

The Role of Prayer in Shakespeare's Plays



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The Role of Prayer in Shakespeare's Plays

Introduction

INTERIOR. CHURCH. NIGHT.

This is where WILL has come. The church is empty, but for the demented, grieving figure of SHAKESPEARE, kneeling, praying, weeping, banging his head, in his private purgatory, dimly lit by tallow candles, gazed upon by effigies of the dead and images of his Redeemer. He is wet, bedraggled, weeds and leaves in his hair. (*Shakespeare in Love* 1998)

On his knees, a lonely figure in a darkened church lit only by candlelight beats his breast and utters passionate prayers of repentance unburdening his soul before his Redeemer. The stirring string music reinforces his fervency as it accompanies his gestures; it descends in steady minor chords, underlined by a drum beating deeply and a bell chiming like a sombre heartbeat, almost in time to the pounding of his hands against his heart. The camera moves in closer until the anguished face and tightly clasped hands are all we see, the fervent prayer becomes audible, and we can hear the words “for the Lord Jesus Christ’s sake” that conclude the scene. The viewer has come face to face with the young Will Shakespeare. It is a crucial moment in the film *Shakespeare in Love* (Madden 1998) in which the poet conveys his deepest impulses through prayer. This compelling depiction of the idealised and idolised Bard, wracked with grief and guilt over the death of Christopher Marlowe, is a point of departure for my study of the role of prayer in Shakespeare’s plays. Envisioning Shakespeare deep in prayer, even in a fiction, resonates with the various depictions of prayer found in his dramatic works and the underlying spiritual pulse beating within many of his plays, especially within a religiously reformed society.

The religious and spiritual dimensions of Shakespeare's plays interact with a broader academic interest in this field as "religion in recent years has been enthusiastically recognized as one of the fundamental concerns expressed and explored in Shakespeare's plays" (Kastan 2014:82). Eric Mallin argues in his book *Godless Shakespeare* that "while the symbolic, thematic elements of Christianity certainly find their way into his work, Shakespeare activates these features in decidedly irreligious or ironic ways" (2007:3). I agree that there are some "irreligious or ironic" uses of Christian elements in the plays, but there are also instances of sincerity. To put it differently, when critiques of Christianity are present, they are most often against the abuse of Christianity but not its theological essence. Fernie points out the loss that comes when religion is disregarded in scholarship or framed only with skepticism and disdain, arguing that "such skepticism has resulted in serious neglect not only of important metaphysical dimensions of Shakespeare's text[s], but also of ideas of emancipation and an alternative world that have real political potential" (2005:8). It does not mean that because Shakespeare constructs this alternative world within his plays that he believed it to be real. He can be defined as a "conjurer" ... someone who has the power to call forth or make contact through language with those things- voices, faces, bodies, and spirits-that are absent" (Greenblatt 2001:1).

However, whether real or merely conjured, this idea of an alternative world is essential in understanding the role of prayer in Shakespeare's plays because prayer acts as a conduit between the world as it appears and this alternative world and its possibilities. Of course, "Shakespeare isn't an orthodox or systematic spiritual thinker" (Fernie 2005:7) and his foremost objective is not doctrinal or polemical; instead, he displays rather "an inclusive and theologically minimalist Christianity that resisted religious rigor and valued social accord" (Kastan 2014:37). This Shakespearean religious view seems "to speak from a moment before it became necessary to take sides, a moment when it was still conceivable that the centre might hold" (Shugar 2002:541). Yet this inclusive resistance to systematic or orthodox thinking does not dilute the spiritual component of Shakespeare's plays. Rather it better fits his interest in richly psychological drama in which spiritual experience is refracted through the intricate prisms of human embodiment and social institutions, manifesting in a variety of

meaningful ways. Thus he offers in the plays “a more complex and problematic view of the human condition than his clerical predecessors had done” (Whitfield White 1993: 174). Yet, this spiritual dimension is not so nebulous that it defies understanding. Unravelling its mysteries is simply a more delicate matter, and in this study, I contribute to this effort of unravelling the ways that religion signifies in Shakespeare’s texts by tracing embodiments of prayer through an archive of plays. My argument will reveal that the role of prayer in these plays is to conduct various rich meanings towards an idea of God or human replacement of God, indicating Shakespeare’s commitment to a metaphysics, even if that metaphysics cannot be delineated in any orthodox manner.

Religion was a key feature of daily life in Elizabethan England, which David Kastan shows, even as this scholar takes pains not to make claims about Shakespeare’s specific beliefs and allegiances.

Kastan writes:

In post-Reformation England, the divisive confessionalism served to highlight religion, making it impossible that it could be an unremarkable given of the culture. I am not claiming Shakespeare as a partisan in those debates. He wasn’t one. I am not claiming him even as a believer. I don’t know what or even if he believed. But I am claiming what seems undeniable: that he recognised and responded to the various ways in which religion charged the world in which he lived. For some, religion was experienced with certainty and joy, for some with doubt and even despair. Sometimes it bound communities together; sometimes it tore them apart. Most often it was habitual, not therefore unimportant but important precisely for that reason (Kastan 2014:2–3).

Kastan notes correctly that the habitual nature of religion in Shakespeare’s era, its embeddedness within the cultural practice, does not lessen its significance as something merely taken for granted. It rather strengthens the case for trying to come to grips with how religion operates in Shakespeare’s society and specifically his plays. The understanding that religion was so intertwined with people’s day to day lives also challenges “the still standard Enlightenment divisions between the religious and the secular, faith and reason, the transcendent and the immanent” (Jackson and Marotti 2011:3). The

presence of religion is so pervasive and naturalized in Elizabethan culture that it becomes hidden in plain sight and requires a sharpened acuity to uncover the richness that religion makes available in understanding the plays.

This interest regarding religion within Shakespeare's works reflects a general revived interest in spirituality and its practice in literary scholarship. Julia Lupton comments on this "turn to religion" that literary study has made, which makes it clear that "religion is not identical with culture" but is rather "a testing ground for struggles between the universal and the particular," that it is "a form of thinking." She argues that:

religion names one strand of those forms of human interaction that resist localization and identification with a specific time, place, nation, or language, installing elements of thought that stand out from the very rituals and practices designed to transmit but also to neutralize them (Lupton 2006:146–147).

Thus, religion is characterised as transcending its own materiality, being beyond the very phenomena that appear to contain it. It has a life force of its own that is fluid enough to engage with multiple currents of thought, but robust enough to resolve these into some kind of unity. This move towards (or rather return to) scholarly interest in Shakespeare and religion has given rise to the publishing of several books called *Shakespeare and Religion* in recent years (Shell 2014; Knight 2013; Callaghan 2001) which explore issues such as antitheatricalism, morality, the Catholic/ Protestant debate, the presence of religious myth and symbolism in the plays as well as critiquing the lack of spiritual engagement in Shakespeare scholarship.¹ David Kastan's recent book *A Will to Believe* (2014) uses Shakespeare and religion as a subtitle and handles a range of relevant issues such as the diverse

¹ Alison Shell lucidly articulates the paradox surrounding the scholarship of Shakespeare and religion, which sees Shakespeare's writing heralded as both "profoundly religious, giving everyday human life a sacramental quality, and profoundly secular, foreshadowing the kind of humanism that sees no necessity for God" (Shell 2014:2). Thus this return to religion grapples with this paradox in research, bringing both extremes of the argument and the spectrum of perceptions in-between, under analysis.

treatments of Catholicism, portrayals of Judaism and Islam, and the way in which *Hamlet* transforms “theology into tragedy” (2014:143). A more specific interest in prayer in Shakespeare has birthed writings such as Daniel Swift’s book *Shakespeare’s Common Prayers* (2012) in which he tracks the influence of the of the *Book of Common Prayer* on Shakespeare’s plays, looking most specifically at the baptismal ritual and how it is interwoven into *Macbeth*. Joseph Sterrett’s book *The Unheard Prayer* (2012) focuses on moments in which characters pray but do not receive a response. His final chapter explores how prayers in the last few plays do receive responses, thus drawing the conclusion that there is a trajectory towards a more interactive image of a deity throughout the course of Shakespeare’s career. I contribute to this conversation about the representation of religion and prayer specifically in Shakespeare’s plays by asking a rather straightforward question that scholars have not grappled with to date: what does prayer do in the plays?

This interest in the depiction and meaning of prayer is also reflected in psychology for although “interest in prayer is an old concern in the psychology of religion ... contemporary research suggests it is a topic that has become increasingly attractive and significant to the current generation of researchers” (Spilka in Paloutzian & Park 2005: 374). Prayer is defined as “individualised ritual” and includes glorification of the deity, confession, petition, and intercession (Spilka in Paloutzian & Park 2005: 371). Some of the conclusions that have been drawn in recent research are that “Prayer as a ritual is a very significant aid in coping with life” and that “there is a reflexive aspect to prayer” (Spilka in Paloutzian & Park 2005: 371,371). These conclusions have bearing on uncovering the role of prayer in Shakespeare’s plays. Firstly, the idea of coping better helps to understand why many characters, in times of great distress, fall to their knees in prayer. Additionally, plays show that prayers are uttered continuously throughout the action as in a brief oath or blessing with the aim of doing something in the world. They are a way to cope and survive. Secondly, the idea of reflexivity is very important. When characters pray, they are not only talking to a deity. They are talking to themselves. There is a self-awareness that is enabled through prayer, and thus characters are often transformed in some way after a prayer (not necessarily for the better) and the audience is given

deeper insight into their inner worlds, in a way that is different to the viewing of a soliloquy, where the character talks directly to the audience. For example, in *Henry V*, Henry prays for God's assistance in the battle of Agincourt and the guilt and anxiety that he feels for the deposition of Richard II at his father's hand is revealed, precisely because he needs God's help and must thus negotiate this moral dilemma. This shows that the evocation of a third party, an invisible powerful entity weighing in on the characters' utterances, ups the stakes considerably of what they are saying and exposes them more fully.

I return to a scene from *Shakespeare in Love*, to explore briefly the multivalent notion of prayer, the replacement of God with human authority and the link between poetry and prayer in Shakespeare's plays. When Viola, who's in love with Will Shakespeare, arrives late for her meeting with her husband to be, Lord Wessex, prayer is used as a pretext for her delay. This pretext arises because Viola is secretly and illegally rehearsing for a Shakespeare play at the Rose Theatre, and her nurse needs an excuse to cover up her whereabouts:

INTERIOR. DE LESSEPSES' HOUSE. HALL. NIGHT.

LORD WESSEX is being kept waiting. The NURSE is bearing the brunt of his impatience.

WESSEX

Two hours at prayer!

NURSE

Lady Viola is pious, my lord.

WESSEX

Piety is for Sunday! And two hours at prayer is not piety, it is self-importance!

NURSE

It would be better that you return
tomorrow, my lord.

WESSEX

It would be better that you tell her
to get off her knees and show some
civility to her six-day lord and
master.

VIOLA enters, wearing a dress, but still her moustache.

The nurse manages to pluck it away just in time before

Lord Wessex turns to look at VIOLA.

Firstly, Wessex describes Viola's prolonged prayer as indulgence and the nurse describes it as piety. This alludes to the multivalent attitudes towards prayer, in both the past and present. There is not one standard attitude or form of prayer historically or otherwise. Secondly, Wessex positions himself as having a much greater importance in Viola's life than God, claiming that he is Viola's "six-day lord and master", thus allowing God merely one day's influence over Viola's being. This replacement of God with human authority is reflected in Shakespeare's plays where characters can often assume the role of God in each other's lives or project divine meanings onto each other. Because the impulse towards prayer is so habitual, these prayer habits are often unthinkingly transferred onto the dynamics of human relationships. Lastly, the joke is that Viola is, of course, not at prayer but rehearsing *Romeo and Juliet*. However, this pretext is not without meaning, and draws attention to the links that can be made between prayer and performance. Furthermore, her passionate and otherworldly demeanour when she returns lends itself to one who has spent a good length of time at prayer since both poetry and prayer can uplift the sacred part of humanity. John Madden exemplifies this in his description of poetry as a contrast to the mundane world when he describes the magnificent balcony scene sequence

as “lifting the film into a suspended space and a different reality”². Similarly, prayer can lift the soul to a heightened reality, and this link between prayer and poetry is exemplified by the fact that “almost all the devotional manuals of the period include poems” (Shugar 2002:514) thus verifying the idea that poetry and prayer often merged. Therefore, comparing the rehearsing of a Shakespeare play to praying is a meaningful comparison, and with this in mind I turn to the outline of my thesis.

In Chapter One, “Prayer, Filial Attachment, and the Case of *Hamlet*”, I engage with the many father-child relationships within in the play, focusing specifically on how Claudius and King Hamlet relate to Hamlet, as well as Ophelia’s relationship with Polonius. These relationships are juxtaposed against the backdrop of God’s interaction with his children through prayer as it is framed within the world of the play. This framing is provided at the outset of the chapter through an analysis of Claudius’s soliloquy in which he describes the ideal form and function of prayer laying out five salient features. I use these features throughout the chapter to assess moments in the play in which characters interact with their earthly fathers, especially when prayer is involved, and I expose the way in which those prayers often fail to live up to the ideal that is provided. These failures become indicative of the limits and frailties of the relationships between the characters and their earthly fathers. I also reveal how prayer to God can mimic interactions between children and their earthly fathers because it can direct and shape filial attachment. This dimension of prayer can cause confusion, leading to characters replacing the authority of God with the authority of their fathers, which appears to produce subsequent danger and tragedy. The way characters replace God with their fathers and the tragedies that this causes is a key focal point of this chapter. I conclude with an application of the ideal features of prayer to the ending of the play, examining statements that Hamlet makes regarding God’s providence and whether these visions of providence come to be within the play.

² Peter Brook exemplifies this in *The Empty Space* when he speaks about Holy Theatre – “The Theatre of the Invisible-Made-Visible: the notion that the stage is a place where the invisible can appear” (Brook 1990: 47). Brook envisions the theatre as a space where the metaphysical world can manifest itself, and Viola similarly experiences this alchemy in the theatre, which enables the unseen to be physically realised.

This projection of a godlike authority onto a loved one is similarly found in two of Shakespeare's tragic love stories *Romeo and Juliet* and *Othello*, which differently dramatize the ways that prayer conducts eroticism, the focus of my next chapter. I focus specifically on how religious language and ritual seem to express erotic love and desire. I examine briefly the tradition of this discourse that can be traced through biblical texts, medieval mysticism, and into the early modern period. I make a link between the two plays through the concept of "rites" in which actions of sexual intimacy and attraction are framed as religious ritual by both Juliet and Desdemona. I then begin with an analysis of *Romeo and Juliet*'s interaction in which they engage in prayer and utilize other religious resources in order to express desire, constructing a mutual erotic bond. I show how the mutuality of this bond impacts considerably on the mechanics of their marriage. Both plays critique the way in which this mutuality devolves into an idolatrous worship of the loved one by suggesting that it leads to tragic deaths. In *Othello*, tragedy is also the result of idolatrous worship, as Desdemona treats Othello like a type of god, using prayer to extend excessive devotion towards him, despite his abuse of her. Ironically, it is her prayers, the very actions that she uses to channel and contain her desire, that become increasingly horrifying to Othello. This is because they represent her autonomy and invisible appetites that he cannot control, although he wishes he could. Even though he orders her to pray as a way of subduing the adulterous acts he believes her to be committing, when he then imagines her at prayer, he can only envision this as an act of transgression, hiding, and embodying her perceived unfaithfulness. In her last moments, he demands that she pray whilst simultaneously suppressing these prayers, exposing the way in which he wants to demand and suppress her desires, but realising agonizingly that he cannot. It is only in killing her that he can feel relief, smothering her even as she begs for a final moment of prayer.

This link between violence and prayer sets the stage for my third chapter in which I explore the depiction of prayer and warfare by looking at *Henry V* and *Richard II*. I draw attention to moments when prayer is used to mobilise acts of violence, as well as how prayer replaces real violent acts, activating symbolic and prophetic violence instead. Shakespeare thus displays an ambiguity about the

relationship between prayer and warfare. In both instances, prayer signifies a weapon that is wielded by Henry V and Richard II, as each king strives distinctively to cling to their power. Henry V uses prayer as a way of endorsing his war with France and of motivating his troops to commit violence in the various battles and sieges they perform. Once France has been captured, prayer is used to sanction Henry's marriage to Princess Katharine of France, shrouding colonialism in romantic and spiritual imagery. I focus specifically on Henry's prayer before the battle of Agincourt in which he asks God to strengthen his men in battle and prays for God to temporally forget his father's usurpation of Richard II's crown. This prayer draws attention to Richard's deposition, which is the focus of the second section of the chapter. This section begins with an in-depth analysis of a moment of very public prayer in which Richard activates the "God save the King" oath to affirm his identity as king, even while he gives up the trappings of kingship to his cousin, Bolingbroke, Henry V's father. Richard reworks this prayer for his purposes, demonstrating his rhetorical dexterity as well as his central belief in the God-given right of kings. His prayer fails to secure his crown, and he is stripped of all dignity and thrown into a prison cell. Leading up to this moment, Richard activates prayer, prophecy, and other religious resources in his assertion of his kingly identity, but it is only once he is dispossessed of all his finery that he truly grasps the meaning of his existence and prepares himself for the attainment of a "new world's crown" (*Richard II* 5.1.24)³ in the life to come. Throughout the chapter I argue that Henry's activation of prayer, though effective in momentarily attaining the power that he wants, is in fact an abuse of prayer, yielding atrocity in both the immediate actions of the play and the violent repercussions the play predicts. Henry fails to attain any true spiritual insight and integrity. By contrast, Richard's activation of prayer leads him finally to a place of victory, despite his abject state, when he recognises the illusion of earthly power and situates his soul and meaning in God's kingdom. Richard's recognition that his real identity can be found in another kingdom prepares the way for the final chapter, which examines the notion of citizenship within this kingdom of God in *Henry VIII* and how it can be accessed through prayer.

³ My references from Shakespeare's plays come from *The Norton Shakespeare* published in 1997 throughout the thesis.

Chapter 4 examines the representation of prayer, individual conscience, and notions of citizenship in *Henry VIII* and reveals how characters in the play take up positions of citizenship in either the kingdom of this world or the kingdom of God, sometimes navigating between the two. I begin by juxtaposing the concepts of spiritual and temporal citizenship by briefly laying out Augustine's definitions of the City of God and the City of Earth and showing the ways that these definitions uncover a distinctive interpretation of the play. This interpretation establishes the pervasive presence of these two cities or kingdoms within the world of the play and how characters vie for citizenship in either of these kingdoms. The prayers of Anne Boleyn and Katharine of Aragon demonstrate this most clearly, and I analyse aspects of their prayers in tandem, indicating plainly in which kingdom each woman chooses to reside. Lastly, I combine ideas of prayer, citizenship and conscience, showing how they work together to provide or deny access to the various kingdoms. Conscience is a central concept within *Henry VIII*. I reveal how a clear conscience means that the messages sent via prayer to the City of God arrive intact, whilst a muddied conscience can obstruct these messages, transforming prayers into tactics and tools with which to navigate the temporal City of Earth. Throughout the chapter I focus consistently on the characters of Henry, Anne, Cardinal Wolsey, Buckingham, and Katharine of Aragon. Henry and Anne are associated with the City of Earth, placing their trust and desire in earthly structures of power, harbouring muddied consciences and engaging with prayer tactically.

Buckingham and Katharine of Aragon are associated with the City of God, especially as they near their deaths and activate visions of this alternative kingdom, channelling their prayers through clear consciences and embracing their fall from the glories of the earthly kingdom. Wolsey is at first deeply embedded in the City of Earth, but he experiences a radical shift when he is cast out by Henry, rediscovering the peace that comes from a clear conscience, which enables him to pray and discover his citizenship in a place beyond all illusion of earthly dignity. I argue that Buckingham, Katharine and Wolsey, in losing their positions of power, gain something far more valuable in spiritual terms.

My conclusion brings together the findings of these chapters and argues that this investment in prayer, the myriad roles it can play and the manifest meanings it can reveal, specifically filial attachment,

eroticism, violence, and visions of citizenship, indicates Shakespeare's broader investment in the metaphysical realm, a realm that is actualised within the worlds of the plays. Through looking through these six Shakespeare plays, that were selected for the wealth of prayer within them, both in its heartfelt and manipulative manifestations, I have contributed a holistic and nuanced understanding of prayer in Shakespeare and the theologies that inform the texts. I argue that Shakespeare presents ideal modes of prayer compellingly, urging viewers to loosen prayer from dubious tactics and channel it meaningfully in order to access resources beyond the limits of this world.

Chapter 1:

Prayer, Filial Attachment, and the case of *Hamlet*

Because Shakespeare's father, John Shakespeare, died in 1601, the same year in which *Hamlet* was written, "it seems reasonable to make a connection between his death and the manifest concerns of that play" (Sundelson 1983:18) and unsurprising that *Hamlet* is populated by a host of father figures who are most active in their seeming absence: King Hamlet, Polonius, King Fortinbras, and ultimately God. King Claudius is also a father figure, though in a different guise, since he fails to assert himself as a father, rendering himself more accurately a failed father figure. At times from aloof distances and at other times with smothering proximity, these fathers, who are often hidden, yet tangibly present, "seeing, unseen" (3.1.35), observe and influence the actions of their children, children whose obedience and devotion they demand. Prayer acts as a conduit of filial attachment between these often invisible fathers and their visible children because as a religious ritual it can establish communion between an unseen Father, God, and his human children, creating an ideal paradigm that the dynamics between a human father and child can imperfectly mimic. Prayer is also intimately entwined with depictions of characters' dilemmas between obeying their earthly fathers and obeying their heavenly Father, a contest between different forms of patriarchal authority. Observing instances in the play when characters pray and discuss prayer elucidates discrepancies between corrupted forms of prayer and ideal forms of prayer, of prayer centred on temporal motives or spiritual motives, of prayer oriented towards an earthly father or a heavenly Father, with positive forms of prayer linked to metaphysical investments. These instances show that the tragic outcomes of the play are partially due to an over investment of the characters in their filial attachments to their earthly fathers, enacted through corrupted forms of prayer. This corruption points to hollow usages of prayer as well as hollow embodiments of fatherhood, resonating with a broader theme of appearances void of substance, things seeming one thing but being another, which permeates *Hamlet*. Ideal prayer, a conduit of heavenly filial attachment, challenges this corruption and hollowness. This ideal is never fully realised in this play and yet is alluded to.

As replacements of God, these father figures tend to hold sway over their children most palpably when their presence is invisible, and each father embodies invisibility in differing ways. Claudius, as a failed father figure, remains a fleshly presence throughout the play, yet his attempts to impose himself onto Hamlet as a father are unsuccessful from Hamlet's point of view, rendering Claudius a non-entity, invisible in terms of his role as a father. It is only during the confession scene, when Claudius discusses the nature of prayer and unburdens his soul to God through prayer, that he momentarily occupies a heightened visibility in Hamlet's perception. There is also the dead King Hamlet, who is visible three times during the play in the form of a pale, armour-clad ghost. Yet it is his invisible self that holds the most sway over his son because Hamlet "misses him, remembers him, knowing so much had remained unsaid when he went off to Wittenberg while his father attended to matters of state" (Kastan 2014:123). Even before seeing the ghost, Hamlet tells Horatio he sees his father in his "mind's eye" (1.2.184), and it is this imagined presence that remains with Hamlet, haunting and heartening him through his misadventures. Thirdly, Polonius is a visible father for the first half of the play, yet through various forms of spying he conceals his presence, controlling, and surveying his children's activities from a distance, and thus exemplifying a peculiar form of invisible father, a father who watches and controls imperceptibly. After his death, his absent though lingering presence triggers tragic reactions from his children, who seek to grasp their invisible father, trying to obtain solace and retribution for their loss. In yet another instance of invisible fathers, Prince Fortinbras, who inhabits the periphery of the play's plot, is compelled to take back what was lost to his dead father, King Fortinbras of Norway, after King Hamlet defeated him and acquired his lands. The presence of his invisible father causes Fortinbras to march unwaveringly into Elsinore to seize the throne, offering a persistent threat throughout the play. In addition to these characters and their fathers, there is also an allusion to the epic Greek legend of Pyrrhus avenging the murder of his father Achilles, by killing Priam, dramatized by a visiting player (2.2.425–475), which further accentuates this theme. Lastly, God's presence as an invisible father, though often obscured, is nevertheless persistent, and made palpable through prayers that at times direct characters' filial attachment towards God, even as their own fathers compete with God's influence.

By examining these different iterations of invisible fathers, I argue that Claudius's description of prayer defines an ideal paradigm regarding God's relationship with his children, conveying filial attachment in its most effective form. This ideal paradigm facilitates absolution from sin as well as the prevention of sin. It is characterized by complete transparency and requires integrity of action, thought, and word. Incongruity occurs when this ideal paradigm is corrupted through the responses of characters to their earthly, invisible fathers. This corruption is defined by deception, revenge, and murder. By focusing on these gaps between the ideal and the corrupted forms of prayer I contend that *Hamlet* has tragic outcomes because certain characters replace their relationships with their invisible Father God with their absent earthly fathers. This focus on the temporal is not a positive investment for characters, as it must, by definition, end, cease to exist without any necessary trace remaining on earth. Martin Luther defines this act of substitution—of taking a human father for God—as a trap. Chris Hassel, for example, outlines Luther's notion of the 'eight great traps' (Hassel 1994:616). These are good things in life such as recreation or familial relationships that can nevertheless have detrimental effects if not contained within their proper place. These eight great traps include relationships with fathers. Luther argues:

But all these... man turns upon himself, in them he seeks his highest good, and of them he makes for himself horrible idols in place of the true God insofar as he does not refer them to God and is not content if they are taken away from him (LW 25:351-52 as quoted in Hassel 1994:616).

This idolisation of the material father in *Hamlet*, setting the earthly father "in place of the true God", is a clear example of this confusion between God and man that concerns Luther. Through this depiction of how the earthly father usurps God's role, *Hamlet* critiques the human tendency to overstep religious and ethical boundaries and it cautions the audience to submit to God's authority, especially in matters of life and death. Yet, despite this replacement of God's position with alternative father figures and the tragedy that it sustains, the play nevertheless points to the ultimate power of God to shape reality towards divine purpose, regardless of the disarray humans may create. Hamlet

utters: “There’s a divinity that shapes our ends,/ Rough-hew them how we will” (5.2.10–11). He voices these lines when explaining to Horatio how his impulsive actions aboard a pirate ship were shaped by God to effective ends. And just 200 lines later, as Hamlet is preparing himself to fight Laertes, he attests to the detailed care and concern God shows his children, even the animals, stating: “we defy augury; there’s a special providence in/ the fall of a sparrow” (5.2.157–158). In theory, then, we need not fear our end as God carefully ordains even the death of a sparrow. Whether this is indeed a plausible description of the outcome of *Hamlet*, with God neatly tying up the pieces for everybody, even as his commandments and influence are rejected, will be assessed at the close of this chapter.

As God could not be physically portrayed on the Elizabethan stage (O’Connell 2000:27), he is not given a voice within the world of the play and thus cannot respond to what is said to or about himself. We are left to infer his involvement or lack of involvement from characters’ responses, descriptions and actions. Prayer, as a ritual practice, becomes significant in this process as it constructs an unseen divine being as the receptacle of these utterances, even as this being is banned from the material world of the theatre. Thus I will return to Claudius’s paradigm defining prayer, leaning into the implications that this definition supplies regarding the manner in which God interacts with his children, and applying these implications to the outcome of the play as a whole, in particular Hamlet and Laertes’s exchange of forgiveness. This process will indicate that, although this ultimate Heavenly Father remains perpetually invisible, and often obscured, performed prayer enables something of a godlike figure to feature onstage, if only in the “mind’s eye” (1.2.184), ultimately overshadowing the inveiglements of earthly father figures.

Claudius's Definition of Prayer

King Claudius discusses the nature of prayer when he is alone on stage, envisioning a compelling image of how to relate to a fatherly God. He has been harrowed by *The Mousetrap*, a play Hamlet arranges, which re-enacts a scenario similar to the one Claudius implemented in the pursuit of his brother's crown. The play depicts a nephew succeeding the throne by killing his uncle and the means of this murder is pouring poison in his ear and then marrying the queen. Claudius, in this moment of solitude, reveals that he is guilty of a similar crime, the killing of his brother through covertly pouring poison in his ear, enabling him to acquire the throne and marry Queen Gertrude. At this moment, he reflects deeply on the nature of prayer, providing some criteria for what he believes effective prayer should be. This soliloquy has been described by Peter Milward as perhaps 'the most religious speech in all the plays of Shakespeare' (Milward 2006:7; Sterrett 2009:752) articulating the true purpose of prayer eloquently, especially regarding the confession and forgiveness of sin. This is poignant and ironic, considering it is articulated by the villain of the play.

According to Claudius's account, ideal prayers include the following five salient features. Firstly, prayer should have the ability to facilitate spiritual cleansing and forgiveness. Claudius reasons that there should be rain enough in heaven to wash a hand stained by sin "white as snow" (3.3.45–46). This aptly echoes Psalm 51, in which King David begs for God's forgiveness for his acts of murder and adultery, saying "Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow"(GNV Psalm 51vs 7)⁴. Secondly, prayer should have the power to prevent us from sinning, so that through prayer we are "forestalled ere we come to fall" (3.3.49). Thirdly, prayer requires actions from those that pray in order for the prayer to be fully effective. Claudius asks rhetorically, "May one

⁴ Shell points out that of all the books in the bible, Shakespeare's audience would have been most familiar with the psalms, as these were printed at the back of the Prayer Book and "featured prominently in morning and evening prayer. No book of the bible would have been repeated more in a liturgical context and as with any piece of poetry, alluding to one verse could have brought the whole poem to mind" (Shell 2014:8). Thus even a brief reference to a psalm, as in Claudius's case, would bring to mind the whole psalm, and perhaps even the story of David and Bethsheba, within the audience's imagination, enriching this reflection on prayer and its power. All biblical references in this thesis are from an online version of the *1599 Geneva Bible* published by Tolle Lege Press in 2010.

be pardon'd and retain th' offence?" (3.3.56). His question implies that this is surely impossible because the advantages gained from evil must be relinquished as a sign of true repentance. Thus "he himself recognizes that this renders his attempted act of repentance utterly hollow" (Beckwith 2011:155) as he is unwilling to give up his gains. Fourthly, prayer uncovers the "true nature" (3.3.62) of our actions. This contrasts with the ways of the world where corruption enables people to "buy out the law" (3.3.60) and paint over their crimes. In heaven there is no "shuffling" (3.3.61), no cover-ups and bribery and everything is revealed for what it is. This also resonates with the theme of hollowness, as many earthly dealings are deceptive and void of substance. Fifthly, we must force our "stubborn knees" (3.3.70) and wills to submit to God and soften our hardened "hearts" (3.3.70) into modes of compliance with God's will so that "All may be well" (3.3.72).

The final criterion is the most significant: that prayer must be heart-felt, words and thoughts must align. Claudius finishes his prayer feeling utterly dissatisfied since he is not convinced that his words serve the purpose of cleansing that he wants. He reflects, "My words fly up, my thoughts remain below:/Words without thoughts never to heaven go" (3.3.97–98). He believes that his words and thoughts are not properly aligned and that prayer, therefore, will ultimately fail him. Ramie Targoff echoes this final reflection on prayer in her essay "The Performance of Prayer: Sincerity and Theatricality in Early Modern England" arguing that "what renders public prayer hypocritical, Christ seems to suggest, is specifically its performative nature: the worshipper caters to a visible and earthly rather than invisible and divine audience" (Targoff 1999:23). Elizabeth Williamson reinforces this in "The uses and abuses of the prayer book in Hamlet", arguing that the "lips and the heart, [are] organs which, to use Thomas Cranmer's words, 'were meant to go together in prayer'" (Williamson 2009:380). Therefore if Claudius's words, even expressed in his solitude, are not ultimately orientated towards an "invisible and divine audience", and if his lips and heart do not go together in prayer, then his prayer is merely a performance for himself to ease his own conscience, thus hypocritical and ineffectual. This focus on hypocrisy in prayer draws attention to the play's broader focuses on the

emptying out of form, which in turn points to the hollowness of substituting limited human fathers for an infinite Heavenly Father.

With this definition of prayer in mind, I will now examine each of these invisible fathers and evaluate their interactions with their children against the criteria for ideal prayer stipulated in Claudius's definition. Through this I will demonstrate how the play repeatedly focuses on moments when prayer fails. Hamlet is often deceived by these failed prayers, which reveals his lack of sound judgement and discernment that causes him to displace God in the first place. These examples of discrepancy between the heavenly Father's ideal interaction with His children and the earthly fathers' corrupt interactions with their children will elucidate the manner in which this discrepancy leads to tragedy.

Claudius as (In)visible Father

Claudius's invisibility as a father is defined by his futile attempts to assert himself as a fatherly figure to Hamlet. Instead Hamlet collapses Claudius's identity into the identity of Gertrude, transferring to her some of his obedience, loyalty, and vehemence that he might owe an earthly father. From the first moment Claudius and Hamlet appear, Claudius construes himself as Hamlet's father by greeting Hamlet in front of his courtiers as "my son" (1.2.64). Further in this interaction, when attempting to persuade him from dwelling on the death of King Hamlet, Claudius urges Hamlet to think of him, Claudius, "as of a father" (1.2.108), claiming that he loves him "with no less nobility of love than that which dearest father bears his son" (1.2.110–111) and concludes his speech by naming Hamlet "our son" (1.2.117). Hamlet, however, remains unmoved by these paternal pretences and shows only filial attachment to his mother during their subsequent interchange:

QUEEN GERTRUDE: Let not thy mother lose her prayers, Hamlet:

I pray thee, stay with us; go not to Wittenberg.

HAMLET: I shall in all my best obey you, madam (1.2.118–120).

This emphasis on obedience towards his mother in response to her “prayers” is indicative of Hamlet’s overt rejection of Claudius as a substitute father as well as Gertrude’s attempt to draw on Hamlet’s filial attachment through the mechanism of prayer. Hamlet states that he will travail to obey Gertrude, but pointedly leaves Claudius out, clearly showing his unwillingness to obey him or acknowledge him as father. Hamlet’s rejection of Claudius as father at this early stage in the play, when the ghost of King Hamlet has not yet incriminated Claudius as his murderer, is significant as it defines Hamlet as utterly fatherless, making him vulnerable to the ghost’s claim to be his father.

Hamlet’s public rejection of Claudius as father contrasts with Claudius’s hidden rejection of Hamlet as son, resonating with the theme of emptying form as Claudius actively hollows the term father even as he seeks to establish it. Although attempts are made by both Claudius and Gertrude to coerce Hamlet into the role of Claudius’s son, Claudius is very clear, when Hamlet is absent, that Hamlet is not his son but rather Gertrude’s son. This is apparent particularly in reference to the difficulties caused by Hamlet. For example, when both king and queen consult with Polonius about the cause of Hamlet’s lunacy, Claudius tells Gertrude that Polonius may know “the head and source of all your son’s distemper” (2.2.55). It is clearly Gertrude’s son who manifests “distemper”, not Claudius’s, indicating the distance that he places between himself and Hamlet. This is again evident after Hamlet has killed Polonius and dragged him out of his mother’s room, leaving her in a traumatised state. Claudius seeks to know the cause of her “sighs” and “profound heaves” (4.1.1) and quickly links their cause to Hamlet, asking “Where is your son?” (4.1.3). Again, Claudius not only connects Gertrude’s distress to her son, but also assigns sole responsibility to her for his whereabouts, tacitly shifting some of the blame for his unruliness onto her. This shifting of the blame onto Gertrude for Hamlet’s behaviour culminates in the graveyard scene, after Hamlet has disturbed Ophelia’s funeral by violently attacking Laertes. Claudius scolds Gertrude saying, “Good Gertrude, set some watch over your son” (5.1.281), publicly humiliating her by implying that her parental skills are lacking and that

she needs to hold more sway over Hamlet. Thus Claudius repeatedly shifts parental responsibility for Hamlet solely onto Gertrude.

These examples show that Claudius has no real interest in acting as a father to Hamlet, especially once Hamlet starts behaving peculiarly, threatening Claudius's position as king. 'Father' and 'son', in Claudius's hands become rhetorical positions that have a certain power in specific political circumstances, especially moments when Claudius must justify his kingship. When the parental role is of no use to him, he describes Hamlet as Gertrude's son, absolving himself from any responsibility for Hamlet's behaviour. Claudius colludes in his own invisibility, as his claims to be Hamlet's father are hollow and ephemeral, thus utterly unconvincing. Claudius's vacillation between fulfilling a fatherly role and rejecting a fatherly role with regards to Hamlet is a parody of the ideal relationship between God the Father and his children, showing the limits of human notions of fatherhood when held up to divine example. Claudius explains that in heaven there is no "shuffling" and everything stands in its "true nature" (3.3.61–62). God does not frame himself as Father to his children and then retract that paternity due to his children's behaviour or rejection of Him. He does not reshuffle the royal household, ousting inconvenient members, renouncing His fatherhood. God does not change. He is "the Everlasting" (1.2.131), as described by Hamlet. This capriciousness of Claudius is evidence of the difference between the image of the ideal Father in heaven and Claudius's corrupted versions of paternity that render him a hollow, failed father figure.

Ironically, it is Claudius's most hollow state that most convinces Hamlet, drawing attention to Hamlet's lack of discernment around what is real and what is not. It is during the prayer scene, the only time that Hamlet really sees Claudius in any real way, when Claudius assumes a posture of prayer in his desperate attempt to direct filial attachment towards God in a quest for absolution. Claudius assumes a kneeling posture, mimicking the required position "while at Mass" where congregants "were neither to stand nor slouch against pillars or walls, but to kneel and pray meekly

and quietly on the floor” (Duffy 1992:117). While absorbed in prayer, Claudius is unaware that Hamlet lurks behind him with his sword drawn, debating with himself how best to kill Claudius so that his punishment matches his crime. Hamlet hesitates, for he reasons that if he kills Claudius while he prays, Claudius will go straight “to heaven” (3.3.78), but if he waits until Claudius is involved in an act of debauchery, “that has no relish of salvation in’t” (3.3.92) then “his soul may be as damn'd and black as hell, whereto it goes” (3.3.94–95). This vivid act of imagining the divergent fates of Claudius’s soul, and connecting these fates to the prayerful or corrupt stances of Claudius’s physical body, briefly renders Claudius intensely visible to Hamlet as he perceives this action to be sincere. But as soon as Hamlet leaves the stage, Claudius confesses the superficiality of his prayers. Claudius unwittingly deceives Hamlet into thinking he genuinely prays, when in fact his words and thoughts are ultimately unaligned, “[his] words fly up, [his] thoughts remain below” (3.3.97), and the prayer fails. Thus Hamlet sees Claudius vividly, yet does not see him accurately. He sees “the actions that a man might play” but not “that within which passeth show” (1.2.84–85). Hamlet is most convinced by Claudius at the point when Claudius is most acutely, almost regretfully, aware of his own hollowness. This draws attention to Hamlet’s inability to accurately read situations, highlighting his lack of discernment which makes him particularly vulnerable to forming bonds with deceptive father figures exemplified by the intense filial attachment he exhibits towards the supposed ghost of King Hamlet.

King Hamlet as Invisible Father

The image of the dead King Hamlet becomes a palpable presence in Hamlet’s imagination, his “mind’s eye” (1.2.184), supplanting God the Father and obscuring, for the most part, God’s influence over him. Hamlet displays repeatedly “the psychological hold his dead father still has in him, his father’s tenacious presence in an interior space that, throughout the play, Hamlet jealously protects” (Kastan 2014:123). In Anthony Low’s essay, “Hamlet and the Ghost of Purgatory: Intimations of Killing the Father” he suggests that “a dead father can be much more burdensome than a living one” (Low 1999:457) as the guilt of things unsaid and undone can haunt the living child’s conscience. Thus King Hamlet’s death has given this father figure a heightened presence in Hamlet’s imagination.

The manner in which Hamlet talks about God and about his father demonstrates his attitude towards each, an attitude that elevates his dead father over God. In Hamlet's first soliloquy he refers to God only in reference to God's law against "self-slaughter" (1.2.132), where he complains about God's prohibitions about suicide, with which he only begrudgingly complies. All other mentions of God such as, "O, God, God" (1.2.132), "Heaven and earth" (1.2.142) and "O, God" (1.2.150) are all expressions of angst and frustration, expletives in fact, and not genuine outpourings of grief and submission to a heavenly Father. To his own father he ascribes god-like status when he compares him to the magnificent Greek sun-god "Hyperion" (1.2.140) and the honorary Greek god "Hercules" (1.2.153) in comparison with Claudius. Although later in the scene he acknowledges to Horatio that his father "was a man" (1.2.186), there is nevertheless a persistent return to comparisons between his dead father and gods, such as in the closet scene with Gertrude, when he contrasts Claudius with King Hamlet, returning to Hyperion, amongst other gods:

See, what a grace was seated on this brow—
Hyperion's curls; the front of Jove himself,
An eye like Mars, to threaten and command,
A station like the herald Mercury
New-lighted on a heaven-kissing hill;
A combination and a form indeed
Where every god did seem to set his seal
To give the world assurance of a man (3.4.54–61).

Again Hamlet concludes with the labelling of his father as "a man", but he is the paragon of a man, and these heightened comparisons, though clearly hyperbolic on one level, do point to a subconscious apotheosis that King Hamlet undergoes within his son's imagination, lending credence and impetus to

the Ghost's commands. Hamlet substitutes his heavenly Father with the memory and felt presence of his earthly father, transforming a human father into an "idolized father" (Hassel 1994:135), a god.

This apotheosis is demonstrated through Hamlet's interaction with King Hamlet's supposed Ghost in how fervently he wants to obey him, despite the Ghost's ambiguous identity. Hamlet cannot know exactly what he sees, "not out of ignorance, but because this non-object, this non-present present, this being-there of an absent or departed one no longer belongs to knowledge" (Derrida 1994:5) as it is outside the scope of empirical measurability. Yet Hamlet is invested in believing it is his father, despite his awareness that it may be something more sinister. When first witnessing this spectral being, Hamlet prays for protection, declaring "Angels and ministers of grace defend us!" (1.4.20). Praying to angels "was a prominent feature of ... piety" (Duffy 1992:270) and demonstrates Hamlet's recognition of the danger in approaching an unknown spirit and the need for divine intervention, directing his filial attachment towards God in an attempt to achieve safety. Because of this recognition of potential danger, Hamlet questions whether this image of his father is "a spirit of health or goblin damn'd" (1.4.21) and whether his intents are "wicked or charitable" (1.4.23). However, he does not wait for a reply or proof of identity from the Ghost, casting aside all desire for divine protection, and instead immediately uses his words to frame this spectre as his father, saying: "I'll call thee Hamlet, King, father, royal Dane. O, answer me!" (1.4.25–26). The spectre that Hamlet perceives to be his true father receives a name, a kingly title, the relationship of father and the status of royalty. Hamlet's desperate plea "O, answer me!" mimics a soul seeking a response from heaven. He addresses his "so-called father" (Derrida 1994:7) as though he was a god-like figure, enacting his filial attachment to his father through an utterance like prayer. But the mission assigned to Hamlet does not reflect the type of assignment a heavenly Father would give to his son:

GHOST: List, Hamlet, list O list!

If thou didst ever thy dear father love—

HAMLET: O God!

GHOST: Revenge his foul and most unnatural murder.

HAMLET: Murder?

GHOST: Murder most foul, as in the best it is,

But this most foul, strange and unnatural.

HAMLET: Haste me to know it that with wings as swift

As meditation or the thoughts of love,

May sweep to my revenge (1.5.22-31).

King Hamlet's command transgresses a central Christian doctrine conflicting with Hamlet's heavenly Father's laws. The Bible censures revenge "first because revenge should be transcended by love (Matthew 5:38) and second because it is God's job ("Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord," Romans 12:19)" (Nuttall 2007:201). David Kastan points out that although St Paul goes on to say in the next chapter of Romans that "the prince 'is the minister of God to take vengeance on him that doeth evil' (13:4)," which would possibly give Hamlet the godly authority to lawfully exact judgement for this crime, yet, "'prompted...by heaven *and* hell" (2.2.62)' as Hamlet articulates later in the play, this "revenge cannot sustain the moral differentiation that would make it justice" (Kastan 2014:133). It is the ambiguity of the Ghost's identity that renders this call to revenge unconscionable. The Ghost clearly compels Hamlet off the straight and narrow path with this request, and Hamlet, who favours the request of his father's likeness over the commands of God, acquiesces to this vengeful command. The Ghost concludes his interchange with Hamlet with the "piercing repeated prayer, Remember me!" (Goethe 2009:42), a prayer that mirrors Hamlet's earlier prayerful request "Oh answer me!". This completes the bond between father and son through a corresponding expression of paternal and filial attachment created by prayer. This incessant urging also imbeds the Ghost's commands into

Hamlet's consciousness, causing Hamlet to erase all past knowledge of right and wrong in order to focus wholly on the ghost's command:

As soon as his father's ghost places his commandment to kill against God's not to kill, Hamlet vows to 'wipe away all trivial fond records' from his memory, 'All saws of books, all forms, all pressures past'(1.5.91). This desire to forget is paradoxically reinforced by the many 'remembers' of the scene with the ghost (Hassel 1994:132).

In this deliberate forgetting, Hamlet replaces God's creeds with his father's urge to revenge, remembering this above all. He shows no resistance or scepticism regarding this request and instead expresses his compliance with great passion. That Hamlet is so easily influenced by this father figment, so quick to discard all godly commands, also points to his own corruptibility. As he declares to Ophelia a few scenes later: "I am very proud, revengeful, ambitious, with more/ Offences at my beck I have thoughts to put them in, imagination/ To give them shape, or time to act them in" (3.1.125–127). He is ripe for this kind of influence and latches onto this mission wholeheartedly, likening his desire to fulfil the ghost's wishes to "meditation or the thoughts of love" (1.5.30), a phrase echoing the practice and passion of prayer, and conducting his filial attachment towards this father figment, transforming the urge to revenge into loving, worshipful prayer directed towards a god.

Comparing the act of revenge to the act of meditation returns us to our ideal criteria of prayer and how these are corrupted by earthly fathers assuming the heavenly Father's position. The most obvious is the Ghost's request that Hamlet take revenge, which contradicts the power of true prayer to facilitate forgiveness, and for God to enact his perfect will in response to sin as "passivity in revenge is the only path left to one both honourable and Christian. As Charlemont says at the end of Cyril Tourneur's *Atheist's Tragedy* (1611) 'Patience is the honest man's revenge'" (Nuttall 2007:204). Secondly,

encouraging a son to sin grossly contradicts the power of prayer to “forestall” sin. Thirdly, this desperate need that the Ghost projects onto Hamlet to set the earthbound score straight shows a lack of reliance on the power of heaven to ultimately uncover the truth and to disclose and deal with corruption on earth. There is a gap between what Hamlet should be receiving from his heavenly Father: the ability to forgive, to avoid sin and to trust God’s divine retribution, and what he is instead enticed towards by this indefinite father figment, revenge.

Although Hamlet does claim to seek out the company of God once the Ghost leaves, this prayer is never depicted, and thus adds ambiguity around Hamlet’s filial attachment to God, allowing a displacement of this attachment, and a replacement of it with his filial attachment to his father figment to be further entrenched. Hamlet states:

HAMLET: And so, without more circumstance at all

I hold it fit that we shake hands and part,

You as your business and desire shall point you—

For every man has business and desire,

Such as it is – and for mine own poor part,

Look you, I’ll go pray.

HORATIO: These are but wild and whirling words, my lord (1.5.131– 137).

Hamlet sends each of his friends off to pursue their “business and desire” and he chooses to pursue his through prayer, a prayer which the play does not present. Elizabeth Watson (2004) argues that King Hamlet represents Catholic theology and King Claudius represents Protestant theology, as the former urges the remembrance of the dead, whilst the latter calls Hamlet’s grief “a fault to heaven,/ A fault against the dead, a fault to nature” (1.2.101–102). This split creates ambiguity around this moment of

prayer. It raises the question: is Hamlet honouring the Catholic tradition of purgatory and praying for “his father’s salvation” (Watson 2004:481) or is he applying cautious Protestant theology that strictly defines ghosts as devils in disguise and thus praying “for guidance in interpreting the apparition” (Watson 2004:481) or is he doing neither? Is he even praying at all? His next appearance certainly depicts a man who has rather spent the night in isolated torment than in the soothing sanctuary of prayer, suggesting a severance between himself and God, and a replacement of God altogether with this father figment. This image of a traumatised Hamlet appears the following morning in a description that Ophelia supplies to Polonius regarding Hamlet’s disturbing appearance in her bedroom:

My lord, as I was sewing in my chamber
 Lord Hamlet, with his doublet all unbraced,
 No hat upon his head; his stockings foul’d,
 Ungarterd, and down-gyvèd to his ankle,
 Pale as his shirt, his knees knocking each other,
 And with a look so piteous in purport
 As if he had been loosèd out of hell
 To speak of horrors, he comes before me (2.1.78–85).

Of course, his prayer and his torment could be intermingled, praying through the torment, voicing the torment through prayer, but there is something distinctly void of God in the description of him as being “loosèd out of hell to speak of horrors” (2.1.84–85). The prayer seems to have failed. Although this bedraggled and traumatised demeanour may be playacting, the first signs of his feigned “antic disposition” (1.5.173), it is still a sign of a deeply troubled soul who is not resting in the assurance of God’s provision but is rather trusting in himself, in his own guiles, and in the alleged authority and command of his invisible father, King Hamlet’s Ghost. It is as if he has already replaced the Father God to whom he intends to pray with the ghostly father figment who claims his obedience, in spite of

the ambiguity of this father figment's identity. Hamlet acknowledges this ambiguity around the ghost's identity as his motive to use *The Mousetrap* to uncover the truth of Claudius's guilt when he says:

The spirit that I have seen
 May be the devil, and the devil hath power
 T' assume a pleasing shape; yea, and perhaps,
 Out of my weakness and my melancholy—
 As he is very potent with such spirits—
 Abuses me to damn me (2.2.575–580).

Hamlet identifies the very real possibility that this father figment may in fact be the devil in disguise, assuming “a pleasing shape” (2.2.577), trying to tempt him to sin so that he goes to hell. He fears that the devil may be taking advantage of his “weakness” and “melancholy”, which clouds his judgement and fuels his revenge. This insight is highly relevant to the danger of replacing the authority of God with the authority of man. Not only is Hamlet potentially substituting ideal heavenly authority with corrupt earthly authority, but he is running the great risk of replacing God with the devil, allowing the devil dominion over his actions and soul, a damningly fatal allowance. As Nuttall compellingly articulates:

According to Protestant theory of the period the ghost cannot be a revenant, a dead person returned. When the Protestants abolished Purgatory they had nothing left beyond the grave but heaven, from which no soul would wish to return, and hell, from which no one could escape. Most people after watching *Hamlet* are pretty sure that the ghost was Hamlet's father, but one can never be completely certain. In the folio stage directions he is always called “Ghost,” never “Old Hamlet.” Even if he tells the truth about Claudius he could still be a devil. When the play is over, we can still ask, “Who was there?” (Nuttall 2007:205).

Hamlet, however, is easily persuaded by Claudius's distressed reaction to *The Mousetrap* that his father's spectral form is indeed "an honest Ghost" (1.5.142) and not a devil entrapping him in evil. He chooses to put his trust in the Ghost, attempting to cast aside misgivings about the Ghost's possible satanic identity, although as Nuttall rightly observes, even facts do not ensure an honest Ghost. There may be satanic involvement yet and Hamlet never quite shakes the awareness of this possibility, as much as he tries. "Always for Hamlet there is some slight gap between the two" (Kastan 2014:140). This is evident in the fact that Hamlet still harbours deep fears regarding the ghost's presence. These fears manifest when he is with Gertrude in her bedroom and the Ghost appears for the last time. In a similar fashion to Hamlet's first encounter with the Ghost, he prays for protection from the angels: "Save me, and hover o'er me with your wings/ You heavenly guards" (3.4.84–95). This prayer demonstrates that there is still a large amount of fear surrounding his interaction with this being. Stephen Greenblatt argues that "the prayer – in a reiterated first person that does not include Gertrude – seems to indicate that Hamlet instinctively senses that the apparition is for him alone and that he is personally menaced by it, as by a demonic spirit" (Greenblatt 2001:223) thus reinforcing the idea that Hamlet intuitively fears the Ghost's identity, using a prayer to reach out for protection from an alternative Father in heaven, channelling filial attachment elsewhere, if only momentarily. This reveals that although Hamlet has committed to the identity and task of this father figure, there is a part of him that still imagines this being to be a "goblin damned" (1.4.21). This again references Hamlet's inability to discern the form from the substance. He cannot settle fully on an identity for this Ghost, but instead chooses the identity he most desires, despite his own misgivings.

Therefore, although Hamlet's instincts tell him that he requires God's protection from his father's supposed Ghost, these fears ultimately go unheeded and this invisible father, made visible for the last time in the play at this point, holds more sway over Hamlet than the God he hopes will protect him. This sway is demonstrated by Hamlet naming the Ghost "your gracious figure" (3.4.95), showing him honour. He also labels himself "your tardy son" (3.4.97) in relation to the Ghost, framing the Ghost as an authoritative father figure who has the right to "chide" (3.4.97) his procrastinating son. In addition,

Hamlet shows his commitment to the Ghost's command by asserting that the ghost's "form and cause conjoined, preaching to stones,/ Would make them capable" (3.4.117–118), demonstrating his conviction regarding the Ghost's "form" as his father and his belief in the validity of the Ghost's "cause" that could move even stones to seek revenge. Lastly, he describes to Gertrude the invisible figure with which he converses as "my father, in his habit as he lived" (3.4.126) clearly equating this being with his father, not the devil, assigning this being the same trust and honour he would give his father. Hamlet commits to obeying this image of his earthly invisible father, possibly a devil in disguise, and starts moving further away from his heavenly invisible Father, no longer seeking His protection or submitting to His authority. The final substitution is complete.

This substitution enables him to embrace unswervingly the ensuing malevolent acts that he commits. He blithely orchestrates the killing of his old friends turned hapless spies, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, which he authorises through the use of his "father's signet" (5.2.50) ring, again deferring to his father's unseen authority. Although he claims that in this "was heaven ordinaunt" (5.2.49), it seems less a gesture towards Hamlet's cooperation with God and more a sign that Hamlet has begun to believe that God "cooperates with him" (Kastan 2014:140). It seems Hamlet has deluded himself into thinking that he and his father have a certain authority over God and that God must serve them in their plans, again indicating his lack of discernment. He glibly evades responsibility for killing Polonius when he makes his conciliatory speech to Laertes before their duel, blaming "his madness" (5.2.176) for the villainous act, even though he claims "it is not madness" (3.4.132) at the time of the killing. Lastly, he follows through with the murder of Claudius, explaining to Horatio that "is't not perfect conscience/ To quit him with this arm? And is't not to be damned/ To let this canker of our nature come/ In further evil?" (5.2.68–71) justifying his act of revenge and judging Claudius with the full force of his accusations as he plunges his poisoned sword into him, glutting him from the poisonous chalice and yelling, "Here, thou incestuous, murd'rous, damnèd Dane" (5.2.267), finally fulfilling his invisible earthly father's commandment and renouncing his heavenly invisible Father's commandments once and for all.

Polonius as Invisible Father

Unlike King Hamlet, Polonius is a visible father for much of the play, yet in a similar way to King Hamlet, his force and influence are felt most when he is invisible. Through stern authority, spies, concealment, and finally death, his invisible influence over his children increases and eventually results in their deaths. He sternly limits Ophelia's interaction with Hamlet, sends spies to France to keep an eye on Laertes, and hides behind curtains to watch Ophelia's rejection of Hamlet, a rejection that he has commanded. Ophelia's role in relation to her father is to obey unquestioningly and this concept is repeatedly expressed: "I shall obey, my lord" (1.3.136), "I have a daughter—have while she is mine—Who, in her duty and obedience..." (2.2.107–108) and "This in obedience, hath my daughter shown me" (2.2.125). Polonius takes on a role of paternal dominance in his children's lives, especially Ophelia's, that is indicative of paternity in early modern England where much emphasis was placed on the household as a site of spiritual instruction and social stability, with the role of the priest disseminated amongst fathers who were characterised as a "kingly and prince-like figure" with an office compared to that of a "private pastor, preacher or bishop" (Walsham 2014:126). Thus fathers were expected to lead their families in religious ritual, carry out religious instruction, ensure attendance at church, and obedience of the law. Polonius, however, although determined to be a kingly presence in his daughter's life, undermines this role of priestly paternity as he uses corrupt forms of piety and trickery to deceive Hamlet and control his daughter absolutely when he orders her to pretend to pray as a pretext for her appearing alone in Hamlet's path. Polonius takes on a god-like role, concealing himself behind a curtain when he and Claudius try to spy on Hamlet's interactions with Ophelia, so that "seeing unseen" (3.1.35) they may determine whether Hamlet's strange behaviour is a result of Ophelia's withdrawal of her affections from Hamlet at her father's command. This plan begins:

POLONIUS: Ophelia, walk you here. —Gracious, so please you,
 We will bestow ourselves. —Read on this book,
 That show of such an exercise may colour

Your loneliness. We are oft to blame in this:
 'Tis too much proved that with devotion's visage
 And pious action we do sugar o'er
 The devil himself.

KING: *[Aside.]* O, 'tis too true!

How smart a lash that speech doth give my conscience
 The harlot's cheek, beautied with plast'ring art,
 Is not more ugly to the thing that helps it
 Than is my deed to my most painted word.
 O heavy burden (3.1.45-56).

Polonius parodies the practice of prayer by mentioning that Ophelia's action of reading the prayer book will "colour [her] loneliness" (3.1.47–48), referencing a usage of the word "colour" as in "colour of law" when an officer of law commits a seemingly lawful act, in the name of the law, but in fact has no lawful grounds to do so, concealing a corruption of the law behind a feigned appeal to the law. Thus Polonius uses the appearance of praying to account for Ophelia's solitary presence in order to fool Hamlet into conversing with her. There is no genuine act of prayer intended by it. Therefore Ophelia, through grasping the prayer book in a prayer-like posture in order to cloak the real reason for her presence, hollows the practice of prayer, resonating with the theme of form void of meaningful substance that runs throughout the play, and indicating a corrupt form of prayer enforced on her by her earthly father. Polonius even admits that with "devotion's visage/ And pious action we do sugar o'er/ The devil himself" (3.1.39–49) at the very moment that he orchestrates this deception, showing an awareness of how piety can be twisted to mask a hidden agenda that he nonetheless embraces. This conscious corruption of sacred practice triggers Claudius's aside, which reveals that he is carrying a "heavy burden" (3.1.56) masked by a veil of piety, reinforcing Polonius's words that using devotion to sugar-coat evil is indeed a common occurrence, rendering both men dangerous figures to be influencing the vulnerable Ophelia.

That Polonius can wilfully inveigle his daughter into such a corruption of devotion reveals his weakness as a father figure and the spiritual danger in which Ophelia finds herself when at the mercy of her father's instructions. This spiritual danger parallels the spiritual danger that the presumed King Hamlet exposes his son to by urging him to take revenge. Both these examples demonstrate how earthly fathers can place their children in spiritual danger, exemplifying the discrepancy between ideal forms of prayer, in which a heavenly Father restores and uplifts his child, and corrupt forms of prayer, in which a father orchestrates deception and revenge through his child. Using prayer to deceive and to sugar-coat evil corresponds with Claudius's contrast between heaven and earth. Firstly, on earth there is "shuffling", deception, and corruption, masked at times with "devotion's visage", but in heaven we cannot "buy out the law", or colour the law, for all will be revealed in its "true nature". This action also corresponds with the notion that spiritual words can be abused if they are not genuine. This prayer book is not used for the purpose it was created and has a similar effect as the words that "fly up" without the under-girding of truthfulness. And in the same way that Hamlet is deceived by Claudius's feigned prayer, so he is initially drawn in by Ophelia's feigned praying, again displaying his lack of discernment in the face of actions that a man (or woman) might play.

Hamlet and Ophelia's ensuing interaction illustrates the manner in which each is controlled by an invisible earthly father, even as both grasp for something that a heavenly Father could supply. Hamlet is taken in by Ophelia's feigned devotion, as he asks her to remember his sins in her prayers and intercede on his behalf: "Nymph, in thy orisons [prayers]/ Be all my sins remembered" (3.1.91–92). Perhaps he wants her to appeal to her heavenly invisible Father so that for a brief moment the burden each shoulders from their earthly invisible fathers is lifted. But her subsequent rejection of his gifts and letters, enforced by her father's command, deeply wounds him, and he bitterly appears to retract all of his love for her and orders her to get to "a nunnery" (3.1.122) along with a profusion of other accusations and insults levelled at both Ophelia and women in general. Hamlet suspects foul play, wondering whether Ophelia's actions are her own or the orders of her father. He seeks answers, asking her "Where's your father?" (3.1.130), to which she responds, "At home, my lord" (3.1.131).

Hamlet then expresses his desire to restrain Polonius's activities saying, "Let the doors be shut upon him, that he may play the/fool nowhere but in's own house. Farewell" (3.1.132–133). This idea of limiting the father figure's dominion to his own house ties in with the kingly role a father needed to play within the kingdom of his own home. The boundary of the home also limits the power of the father, a limit that Polonius does not subscribe to. Polonius seeks to play God within the realm of the court, and Hamlet wants to limit Polonius's power as he recognises the absolute control that Polonius wields over his daughter which is now affecting Hamlet's autonomy. However, while desiring to limit Polonius's power, Hamlet fails to see his own malleability at his father figure's hands, again alluding to his poor judgement.

Ophelia briefly extricates herself from her earthly invisible father's grasp through prayerful beams of filial attachment aimed at her heavenly Father. She responds to Hamlet's abuse with a prayer: "O help him, you sweet heavens!" (3.1.134). This triggers further abuse and threats from Hamlet. Again she prays for him: "O Heavenly powers, restore him!" (3.1.141), believing that Hamlet's violent reaction stems from turmoil in his soul and not simply distress at her betrayal. Julia Staykova describes how at the moments "in performance Ophelia would have accompanied the words with a pious gesture, such as raising her hands to heaven or closing her eyes and pressing her palms in prayer" (Staykova 2010:214). These pious gestures give Ophelia an opportunity to embody her concern for Hamlet and through appealing to God, Ophelia expresses her love for Hamlet through her desire that God restore him. She appeals to her heavenly invisible Father for the healing of Hamlet's brokenness, upholding the ideal that heartfelt prayer can make all things "well" (3.3.72), redeeming herself in part for her prayer-gilded deception. Although, as Williamson rightly points out: "it is not Ophelia's deception that needs to be smoothed over, however, but her father's, and like Guildenstern she has not 'craft enough to colour' (2.2.273) her intentions" (Williamson 2009:378). Thus these genuine prayers enact Ophelia's innocence in this charade that was orchestrated and presided over by her overbearing father, and momentarily she escapes his control, speaking truthfully through prayer. However, Hamlet fails

to recognise the real feelings conveyed by these prayers and they instead increase his anger against her, another example of Hamlet's inability to distinguish what is real and what is not.

Despite Ophelia's attempt to use prayer to facilitate filial attachment to her heavenly father in the pursuit of freeing both herself and Hamlet, neither Ophelia nor Hamlet can fully grasp the help and restoration offered by these "Heavenly powers". Both are too enmeshed with their invisible earthly father's agendas. Ophelia continues to conform unquestioningly to her father's will, and Hamlet continues to try to execute his father's vengeful quest. This quest leads him unwittingly to kill Polonius, whom he mistakes for Claudius, severing Ophelia from her substitute god and driving her over the edge of reason. Once Ophelia loses her father, her mental and spiritual well-being that was predominantly defined by him, becomes completely shattered. His invisible presence continues to haunt her and she obsesses about his death, weeping for his body "i'th cold ground" (4.5.67), singing songs about how "they bore him bare-faced on the bier" (4.5.163) and claiming that his death made all the violets wither (4.5.180). It is clear that without the god-like figure of her father she is utterly lost.

However, there is also evidence that she continues to try to grasp for her invisible heavenly Father as a way of seeking some solace and structure within the chaos of her inner world, trying to establish a conduit of filial attachment to a father who might still be able to contain her sorrow. I do not intend to stretch this claim by framing her as spiritually enlightened due to her psyche's deep disturbance, but her songs of death and unlawful sexual exploits are intertwined with a number of spiritual indictments and blessings, drawing God into her disorganized discourse. For example she addresses Claudius, saying, "Lord, we know what we are, but know not what we/ May be. God be at your table!" (4.5.42–53). In this instance, she seems to show awareness of Claudius's struggling soul, perhaps suggesting that Claudius knows his current kingly state, but does not know the fate that awaits him once the truth is uncovered. Asking God to be at his table could be an oblique warning that he needs God's forgiveness and must partake in the Lord's Supper. She begins a bawdy, but tragic rhyme, with the

oath by “By Gis and St Charity” (4.5.57), framing Jesus, and the martyred girl, St Charity, as witnesses to the shame of a man using a woman sexually and then breaking his promise to marry her. This allusion may be a reference to Hamlet’s dealings with her, and appealing to Jesus and a young female saint to partake in her suffering lends poignancy to her words and comfort to her spirit, as well as judgement on the possible perpetrator. Her final utterance to the assembled characters is: “And of all Christian souls, I pray God. God b’ wi’ ye!” (4.5.195). She prays for those assembled, those with “Christian souls”, that God will be with them. These examples of Ophelia weaving prayers into her speech show her attempts to summon God’s presence as a heavenly invisible Father, in part replacing the father she has lost.

The contrast between her coerced resemblance of piety at the hands of her father in the form of a feigned reading of a standardized prayer book and this highly individualized, spontaneous and unconventional expression of spiritual engagement suggests that in the losing of her earthbound father she has developed a more open channel to her heavenly Father. Her mingling of Christian discourse within her fragmented speech gives her prayer a fractured yet heart-felt quality. She turns to shreds of ritual and liturgy to soothe and supplicate. This notion of shredded ritual, of traditional prayers and sayings being fragmented and tossed together with bawdy songs and personal lamentations, paints the impression that standardized religious prayer, as in the prayer book she is asked to “read on” (3.1.46) is not robust enough to hold together her tattered psyche. Instead, these snatches of Christian discourse, and later, as she is drowning, “snatches of old lauds” (4.7.148), are a more true expression of her distinctively threadbare inner reality, providing, if not sanity, then at least an honest mouthpiece for her suffering. Prayer is no longer a hollow act that she presents at the command of an earthly father figure who deals in deception, but rather a deeply transparent expression that flows spontaneously towards a heavenly Father who values the “true nature” of things. In relation to Claudius’s definition of prayer, her words and her thoughts fly up simultaneously. She has neither the cause nor cunning for deception. Her words also entreat the listeners to appeal for forgiveness, as in her assertion that God be at Claudius’s table or in her gift of rue to Gertrude, a plant associated with

the cleansing of sins, “herb-grace o’/ Sundays” (4.5.178–179), which could help to wash Gertrude’s soul “as white as snow”. Her prayer that God be with her onlookers alludes to Claudius’s notion that submission to God will ensure that “all may be well”.

However, all is not well for Ophelia or for her brother Laertes in this life, at least. The force of their father’s control over them is too great and both Ophelia, and then at the close of the play, her brother Laertes, who attempts to avenge his father, die as a result of Polonius’s death, their invisible father’s presence hastening this tragic trajectory. Ophelia’s death by drowning in a brook, defined by Gertrude as an accident born from a distressed mind (4.7.149–151), but as a suicide by the priest who performs Ophelia’s funeral (5.1.209), is, either way, a direct result of Polonius’s death. By contrast, Laertes seeks revenge for Polonius’s death and his vulnerability due to the loss of his father and impulsive desire to avenge that death make him susceptible to Claudius’s feigned signs of concern for his cause (4.7). Claudius can easily manipulate him into killing Hamlet, channeling Laertes’s hot blooded passion to avenge his invisible father’s death onto the perpetrator of that crime, for Claudius’s own ends. However, once the plan has backfired and Hamlet and Laertes are both dying, poisoned by the same envenomed sword, they exchange forgiveness with one another:

LAERTES: Exchange forgiveness with me, noble Hamlet.

Mine and my father’s death come not upon thee,
Nor thine on me. [*Dies.*]

HAMLET: Heaven make thee free of it! (5.2.271–274).

Laertes’s confession and request for forgiveness and Hamlet’s acceptance and brief prayer to confirm this forgiveness fulfil ideal forms of prayer, presenting prayer’s ability to wash a sinful person “white as snow” (3.3.46) and to reveal the “true nature” of things, free from earthly “shuffling”. Both sons’

hunger for vengeance has been appeased, but it is forgiveness, not vengeance, that truly satisfies their souls. Anthony Low points out that “as the play ends, Hamlet and Laertes repent and generously forgive each other. That is as close as they come to formal confession and absolution” (Low 1999:464). Through this action both sons, if only briefly, submit to God’s authority as their ultimate invisible father in an act of forgiveness as opposed to revenge and achieve real peace. All may yet be well.

Conclusion

Within the world of *Hamlet*, God allows his children absolute freedom; the freedom to reject him and replace him with idols of their own father figures; the freedom to destroy themselves and those they love and hate; the freedom to be deceived by falseness appearing true and truth appearing false; the freedom to “rough-hew” their reality, in whatever way they choose. But hazardous human lurching from one impulse to another will also be called to account, which Claudius realises when he reflects on how “in the corrupted currents of this world” (3.3.57) human evil is so often smoothed over and yet:

’tis not so above.

There is no shuffling, there the action lies

In his true nature; and we ourselves compelled

Even to the teeth and forehead of our faults

To give in evidence (3.3.60–64).

Nothing goes unnoticed and nothing goes undealt with. Everything is exposed in the end and people will attest to their decisions in the courts of heaven. This proposition calls into question the framing that Hamlet supplies regarding the outcomes of the play as he presents God as a being that will smooth over all “rashness” and “indiscretion” (5.2.7–8), shaping everything to a divine end regardless of the “clear plots” and “rough-hew[n]” nature of the characters’ actions (5.2.9–11). If this is the case,

then are none to be called “to give in evidence” (3.3.64) when everything has been exposed? Or are characters still responsible for their foolish actions regardless of how God may shape these actions to his purposes? Nuttall and Kastan supply two alternative perspectives on the matter that nevertheless speak meaningfully to each other. Nuttall claims that:

The chaos at the human level leaves God free to ensure the proper end. It is only because of this confusion that we are able to think of Hamlet as not necessarily bound for hell...the play certainly makes the order of divine, over-arching causation evident to us: “There’s a divinity that shapes our ends” (Nuttall 2007:203).

Nuttall argues that the clay from which God can mould his desired end is the chaos that ensues from a variety of impulsive and self-seeking decisions made by characters, causing “carnal, bloody, and unnatural acts,/ ...accidental judgments, casual slaughters” (5.2.325–326), which ricochet and counteract each other. Because the plans of all the characters are thwarted by the plans of others, there is a general levelling of human agency, and within this confusion, God is able to bring about ultimate resolution. Perhaps it is even God who creates the confusion, his involvement thwarting their plans, bowing at last the stubborn knees of his wayward children to his will. It could be this shaping that saves Hamlet from his sins and allows “flights of angels to sing him to [his] rest” (5.2.303).

Yet Kastan aptly points out that “the play, we oft forget, distracted by the linguistic richness and metaphysical density, is a bloodbath. These dispiriting ends all seem very much ‘rough hewn,’ with no obvious marks of divinity having shaped them” (Kastan 2014:142). Thus the sheer number of lives lost of both innocent and guilty characters seems to indicate that God has not intervened in this orgy of death, but has rather allowed the destructive impulses of his children to run their course and reach their logical conclusion, demonstrating a result of characters’ rejection of God in various ways and their replacement of him with the whims of their father figures or their own selfish desires. Yet the grisly end of these characters lives does not rule out the fact that God may still have the last word. There may be a final shaping, a final divine moulding that will render “heart[s] with strings of steel/ ...soft as sinews of the newborn babe” (3.3.70–71).

To gauge this possibility, I will turn back to our definition of prayer that has shaped this argument throughout to understand how it can help to interpret the final moments of the play. Firstly, prayer should have the ability to facilitate spiritual cleansing and forgiveness (3.3.45–46). Both Laertes and Hamlet experience this cleansing in their mutual prayer and exchange of forgiveness, activating this cry for mercy in their attempt to reconcile with each other and find peace within themselves.

Secondly, prayer should have the power to prevent us from sinning, so that through prayer we are “forestallèd ere we come to fall” (3.3.49). Clearly, none of the characters were engaged in sincere prayer leading up to this ending; there is no evidence that they were, else they would have found themselves prevented from committing such deeds, especially Claudius and Laertes. Laertes does speak of his conscience troubled by the act of slicing Hamlet with the poisoned sword (5.2.271), which shows a moment in which he could have listened to the voice of God within him trying to forestall this regrettable act. Sensitivity to this voice of God would have been developed through time spent previously in prayer, though of course he ignores it. He does, however, reveal to Hamlet the truth of the situation once the damage is done, following his conscience in the last moments of his life (5.2.271–273). Thirdly, prayer requires actions from those that pray in order for the prayer to be fully effective. Claudius asks rhetorically, “May one be pardon'd and retain th' offence?” (3.3.56). Thus both Hamlet and Laertes, in order for their forgiveness of each other and their forgiveness from God to be activated, need to stop destroying one another, and this is demonstrated clearly in their extension of genuine forgiveness towards each other, when they seek the best outcome for the other, despite their mutual suffering at each other's hands. Furthermore, prayer uncovers the “true nature” (3.3.62) of our actions. At the end of the play much of the shuffling within the world of the play is revealed for what it is. Laertes is essential in revealing the truth of the plots, and as Hamlet is dying, he urges Horatio to speak up about the truth, or as much truth as he is aware of, so that as much as possible the true nature of the situation will be revealed in the earthly realm. This reflects the dynamics of heaven, where truth overrides lies.

Finally, prayer, in the play's logic, must be earnest. Words cannot fly up without thoughts (3.3.97–98). This claim about effective prayer comments broadly on the ineffectual nature of any duplicitous act. Whether a clandestine crime that leads to seizing the crown or poisoning an enemy, these deceits are always revealed for what they are in the end, rendering whatever goal was achieved through their implementation hollow. Hamlet's prayer for heaven to make Laertes free of the guilt for his death is most sincere, and certainly his thoughts and words are aligned since they are conducted towards a heavenly father figure awaiting the filial attachment of his beloved children. Although tragedy is not forestalled, there is nevertheless the sense that God somehow has the bigger picture under control. There is a divinity shaping the end after all, but it is not working to cover up and excuse human shuffling, but rather to reveal the nature of a situation and begin to draw characters towards that truth, enabling them to change whilst maintaining their freedom to do so.

Chapter 2:

Prayer and Eroticism in *Romeo and Juliet* and *Othello*

Prayer can be an act of surging, passionate communication with a desired divinity and thus can also conduct erotic desire towards a desired individual. Both *Romeo and Juliet* and *Othello* depict prayer acts as channels of erotic desire, albeit in different ways. Although a meaningful metaphor and mimetic of human desire, the eroticism in these plays dangerously emulates worship of the desired one, erring on idolatry, which constructs precarious dynamics within these marriages, shaping the tragedies that ensue. This link between sexual desire and prayer as romantic religious ritual is articulated early on in both plays through the use of the word “rites”. Juliet, for instance, longs for her wedding night when she and Romeo can consummate their love through their “amorous rites” (3.2.8), comparing sexual intimacy to a sacred ritual of love. Juliet’s emphasis on “amorous rites” signifies the mutuality of their relationship because these rites incorporate both lovers in sexual union, specifying mutual attraction and surrender in their relationship. But as the play progresses a mutual worship of each other develops, distorting this ideal mutuality into a devastating exclusivity and idolatry, void of God, which is reflected in their mutual suicides.

These amorous rites are also articulated in *Othello* when Desdemona pleads with the Duke of Venice to allow her to accompany Othello to Cyprus as he leads the Venetians into battle against the Turks. She argues that it was Othello’s bravery in war that first aroused her attraction to him and therefore if she cannot support him in his violent undertakings and must instead remain home as a “moth of peace” (1.3.255), she would lose the “rites” for which she first loved him (1.3.256). Desdemona’s “rites” place all the emphasis on her desire for Othello, a desire ominously interlinked with his feats of violence. Othello appears as a dominant figure in the marriage, demanding utter devotion, which Desdemona channels towards him as an act of worship and servitude, idolising him. It is this desire

symbolised and actualised through prayer that causes Othello to overpower Desdemona, his dominance climaxing in the crushing of her desire, even as she fights for life through one final prayer.

Combining spirituality and sex in literary discourse is not unique to *Romeo and Juliet* and *Othello*, but rather it is a common feature of the early modern period, epitomised by poets such as John Donne (1572–1631) and Richard Crashaw (1613–1649). For example in “The Canonisation”, Donne compares his union with his lover to a “pattern” (46) that the world seeks to emulate. It is the quintessence of love. He imagines that he and his lover have attained sainthood based on the perfection of their love. He claims that “by these hymnes, all shall approve/ Us Canoniz’d for Love” (36–37) thus equating the passion of sexual intimacy with spiritual love. He asserts that their love transports them to the heights of heroes of the faith from which pilgrims must draw inspiration in order to show their true devotion. Richard Crashaw goes further in the poem “Prayer” when he contrasts the sordid nature of unlawful sexual activity with the orgasmic experience of knowing God, using sex as a way of understanding true human intimacy with the divine, concluding with:

Happy proof! She shal discover
 What ioy, what blisse,
 How many Heav’ns at once it is
 To have her God become her Lover (123–126).

The idea of God as ultimate lover is expressed, and the ecstatic experience of this is emphasised as beyond any human sexual climax. Crashaw echoes the language of Christian mysticism which is often “drawn from sexual love – physical descriptions of the beauty of the lover, as well as images of longing and meeting, of burning and swooning, of kisses, embraces, and even intercourse” (McGinn 1993:46) in relation to intimacy with God were widespread. God will arouse “ioy” (124) and “blisse” (124) within her, and she shall experience a multitude of heavens if she allows God to become the

ultimate paramour of her soul. “The Canonisation” compares a sexual experience to a spiritual state, while “Prayer” compares a spiritual state to a sexual experience. These examples pithily illustrate the wide spectrum of imagery that intertwines sexual and sacred desire in early modern literature.

This spectrum emerges from a pervasive convention within religious traditions in which scriptural texts such as *The Song of Songs* serve as both an evocative celebration of the sensual union between a lover and beloved and also as a picture of Christ’s intimacy with His people.⁵ Furthermore Richard Rambuss elaborates on this theme in *Closet Devotions* where he highlights the Christian doctrine of the incarnation, which sees God becoming flesh through Christ, thus proffering “a spirituality that paradoxically bespeaks embodiment, doing so in ways that often enhance or extend the expressive possibilities of bodies and desire” (Rambuss 1998:2). Rambuss goes on to detail the many erotic expressions of devotion to Christ articulated by both male and female early modern writers and artists, stressing the actuality of erotica in these sacred engagements beyond mere metaphorical meaning. He demonstrates how “the body and its poses, its motions, its voicings, even its passions can thus be redeemed in the performance of prayer as the medium in which religious devotion takes in its fullest expression” (Rambuss 1998:130). Thus he compellingly argues that religious devotion is an expression of erotic desire, which challenges the shadowy presence of “denial and scandal” that so often accompanies sexuality in conventional Christian discourse (Rambuss 1998:135). With this background in mind, I investigate the manner in which prayer reflects the dynamics of erotic desire in both *Romeo and Juliet* and *Othello*. I examine ways in which erotic desire suffuses prayer, but also how such a combination can easily shift to idolatry, warping the vision of the lovers in each other’s eyes. I prove that these warped visions create tragic outcomes caused by the characters’ transference

⁵ Theresa of Avila, a mid-sixteenth century Christian mystic in Spain, wrote a series of meditations on the *The Song of Songs* in which she compares her relationship with God to the ecstatic and erotic union between a husband and wife, a marriage, in which “a soul in love with her spouse” can “experience all these favours, swoons, deaths, afflictions, delights and joys in relation to Him” (Meditation 1.6). She begs God, through the blood of His son, that He grant her this favour: “‘Let him kiss me with the kiss of his mouth’ for without you what am I Lord?” (Meditation 4:8) (Slade 1995: 52, 56). In *The Book of My Life*, she praises God saying “You have loved us so much that we are able to speak of a communion between you and our souls here in exile.” (pg. 122) further emphasising this passionate bond of love she envisions between the soul and God, demonstrating how the erotic and religious meld together.

of their devotion towards God onto each other. This will demonstrate Shakespeare's critique of excessive devotion to a lover at the exclusion of God, revealing that prayer as a conduit of erotic desire towards humans ought to be wisely contained, with ultimate desire being channelled towards God in passionate prayer.

Romeo and Juliet: Let lips do what hands do, they pray

From the moment they meet, prayer activates the mutual desire of Romeo and Juliet's bond. They share a sonnet that playfully and delicately employs the image of prayer as a symbol of touching hands and kissing, underpinned by heady desire. Not only does the sonnet explore prayer and mutual desire in its content, but the very form of a sonnet and practice of sonnet writing is often compared to prayer. This connection between sonnets and prayer was first suggested by C.S. Lewis who claimed that "a good sonnet was like a good public prayer" (Lewis 1965:490) and Shakespeare himself reflects in Sonnet 108 on his "penchant for rewriting the same poem over and over" (Hokama 2012:199) stating that "like prayers divine,/ I must each day say o'er the very same,/ Counting no old thing old, thou mine, I thine/ Even as when first I hallowed thy faire name" (lines 5-8). With this in mind, Shakespeare's sonnets become performed prayers that may be repeated infinitely without losing their efficacy, just as "the oldest forms of prayer, being divinely inspired, never ceased to be relevant and as fresh as they were when first spoken by the first believers" (Hokama 2012:212). Furthermore, the sonnet is equally shared between the voices of both Romeo and Juliet instead of representing a single, often male perspective addressed to an unseen and silent female beloved, as can be noted in "contemporary sonnet sequences, which portray the poet by stifling the woman's voice" (Davis 2001:45). This "reciprocity" is carried throughout the play which is "marked by the lover's dialogues" (Davis 2001:45). All of these factors serve to characterise this moment in the play as highly emblematic of the interweaving of prayer and desire in Romeo and Juliet's interaction as well as a pattern for the mutuality characterising their union.

In the first quatrain, Romeo, whose name literally means "pilgrim" (Wells 2010:61), holds Juliet's

hand and describes his lips as “two blushing pilgrims” (1.5.92) who are waiting to tenderly kiss Juliet’s lips, the “holy shrine” (1.5.93), to redeem any sacrilege that may have been caused by the “rough touch” (1.5.94) of his hand against hers. Juliet responds in the second quatrain by calling Romeo “good pilgrim”(1.5.97) and assuring him that he speaks too harshly of the damage caused by his hand, and that in fact his hand touching hers is a proper form of “mannerly devotion”(1.5.95). She playfully rebuffs his offer to kiss away all harm by reminding him that it is customary to touch a saint’s stone hand with one’s own hand but not to kiss it. A pilgrim is also urged to pray before the statue of a saint, pressing their hands together as lovers may do with their lips. Prayer is the appropriate form of “kissing” when it comes to the veneration of a saint; one hand held gently against another in a sacred “kiss” (1.5.97). Moreover, Romeo questions rhetorically whether saints and pilgrims have lips, implying that they are not made for austere supplication only but for passionate, bodily engagement. Juliet swiftly retorts that their lips are purposed for prayer, once more placing prayer at the meeting point of saints and pilgrims. Romeo replies, “O, then, dear saint, let lips do what hands do:/ They pray; grant thou, lest faith turn to despair” (1.5.100–101). He wittily weaves Juliet’s rebuff into his persuasion, stating that lips must imitate the spiritual fervour of the palm and kiss in actuality, placing the one devoutly against the other. If Juliet, the saint, does not grant Romeo his prayer, in other words his kiss, his “faith” will dissolve into “despair”. His spiritual assurance rests in her willingness to kiss him. If she were to deny this kiss, she would deny him the pinnacle of his pilgrimage.

Juliet skilfully maintains her power by feigning indifference. Her rejoinder is that: “Saints do not move, though grant for prayers’ sake” (1.5.102). If she were to grant him his prayer, it would be for his “sake”, for the benefit of his soul, and not for some pleasure of her own. As a saint, she graciously and selflessly fulfils his supplication from her vantage point of complete self-sufficiency. He requires her assistance, but she needs nothing from him. Therefore, if she were to kiss him, it would be an act of charity, not self-gratification. Although this static image of women embodied by the stone statue of a saint is problematic, since it elevates women but also paralyses them, Juliet subverts this trope of

passivity by actively conveying her own desire and activating Romeo's desire, as her false disinterest serves to further increase his longing. He urges: "Then move not, while my prayer's effect I take/Thus from my lips, by thine, my sin is purged" (1.5.103–104). He requires her to remain motionless while he kisses her, framing this act of kissing as a purging of sin, the effect of his prayer. After kissing him, Juliet cleverly comments on the fact that her lips are now smothered in his sin, and Romeo swiftly takes the opportunity to retract the sin through kissing her again. She concludes by showing her delight in his kiss, saying that he kisses "by the book" (1.5.107) and thus to her satisfaction. This interweaving of sacred acts of spiritual devotion with physical expressions of erotic desire adds a layer of holiness to Romeo and Juliet's union and embodies the sense of mutuality that frames their interactions throughout this brief relationship. That mutuality is expressed largely in spiritual terms is significant as the conformity of gender roles to patriarchal structure within marriage was prevalent within this period but "spiritual equality" between the genders was also upheld (Dolan 2008:28). Thus spiritual discourse provides the lovers with a rich rhetorical way to promote the ideal of mutuality within their bond.

This shared prayerful interchange conducts their mutual desire displaying their equal investment in the formation of their bond, which is further emphasised in the play through the many references to the lover's paired experiences of desire. For instance the Chorus at the start of Act 2 stresses how the young lovers are "alike bewitched by the charm of looks" (2.Chorus.6), emphasising the mutual attraction that they experience for each other, not only Romeo's desire for Juliet. This mutuality is further emphasised in the rhyming couplet: "But passion lends them power, time means to meet,/ Tempering extremities with extreme sweet" (2.Chorus.13–14). Passion and time lend both of them power and means, and together they experience the "extreme sweet". Again the play stresses mutuality when Romeo relays the story of his shared love with Juliet to Friar Lawrence, emphasising how each has wounded the other with love and that "both [their] remedies/ Within [the Friar's] help and holy physic lies" (2.3.52–53). They have each been equally wounded and shall be jointly healed through marriage. Romeo continues in this train of thought when he states that "her I love now/ Doth

grace for grace and love for love allow” (2.3.85–86), making it clear that Juliet returns his affection equally as the repetition of the words “grace” and “love” depicts the pairing of equal desire. After they have enjoyed their “amorous rites” and must part, Juliet passionately lists incommensurate titles for her Romeo as he leaves her bedroom, calling him “love, lord, ay husband, friend” (3.5.43).

Although she willingly names Romeo her “lord”, enclosing this position of leadership with the words “love” and “husband”, she concludes the list with the word “friend”, a term indicating ultimately the companionate nature of their marriage, reflecting a sense of equality, and mutuality. This notion of mutuality in marriage challenges entrenched notions of hierarchy as “early modern religious, legal, and popular discourses reveal a deep distrust of equality” as it was associated with conflict (Dolan 2008:3).

In addition to expressing mutuality through corresponding experiences of desire, the play also inverts and conflates the traditional gender roles of the lovers in order to emphasise equality. For instance, unlike the traditional idealisations of women that tend to silence them through elevating them, Romeo urges his angel to speak: “O, speak again, bright angel” (2.1.68) And “because Juliet speaks *freely* – to herself at night, under no external obligation, to no other listener – it is her own free actions, her freedom, that Romeo must apprehend if he is to recognize her at all” (Kottman 2012:20). Not only does he urge her to speak but he also imbues her with masculine qualities because the angel he envisions is male. This is evident when he continues to compare her to “a winged messenger of heaven” that causes mortals to “fall back to gaze on him” (2.1.70,72). Through this construction of Juliet as a male angel, the scope of Juliet’s gender identity is broadened, as features associated with male angels such as valour and strength are ascribed to her. Romeo again urges Juliet to speak once she arrives at Friar Lawrence’s cell and they kiss. After kissing her a second time, he urges her to express her love for him through words when he says, “let rich music’s tongue/unfold the imagined happiness” (2.6.27–28). He takes delight in her speaking and does not use kisses to silence her. This is no “Peace! I will stop your mouth” (5.4.96) scenario as found in *Much Ado About Nothing*, where Beatrice is silenced by Benedick’s kiss. The kisses are instead a release of words, a mechanism

through which Juliet's lips become active, not passive. Furthermore, Juliet's speech before her wedding night which depicts her desire to be "enjoyed" (3.2.28) expresses "a joyful anticipation of sexual pleasure not found in the language of a virginal heroine preceding her in English drama" (Bly 1996:67). This anomalous expression of chaste sexual desire further differentiates Juliet from traditional depictions of women as either "whores or angels" (Traub 1992:30), construing her as something in between, a virgin with a hearty sexual appetite. In addition to this, Juliet asks Night to "learn [her] how to lose a winning match/ Played for a pair of stainless maidenhoods" (3.2.12–13). Both Juliet and Romeo's chastity is emphasised here, which is unusual, and referring to Romeo's chastity as "maidenhood" serves to somewhat feminise him, further dismantling the gender dichotomy. This can also be noted in *Shakespeare in Love* where Viola and Will rehearse the balcony scene during their moments of sexual intimacy in which Viola takes on the role of Romeo and Will takes on the role of Juliet. The meanings of their utterances remain largely unchanged, thus illustrating the interchangeable nature of the gender roles in Romeo and Juliet's dialogue, attesting to the characters' mutuality. Although this violation of gender norms upsets the heteronormative framework of their bond, it serves as an effective route by which to imagine equality in their marriage, as gender norms were used to enforce hierarchy and thus collapsing these norms levels the playing field.

This equality is reflected in the very mechanics of their marriage. For example it is Juliet and not Romeo who initiates talk of marriage, querying the honourable nature of Romeo's intentions and giving him further instructions regarding how to commune with her on condition that his "purpose [be] marriage" (2.2.186), which Romeo vows he will. Romeo then follows through with his promise and arranges their marriage, informing the nurse that Juliet "shall at Friar Lawrence' cell/ Be shrived and married" (2.3.63–64). Thus both Romeo and Juliet play an equal role in the creation of the marriage and each willingly give of their consent. Although this is normative for the period as consent mattered in marriage and required both partners to agree, it was also normative that societal and familial pressure often coerced a false consent (McSheffrey 1995:4), whereas Romeo and Juliet offer

it freely. The vows of love they exchange during the balcony scene (2.2.169–176) would have been sufficient evidence of a marriage contract because, although “marriage was a sacrament, it was performed not by a priest but, rather, by the individuals who were marrying” (McSheffrey 1995:4). Thus it was common for marriage contracts to be performed in domestic settings, places of work, even taverns, though “parties who failed to solemnize their marriage before a priest committed a sin, although they were still married” (McSheffrey 1995:4). Therefore, “while a marriage was irrevocably created in a single moment in which a couple said, ‘I take you as my wife,’ and ‘I take you as my husband,’ a fifteenth-century wedding was not a single event but a process” and the couple often waited for this process to unravel and conclude in church solemnization before cohabiting (McSheffrey 1995:9). Therefore, once reunited at Friar Lawrence’s cell, Friar Lawrence stresses the necessity of Romeo and Juliet’s marriage in church as he can sense the palpable sexual tension between them and thus urges that “[they] shall not stay alone/ Til Holy Church incorporate two in one” (2.5.36-37) drawing attention to their mutual union sanctioned by religious ritual⁶.

Although Romeo and Juliet’s marriage is clandestine and swiftly arranged, thus opening itself to the appearance of “light love” (2.2.108), Friar Lawrence intends to reveal the marriage to the townsfolk, which he explains when he instructs Romeo to live in Mantua “till we can find a time/ To blaze your marriage” (3.3.149–150), proving that Friar Lawrence envisions that in time this marriage would be accepted and Romeo and Juliet’s married life would be integrated into a community, facilitating reconciliation between the households. Although medieval marriage was not attuned to satisfying modern notions of romantic love, as these feelings were regarded with great caution since they could cloud judgement or affect the health of the inflicted, and factors of property, status, and useful alliances were favoured, if not by the couple then by the patriarchs that wielded power and influence over the couple, “if a union was in other respects satisfactory, love was thus accepted as a positive

⁶ In a recent publication of Pope Francis entitled *Amoris Laetitia* –the Joy of Love–he stresses that “when a man and a woman celebrate the sacrament of marriage, God is, as it were, ‘mirrored’ in them; he impresses in them his own features and the indelible character of his love. Marriage is the icon of God’s love for us” (Francis 2016:91). This statement articulates an enduring belief of both the Catholic and Protestant faith about marriage, reflecting and embracing the image and love of God.

sentiment which even families with pretensions to gentry ranks were willing to accommodate” (Ingram 1987:141–142). In addition to this, Lord Capulet speaks of Romeo as a “virtuous and well-governed youth” (1.5.65) and may well have approved the match as “they are also close in age, rank and status” (Hopkins 1998:135). Moreover their households being “both alike in dignity” (1.Chorus.1) would have been economically well-suited to merge, with marriage serving as “the principle vehicle for the transfer of property between generations and the chief nexus for the formation of enduring social bonds” (Howell 1998:3) as well as “making alliances between families [and] settling feuds” (McCarthy 2003:20). Therefore the mutuality experienced between them is not merely a product of suspended reality but rather an institutional arrangement that could develop into a workable marriage to the benefit of the community. Thus it is not far-fetched that “the Friar not only seeks to ensure that the lover’s passion leads to lawful marriage, but also works to repair Verona’s frayed social bonds” (Kastan 2014:52).

Not only is this marriage “alliance” hoped to turn the “households' rancor to pure love” (2.3.91–92), creating social stability and peace, but its depiction through religious imagery and an aura of holiness echoes a broader project of reclaiming marriage as a sacred way of being. Kastan asserts that Catholic imagery is “deeply woven into the language and action” (2014:51) of the play, and Charney adds that in *Romeo and Juliet* “there is a great deal of religious imagery converted to erotic needs, which fits perfectly the mood of adoration” (2000:83). Furthermore Jonathan Swift argues that “even as Romeo and Juliet trade tropes of devotional love, they talk also of sex, for the two – sex and worship – are not contradictory but commensurate” (2012:80). Swift continues to convincingly argue that “the reformation was marked by deliberate attempts to connect eroticism with the ideal of marriage” (2012:81) because “where ministers had been forbidden to marry, the reformed English Church permitted them to take wives” (2012:82). As marriage was now permissible amongst clergy, the church, and cultural discourse in general, needed to work against medieval beliefs that “promoted a view of sexual behaviour which exalted virginity and chastity above even marital sex” (McCarthy 2004:2) as sex was seen to be “possessed of a stain or impurity that negated prayer, while original sin

was identified as the first sexually transmitted disease” (Elliot 1993:38). Thus Shakespeare assists with this project of reclaiming pleasurable sex within marriage as a sanctified act by framing Romeo and Juliet’s sexual union as holy through the interweaving of religious discourse with expressions of love.

A particularly striking piece of religious discourse used to these ends, and one that turns our attention back to the couple’s first encounter and to the symbolic work of prayer in depicting mutuality, but also potential idolatry, is that of the saint. As has been observed, Romeo activates the extended metaphor of Juliet’s being a saint in their shared sonnet early in the play. In addition to this, he again refers to her as “dear saint” (2.2.97) during the balcony scene. He then further canonises her, after hearing news of his banishment, through a description of the holy privilege of flies that may revel in the “white wonder of dear Juliet’s hand,/ And steal immortal blessings from her lips” (3.3.36-37). Her hand is again the white marble of a saint, which is paired with the “blessings” of her words that are “immortal” and thus of eternal spiritual consequence. The image characterises Romeo’s adoration of Juliet as the worship of a saint, a practice that was outlawed as idolatrous by English Protestant polemicists (Dowley 1977:372), thus marking Romeo’s love as a form of idolatry. However, the play is not invested in a critique of Catholicism itself. Kastan observes the significant contrast between Shakespeare’s innocuous treatments of Catholicism in his Italian plays compared to his more sinister treatment of Catholic clergy in the English history plays (2014:56). In another era and another land Catholicism is not a threat. The images and practices would resonate with Shakespeare’s audience, giving them echoes of a familiar but far off time, a kind of fantasy realm that suits the romance of the play⁷. Thus the critique is more concerned with Romeo’s idolatry than specifically Catholic idolatry as associating Juliet with a saint does suggest that Romeo’s adoration teeters precariously between intense passion and profane idolization. Furthermore, Juliet explicitly references idolatry when

⁷ Shell argues that there is a kind of nostalgia imbedded in Shakespeare’s plays for the country’s Catholic past. However she states that “this does not mean he was a Catholic; many of an antiquarian bent, or with an imaginative sympathy for the past, were capable of experiencing wistfulness for the old religion without wishing to put back the clock” (Shell 2014:6).

describing the excess of her passion for Romeo during the balcony scene when she names him “the god of [her] idolatry” (2.2.156), equating her love for him to worship, even the forbidden worship of an idol. Idolatry was a central anxiety for reformers and part of the reason that biblical dramatizations were outlawed by the time Shakespeare was creating theatre, despite playwrights’ attempts to reform the content of these plays. As O’Connell argues in *The Idolatrous Eye* with regards to the banning of these mystery plays, “the final sticking point was not Marian, ecclesiastical, or eucharistic dogma but the physical portrayal of the divine” (2000: 27). Depicting the divine in a physical body was considered profane, even in theatrical form, and thus this mutual worship of the other would be recognised as highly problematic. Romeo’s veneration of Juliet as a saint and Juliet’s worship of Romeo as a god push the boundaries of mutuality towards something more sinister, an exclusivity and misplaced reverence that severs them from safety.

Therefore, though shrouded in sacred symbolism, their mutual relationship starts to become so exclusive that it finally rejects the involvement of God and tragically implodes. This tragic trajectory begins when Romeo enters the Capulet ball and experiences a deep sense of foreboding that an early death awaits him. Yet he surrenders to “He that has the steerage of [his] course” (1.4.112) urging him to “direct [his] sail!” (1.4.113). This utterance serves as a prayer of surrender to God whom Romeo believes to be at the helm of his destiny. However, at the close of the play, Romeo returns to this image of his destiny as a ship, but this time it is he, himself, who is at the helm, accompanied by the poison that will end his life. As he prepares to drink the poison he declares: “Thou desperate pilot, now at once run on/ The dashing rocks thy seasick, weary barque” (5.3.117-118). Romeo is now the “desperate pilot” taking his destiny into his own hands, wrecking the ship of his life. He has lost all faith, all trust in God and single-mindedly seeks to join Juliet in death, evacuating all other possible solutions.

Juliet also severs herself from God when she experiences herself as bereft of God's support once she is abandoned by her earthly parents. This she reveals during a fight with her parents in which her father orders her to marry the County Paris. She protests and is violently threatened by her father who hurls cruel insults at her and then storms out of her chamber. She rhetorically asks "is there no pity in the clouds/ That sees into the bottom of my grief?" (3.5.196–197), articulating the indifference she perceives from heaven after her father has threatened her with disownment. She reaches out to her mother, but her mother rejects her sorrow, commanding her to be silent, giving only silence in return. Juliet projects her anguish onto heaven after her mother deserts her, crying: "Alack, alack, that heaven should practise stratagems/ Upon so soft a subject as myself!" (3.5. 209–210). She attributes her troubled circumstances to the machinations of God. She does not turn to God for assistance but rather blames God for her troubles. Once she returns from Friar Lawrence and begins to enact their plan, she implores her mother and nurse to leave her to herself for the evening and uses prayer as a pretext for her solitude, rather than a cure for her suffering, saying:

I pray thee leave me to myself tonight,
 for I have need of many orisons
 To move the heavens to smile upon my state,
 Which well thou knowest is cross and full of sin (4.3.2–5).

However, no such prayers are ever prayed, and although it is obvious that Juliet does not feel herself "cross and full of sin" (4.3.5), her desperate situation certainly warrants God's involvement. In fact the first three lines of this plea express a striking truth regarding her circumstances and could be performed in absolute earnest, with the last line being belatedly inserted to preserve the veracity of her alleged submission. But instead of praying, Juliet spends forty lines imagining all the possible gruesome calamities that could occur as a result of this risky plan of awakening in a tomb. She drinks the potion while crying out Romeo's name again and again as if praying to him, rather than seeking God's comfort (4.3.14–58). Thus both Romeo and Juliet eventually replace God with each other.

Romeo wrenches the helm of his destiny from God's hands, steering his ship desperately into perilous rocks as he chooses to die by poison rather than live without Juliet. Juliet similarly takes matters into her own hands after she accuses God of indifference and cruelty, no longer seeking God's intervention and instead choosing to stab herself rather than live without Romeo. Thus their mutuality persists even in death. This exclusivity and excessive worship of the other allows both to single-mindedly march towards their graves with a kind of passionate ecstasy climaxing in a final kiss of the other (5.3.120); kisses that are intimately linked with prayer and thus adoration of the other right from the moment they meet. Thus the play evinces some scepticism about romantic love that encourages the two partners to worship each other because such worship excludes others, whether the community or in this case, God, with fatal consequences.

Although both Romeo and Juliet take matters into their own hands, resulting in their suicides, their deaths are ironically attributed to divine decree when, to the households' chagrin, Escalus declares: "See what a scourge is laid upon your hate,/ That heaven finds means to kill your joys with love" (5.3.291–292). Escalus claims that God intentionally uses the love of Romeo and Juliet to destroy them as a consequence of the households' persistent hatred and killing. This "scourge" (5.3.291) appears to have achieved its end, as the play concludes with the hope that the households will continue in peace, albeit a "glooming" (5.3.304) one. However, that Escalus claims that God is responsible for this tragedy does not make it so. Indeed Romeo and Juliet's love does kill them. I suggest, however, that this is not at the hand of God but because of the lack of God's hand. Romeo and Juliet choose to make each other the object of their worship, ultimately excluding God from their union. God does not kill them with their love; they do it themselves. They choose to steer their own courses, to shut God out. The mutuality of their bond, that is potentially empowering and intimate, becomes excessive and closed off to God's influence and solutions. Thus Shakespeare presents a powerful caveat regarding the dangerous potential of untrammelled erotic love that can destroy itself when channelled through the mechanisms of prayer and transformed into kisses, marriage, sex, and

the ecstasy of a shared death, punctuated by farewell kisses which become the final prayers of their mutual worship. As Friar Lawrence warns the lovers prior to their marriage:

These violent delights have violent ends
 And in their triumph die like fire and powder,
 Which as they kiss consume (2.6.9–11).

***Othello*: A prayer of earnest heart**

Othello presents a very different relationship to the one that appears in *Romeo and Juliet*. It subscribes to a more conventional, hierarchical structure in which “woman, as the less perfect of the species, was relentlessly subordinated to man” (Elliot 1993:299). Thus prayer as a conveyor of erotic desire is not in this case a two way flow, but rather emanates from Desdemona towards Othello, elevating him to heights close to divinity. Desdemona articulates her sexual desire through her prayers which express absolute devotion to Othello, leaving her vulnerable to his violence. This violence occurs once Desdemona’s prayers turn against her, becoming instead abhorrent emblems of her supposed sexual transgressions, symbolising her autonomy, that unseen essence of her inner being that threatens Othello, causing him unfathomable anxiety. This pairing of prayer and desire highlights the invisibility of each force and in turn anxiety that can arise from trying to militantly control these forces in another or in the self. This anxiety can only be truly counteracted by trust, another invisible force. David Schalkwyk rightly argues in *Shakespeare: Love and Service* that “in *Othello*, Shakespeare shows that master-servant relationships require trust as a human not merely instrumental need” (2008:245). Thus Othello’s trust becomes the most coveted commodity in the play for which Desdemona and Iago must compete through their respective displays of devotional servitude. However, Desdemona’s attempts to gain this trust through prayer and devotion warp her perceptions of Othello, idolising him and leaving her utterly at his mercy, a mercy she never receives.

Prayer symbolises the complex manifestations of Desdemona's desire for Othello and it is her prayers that surge towards him and his potential violence that establishes the master/servant power dynamic within their marriage. She is the devoted pilgrim, and he is the hallowed being of her worship. Natasha Korda defines this template of power in economic terms, arguing that Desdemona is characterised as overvaluing Othello's worth, expressing an "extravagance of ... desire", whilst Othello undervalues her worth, when he throws "a pearl away/ Richer than all his tribe" (5.2.356–357). That women and Africans were pervasively characterised as placing skewed value on material objects serves to further support this analysis of misplaced desire (Korda 2002:114–115). Early on, Othello refers to prayer as a symbol of Desdemona's sexual desire for himself. Incited by the fury of Desdemona's father, Brabantio, Othello explains to the gathered senators and Duke how he won Desdemona's love legitimately, without coercion or charmed concoction. He describes how he would visit Desdemona's house as a guest of her father and narrate the stirring adventures and misadventures of his life:

These things to hear
 Would Desdemona seriously incline:
 But still the house-affairs would draw her thence:
 Which ever as she could with haste dispatch,
 She'd come again, and with a greedy ear
 Devour up my discourse: which I observing,
 Took once a pliant hour, and found good means
 To draw from her a prayer of earnest heart
 That I would all my pilgrimage dilate,

 she thank'd me,
 And bade me, if I had a friend that loved her,
 I should but teach him how to tell my story.
 And that would woo her. Upon this hint I spake:

She loved me for the dangers I had pass'd,

And I loved her that she did pity them.

This only is the witchcraft I have used (1.3.144–152;163–168).

When Desdemona could find a moment to be relieved from “house-affairs” (1.3.146), she would be swiftly drawn to Othello’s side, eating his words and stories ravenously. Her “greedy ear” (1.3.148) reflects her voracious sexual desire aroused by his enticing stories of war and danger, which penetrate her aurally, infiltrating her erotic core. This arousal climaxes in a “prayer of earnest heart” (1.3.151) which she offers, not to God but to Othello, begging him for more tales of adventure. Her prayer symbolises her desire for more of him, yearning, begging, pleading him for more stories of his strength and suffering, craving the stimulation of his words, his history, his very being. Thus he continues to feed her ear with his tales, deepening the thrust of his words, until she hints of her love, giving him opportunity to confess his own. Although describing her as “greedy” already marks her as transgressive, because she actively desires more than her share, and although Othello’s view of her ravenous desire soon mutates into a force inflicting him with harrowing disquiet, at this point in the play he delights in it. Furthermore, the fact that Othello is in control of this narrative which describes her desire to an audience as spontaneous prayer, suggests that he does not yet perceive her desire as a force outside of his control, but rather as a fixed entity that he can unlock, define and contain.

But as an emblem of her desire, this same prayer shortly becomes an emblem of her transgression, as Brabantio characterises her desire for Othello as erroneous when he asserts that it is unnatural for a young, white, noble woman to love an older, black, commoner. He claims that “For nature so preposterously to err” (1.3.62) Othello must have used witchcraft to control her. Desdemona’s love is a ludicrous mistake. David Kastan notes how Othello in turn comes to view Desdemona’s desire for him as similarly erroneous when Iago first hints at her possible unfaithfulness. Othello states that he believes Desdemona to be honest, but then his insecurity lets slip when he says: “and yet how nature

erring against itself" (3.3.232), at which point Iago jumps in with "Ay, there's the point" (3.3.233). Recognising that Othello has at this point internalised the belief that Desdemona's desire is unnatural, Iago capitalises on Othello's insecurity (Kastan 2014:109) and emphasises how Desdemona's choice in Othello as a husband contradicts the normal course to which "nature tends" (3.3.236). This further highlights the unnaturalness of Desdemona's choice, eroding Othello's trust in the veracity of her desire. And "his inability to trust in Desdemona is directly related to his inability to trust his own racial identity and self-worth" (Traub 1992:36). His trust is further broken down by this notion that Desdemona's desire and thus her prayers are in error because choosing a black man over a white man is deviant. In addition to this ability to deviate, the fact that Desdemona chooses to actively express and enact her desire, to be "half the wooer" (1.3.175) places her in profound danger in a "misogynistic society" (Hopkins 1998:152) in which possessing and expressing sexual desire characterised a woman as devious, warranting Brabantio's warning that Othello "Look to her" (1.3.291). Thus Othello comes to realise that Desdemona's desire is in fact out of his control, just as her prayers cannot be grasped and contained.

Though the word "prayer" is commonly used by Shakespeare to denote requests made between two people, as well as between people and God, it is important to note that once Desdemona has endured her initial interrogation by Othello regarding the missing love-token of the handkerchief, experiencing his anger for the first time and then attempting to understand it, she states "nay, we must think men are not gods" (3.4.144). This statement implies that before this moment she holds a belief that Othello is on a similar level to a god, and her desire for his heroic stories, her desire for him, is a form of worship that intensifies her passion and hastens their marriage, reflecting a similar dynamic to that of Romeo and Juliet, but from her side only. This pseudo-religious worship of Othello distorts Desdemona's responses and understanding of her husband's actions, greatly endangering her life, for despite her admission that men are not gods, this projection of god-like status onto Othello still remains a perilous part of Desdemona's imaginative framework.

The dangerous intensity of Desdemona's idolisation of Othello becomes evident once he has verbally and physically abused her and she uses prayer to further articulate her desire for him, a desire that seems worryingly to increase as a result of the abuse. After hitting her publically and sending her out of his sight, Othello invades her private chambers, viciously accusing her of unfaithfulness, scorning her denials and calling her the "cunning whore of Venice/ That married with Othello" (4.2.93-94) before storming out. The blame of his words causes her to kneel and pray for punishment to inflict her if there is any truth in his accusations, allowing for the possibility that his words may be true, although she claims she has been faithful. Thus she further ascribes him divine attributes as he is portrayed as privy to knowledge about her actions beyond her own awareness. In this prayer Desdemona concentrates her desire intensively towards Othello, attempting to direct it entirely towards him at the absolute exclusion of any other man. Even God is displaced. She prays:

Here I kneel:

If e'er my will did trespass 'gainst his love,
 Either in discourse of thought, or actual deed;
 Or that mine eyes, mine ears, or any sense,
 Delighted them in any other form;
 Or that I do not yet, and ever did,
 And ever will, - though he do shake me off
 To beggarly divorcement, - love him dearly,
 Comfort forswear me! (4.2.155-163).

This lavish prayer of desire and devotion to her husband, climaxing in an exclamation of her dear love for him, goes dangerously too far. She orders a personification of Comfort to abandon her should even a jot of attraction towards other men inhabit her, an unattainable intention. Furthermore, her prayer displaces God, as she does not address God directly by seeking divine consolation, forgiveness or guidance regarding her situation, but rather holds Othello up as the object of her highest affection,

cutting herself off from any comfort were she unable to offer him the most focussed devotion imaginable.

Desdemona is unable to maintain this picture of perfection by which she frames herself and her inability to admit or recognise this shows her lack of insight into the nature of her own desire, an invisible force that, like her prayers, can be drawn out of her spontaneously. She unwittingly undercuts these high standards of absolute purity when in the next scene she and Emilia are discussing Lodovico, the Venetian ambassador, admiring his looks and speech:

DESDEMONA: This Lodovico is a proper man.

EMILIA: A very handsome man.

DESDEMONA: And he speaks well (4.3.33–35).

In her prayer she claims that she will never appreciate another man visually or aurally or through any other sense, yet in this interchange with Emilia she fails to fulfil two criteria established in her prayer by admiring this man with both her “eyes” (4.2.158), when she accepts Emilia’s description of him as being handsome, and “ears” (4.2.158), when she praises his manner of speaking. Both these senses, the visual and aural, are prominent recurring motifs throughout the play and Desdemona is characterised especially as finding delight in the ability by which a man may use his words to please her ear, which is evident through the power and pleasure of Othello’s stories to arouse her desire. As Lodovico verbally defends her by urging Othello to “make her amends” (4.1.238) after Othello strikes her, it is all the more apt that she would find him well-spoken. Thus, despite her aims for absolute purity, in this moment she does express desire for another man, indicating that her aims are unattainable. She cannot be the perfectly chaste woman that Othello wants, just as no sexual woman could fulfil this criteria. Curiously, these passing compliments directed towards Lodovico occur while

she is preparing herself for her encounter with Othello, an encounter in which “Comfort” clearly does “foreswear” (4.2.163) her. This comfortless state is one that she summons upon herself in her prayer, a prayer that denies her any comfort should her eye or ear find delight, even slightly, “in any other form” (4.2.159). Though her brief admiration of Lodovico is obviously not the cause of her undoing, it does demonstrate that the standards that she sets herself in her prayer are unattainable and that it is rather trust and trustworthiness between partners, not utter blindness or deafness to the loveliness of others, which creates faithfulness. For even as Desdemona admires Lodovico, so she lovingly prepares herself to be intimate with Othello, the man whose trust she values. However, it is not trust in which Desdemona invests to rectify her relationship with Othello, but rather in her own ability to “love him dearly” (4.2.162), pinning the burden of remedy onto herself, further entrenching her position of servitude to his position of authority, and overinvesting in the power of erotic desire to cure all.

This attempt to solve her marital disquietude through her expressions of desire is a failure and instead her desire, symbolised, and actualised by her prayers, further exasperates Othello’s jealousy. This begins earlier in the play, just after Othello and Iago have sworn the oath of vengeance, when Othello urges Desdemona to pray in order to resist sexual temptation, but is simultaneously repulsed by her prayers, signifying his need to control her sexuality and his utter horror as he realises he cannot. When Othello and Desdemona encounter one another, Desdemona is blissfully oblivious to Othello’s suspicions. He begins to express these suspicions while holding her hand and claiming that it is “moist” (3.4.34) and thus “liberal” (3.4.36). She responds to his insinuations with lightness and ease:

OTHELLO: This argues fruitfulness and liberal heart:

Hot, hot, and moist: this hand of yours requires

A sequester from liberty, fasting and prayer,

Much castigation, exercise devout;

For here's a young and sweating devil here,
 That commonly rebels. 'Tis a good hand,
 A frank one.

DESDEMONA: You may, indeed, say so:

For 'twas that hand that gave away my heart

OTHELLO: A liberal hand. The hearts of old gave hands,

But our new heraldry is hands, not hearts.

DESDEMONA: I cannot speak of this (3.4.36–46).

Othello interprets the moistness of Desdemona's hand as a reflection of her liberality with her sexual favours. Not fully grasping his accusations, she responds by claiming that it is her youth and inexperience that lends her hand vitality and that her hand is indeed a good hand as it gave away her love to Othello in marriage. Othello goes on to insinuate that she may have given him her hand in marriage but not her heart. She does not know how to answer this, nor does she fully grasp the statement's import. Amidst these varying descriptions and insinuations regarding Desdemona's hand, Othello urges her to take up "fasting and prayer,/ Much castigation, exercise devout" (3.4.38–39) in order to avoid sexual temptation. He attempts to control her sexuality by demanding absolute asceticism from her, using prayer as a device through which to reign in rather than conduct her desire. This resonates with her own attempts to attain absolute control over her sexual impulses through prayer, but also the failure of this attempt. Shortly after this, his urging of her prayer is distorted into disgust with her prayers, as he fears they embody a teeming collection of evil secrets. He articulates this fear once he has publicly abused Desdemona, entering her bedroom to interrogate both Emilia and then Desdemona. While Emilia is fetching Desdemona, at Othello's command, Othello fumes about Desdemona:

This is a subtle whore,
 A closet lock and key of villanous secrets,
 And yet she'll kneel and pray; I ha' seen her do't (4.2.22–24).

Desdemona's prayers, therefore, provide no comfort to Othello regarding his ability to control her sexual desire for he perceives that even when she does pray, she is in fact nurturing and concealing a nest of lustful escapades, using her prayer as both a vehicle and veil for her desire. Moreover the reference to "a closet" alludes to the spiritual practice of individuals praying alone in private sanctuaries or prayer closets, a practice which nurtured the secret desires of the soul in communion with God. This "closet devotion...is the technology by which the soul becomes a subject" (Rambuss 1998:109) and thus Desdemona's prayers in her closet come to represent her subjectivity, her independence and autonomy, which frighten Othello. Furthermore the prayer closet is a space where the soul's intercourse with God "correlates to the lovemaking of husband and wife "behind the door"" (Rambuss 1998:135) further intensifying Othello's terror as he imagines her prayers to be actual sex acts that exclude him. Thus her prayers further infuriate and disgust him as they contribute to the subtlety of her deception since she appears a most devout and virtuous lady, yet to his mind she harbours licentiousness. Furthermore these prayers represent her ability to express and direct her own subjectivity, constructing an erotic and intimate realm of her own from which Othello is shut out.

Unaware of the disgust and terror that her prayers provoke from her husband, Desdemona continues to use prayer as a way of directing her desire towards Othello. She asks God to assist her in resolving her relationship with her husband through her own attempts at virtue, thus further absolving Othello of responsibility and leaving her vulnerable to his violence. As she prepares for bed and Othello's requested visitation, she prays, "Heaven me such uses send,/ Not to pick bad from bad, but by bad mend!" (4.3.80–81). She asks God to help her not to pick up bad practices from the manner in which Othello treats her, but instead to learn from his errors and mend the breakdown through her own

honourable behaviour. She dangerously places the sole responsibility of mending the broken relationship onto herself. In the Maynardville, Cape Town (Abrahamse 2015) production of *Othello*, Desdemona's attempt to use this prayer as a means of spiritually transforming herself manifests through her gestures, accompanied by ethereal music and a glowing halo of light, which illustrate how she idealistically aims to mend her relationship through her own goodness and spiritual resources. Emilia left the stage and Desdemona, played by Melissa Haiden, climbed under the white coverings of her bed. Looking wistfully into the sky, she stretched out her hands in praise above her and then delicately, as she uttered the prayer, intertwined her arms and let them crumple gently over her head and flow down her face until she clasped them tenderly to her chest, orientating the gesture to both the heavens and to her bodily presence, aligning both these forces. She positions the need for change within herself, employing prayer to bring about this change and thus enable the marriage to work. However, this prayer is very ominous as she places all of her trust in her ability to solve Othello's jealousy through modifying herself, thus failing to recognise the real danger that awaits her and unintentionally colluding in her own demise.

This demise involves Othello not only stopping the physical functioning of Desdemona's body but pointedly putting to death her unseen metaphysical functions too, specifically her prayerful and sexual inclinations which represent her autonomy. As Celia Daileader succinctly argues: Othello "is the story of a woman killed – smothered in her bed – for having sex" (2005:2), with the details of the sex being of less importance than the sheer fact that she is a sexual being and thus a threat that must be destroyed. The build-up towards this destruction begins with Othello's mixed-feelings about killing Desdemona, revealed through the manner in which he deals with her prayers, at first demanding a prayer from her in order to preserve her soul, then confirming the prayers of protection that she prays for herself, but not fulfilling them, and lastly denying her the opportunity for a final prayer, suffocating both her, her invisible prayer, and her unseen sexual desires. In his speech prior to her awakening, he cries:

Othello attempts to control Desdemona's unseen essence through this request for her prayer, wanting her soul to be received by God. But his concern is only for her soul's safety. Her body must be destroyed as it is her body that harbours her greedy, insatiable sexual desires that haunt him because of their invisibility. His divided attitude towards her body/soul binary is exemplified through his affirmation of her prayers for God's mercy, but his refusal to show mercy himself, when they continue:

DESDEMONA: Talk you of killing?

OTHELLO: Ay, I do.

DESDEMONA: Then heaven

Have mercy on me!

OTHELLO: Amen, with all my heart

DESDEMONA: If you say so, I hope you will not kill me (5.2.35–38)

This pattern is soon repeated:

OTHELLO: Thou art to die

DESDEMONA: Then Lord have mercy on me

OTHELLO: I say, amen.

DESDEMONA: And have you mercy, too (5.2.61–63)

By saying "amen" (5.2.37; 63) Othello affirms Desdemona's prayers for God's mercy, but he does not follow the logic to which she appeals, which insists that if he desires God's mercy, he too should show mercy. Moreover the scene echoes the Catholic death bed rites of *ars moriendi* (the art of dying) and "in a quick pivot, the scene reverts from the reassurances of traditional *ars moriendi* dialogue ("Lord have mercy on me." "I say amen.") back into tragedy, as a victim pleads with her

murderer for mercy” (Poole 2014:85). In traditional illustrations of the *ars moriendi*, the dying person is surrounded by a priest, an Angel, Death and the Devil who vie for their soul, depicted by a tiny human form. The dying person must overcome a series of temptations articulated by the priest in order to confirm whether the soul will accompany the devil or the angel to the next life. These temptations include the belief that one is either unworthy of forgiveness or not in need of forgiveness, both of which preclude one from truly receiving forgiveness which is freely given through Christ and necessitates salvation (Aries 1981). In the sixteenth century Erasmus developed his own version of the *ars moriendi* which features the Devil himself as the one who interrogates the dying, and the dying needs must answer with confidence and faith in Christ’s salvation. Erasmus states that the priest need not be present and that “the dying may confess directly to God who gives salvation without the sacraments if faith and a glad will be present” (Atkinson 1992:56). Thus Othello can be seen to take on concurrently the role of the priest, through alerting Desdemona of her need for forgiveness (5.2.42); the angel, through wanting her soul to ascend to heaven (5.2.32); Death, through enacting the murder (5.2.92); and the devil, as he both interrogates her and stifles her final prayer, hence, to his knowledge, damning her soul (5.2.85;130). Othello thus creates “a religion of his own in which he could combine the roles of confessor and killer” (Leggatt 2012:846) along with those of angel and devil. The final role of devil is further emphasised through Emilia’s multiple assertions that Othello is a “devil” (5.2.140;142) once she has discovered that he has murdered her mistress.

Yet, even as Othello employs the apparatus of the *ars moriendi* for his own purposes, fulfilling all four roles of the ceremony, he still cannot force Desdemona to confess and pray for forgiveness for her supposed sins, however much he threatens and accuses her, and this correlates with Desdemona’s sexual appetite that Othello recognises is also out of his control, as much as he seeks to contain it. Again the template of Othello’s dominance and Desdemona’s submission is imposed onto their relationship, yet Desdemona’s interior realities remains elusively and exasperatingly out of Othello’s grasp as both Desdemona’s prayers and sexual desires are invisible, intangible forces emanating from

her central being. Othello refers to the terrifying intangibility of women's sexual desire earlier in the play when he laments:

O curse of marriage,
That we can call these delicate creatures ours,
And not their appetites! (3.3.272–274)

In this moment he recognises that he has no calculable manner in which to measure or possess Desdemona's sexual appetite, and this causes him harrowing anxiety, enough to make him curse marriage. Traub comments on these lines saying that: "for Othello, women's inconsistency comes to signify the very foundation of the marriage relation, its hidden source and origin" (1992:36). This terror of female sexuality is deeply entrenched in medieval and early modern culture in canonised texts such as the third century tracts *On Singleness in the Clergy* and *A Sermon on Concubines* in which women are construed as "a danger to men" and "the root of all evil" (Elliot 1993:36), attitudes that caused marriage to become a potent site of anxiety as "it conferred merit, but it also involved sex" (McCarthy 2004: 11), a precarious combination. The invisibility of Desdemona's sexual desire is further referenced when Iago is discussing the handkerchief with Othello, weaving its wavering relevance in and out of their discussion. At first he claims that it is Desdemona's prerogative to give the handkerchief to whomsoever she chooses. Othello responds that "She is protectress of her honour too:/ May she give that?" (4.1.14–15). Iago then replies that her honour is an "essence that's not seen" (4.1.16), unlike the visibility of "the handkerchief" (4.1.18). Thus the visible evidence of the handkerchief is valued higher than Desdemona's honour, which is an unseen "essence" (4.1.16). Once more the motif of ocularity appears through Iago's emphasis on what is seen, the handkerchief, over what is unseen, Desdemona's honour. This emphasis on the invisibility of Desdemona's honour, and by association her invisible sexual desire and autonomy, compounds Othello's anxieties and provides credence to the proof of the handkerchief. The handkerchief is the only possibly visual evidence regarding this crime, unless Othello were to act as "the supervisor" and "grossly gape on" while Desdemona is "topped" (3.3.400–401), an idea that disgusts him as well as one that would be challenging to arrange, as Iago points out (3.3.402–403). Therefore this notion that Desdemona's

sexual desire is an unseen essence filters through Othello's imagination and emerges in the manner in which he seeks to control her prayers, as a final attempt to control her sexual desire, to in fact see the unseen through an action she may perform at his command. Thus he attempts to control her by demanding that she pray and then affirms her prayers for mercy, whilst leaving them unanswered in terms of his own actions, placing limits on their efficacy. He taunts her by seeming to give her a way out through her prayers that he affirms, but simultaneously crushes these prayers by showing no mercy. This aptly dramatizes the dilemma that has haunted him for most of the play as he values Desdemona's expressions of desire, carried by her prayers, but simultaneously seeks to control this desire, a deed he can never achieve as these impulses are unseen and spontaneous. Thus his only option left is to control what is seen—her body—by destroying her altogether. He does this as she seeks to pray one final prayer, suffocating her body, her sexual desires, her autonomy and her prayers in one move. As she nears her death she tries to negotiate with him:

DESDEMONA: Kill me tomorrow; let me live tonight.

OTHELLO: Nay, if you strive –

DESDEMONA: But half an hour.

OTHELLO: Being done, there is no pause.

DESDEMONA: But while I say one prayer.

OTHELLO: It is too late (5.2.87–92).

The time frames that Desdemona requests to remain alive diminish exponentially, until all she desires is a moment to pray, but that, too, is denied her. Othello's concern for her soul has evaporated. He is focussed only on choking her. She is killed with that unspoken prayer lingering on her lips, a prayer that is asphyxiated, silenced, "too late" (5.2.92). The concurrent smothering of Desdemona's spiritual and sexual impulses demonstrates the commonality between these two forces, as they represent her

hidden autonomy, which pose a threat to Othello for he realises they are outside of his control, except to be crushed completely. Therefore trust, another invisible force, is the only force powerful enough to counteract this trajectory. However, Desdemona's prayers, which are directed towards Othello in devotion and towards herself in attempts to control her own actions, are not able to cultivate trust within Othello, no matter her fervency. In as much as he cannot control her desire, she cannot control his trust. Each of these forces must be freely administered by the being from whom they emanate. Any other attempt to manage these forces outside of personal autonomy renders them hollow. In addition to this, Desdemona's consistent flow of intense devotion towards Othello through prayer frames her adoration as idolatrous, elevating him to the status of a god, a god who in the end overpowers her. Thus Shakespeare presents an insightful critique of a marriage in which this free exchange of desire and trust is broken down. Prayer is a channel and symbol of Desdemona's desire, both in the form of her devotion leaning towards idolatry and in her desperate attempt to cultivate Othello's trust, neither of which protects her from the force of a mind utterly disturbed by the very idea that Desdemona has the power to freely express "a prayer of earnest heart" (1.3.151).

Conclusion

As prayer is a force that expresses the deepest yearnings of the soul and elevates the one to which one prays to heavenly heights, it is an effective poetic device for the depiction of passionate erotic desire. The concept of "rites" in the depiction of love and sexual intimacy effectively characterises the lovers' experiences as sacred, reflecting a broader project that sees sex in marriage as redeemed, just as holy and bodily expressions of prayer are a vehicle for erotic passions, shaping individual subjectivity. However, Shakespeare illustrates the dangers of employing a heightened level of devotion towards a human lover to the exclusion of God. This excess distorts the lovers' perception of reality and of the other, causing them to take matters into their own hands through drastic actions, such as in *Romeo and Juliet* when mutual idolatry generates risky schemes resulting in joint suicides or in *Othello* when Desdemona's idolisation of Othello leaves her utterly at the mercy of his violence. The excess to which they imbue their partners with divine attributes clouds their judgement, disregarding their fragile humanness and, in Shakespeare's vision, the limits of their earthly powers.

Chapter 3

War, Violence, and Prayer in *Henry V* and *Richard II*

Prayer can conduct actual and symbolic violence in a number of Shakespeare's history plays.

Appealing to the divine can mobilise the human power and resources to implement acts of violence through which political institutions are constructed and maintained. Because "religion was not considered something separable from such political institutions until the modern era" (Cavanaugh 2004:37), it was inherently bound up in the political manoeuvres in the late medieval and early modern periods. As represented in the theatre, prayer is a primary device in this mobilisation project since it appears to be a transparent link between a political power and God, legitimising the actions of that political power by creating the appearance of submission to the highest authority and thus the endorsement of violence by that authority. Political powers can exploit religious symbols, myths, and rituals in order to harness the fervour inherent in their followers' faith and then channel that fervour through prayer, disguising these political objectives as sacred quests. Alternatively, prayer can channel a symbolic violence by summoning spiritual armies to replace earthly armies, and with the prayer calling on God to endorse political authority through the spiritual realm when temporal power has been undermined. In this chapter, I concentrate on the characters of Henry V and Richard II, as they appear in their eponymous plays, since they both use prayer to induce violence. There is a compelling link between each King's principal prayers. Henry V's prayer before the Battle of Agincourt can refer back to Richard's deposition at the hands of Henry Bolingbroke, Henry V's father, and Richard's prayer serves to assert his right as king in the face of this deposition by Henry Bolingbroke. Thus there is a historical thread that runs between these two moments as each king is roused to pray due to the unseating of King Richard II, an act that undermined the traditional transfer of power via lineage.

In addition to this connection, both kings have elicited highly polarised readings that render them thought-provoking emblems of the sacred mingled with violence. Gunter Walch characterises the critical readings of *Henry V* as containing two distinct camps, the first of which views the play as a celebration of Henry's triumph over the French due to his charismatic leadership and spiritual fervour, making him "the most successful English monarch of all the histories" and "the mirror of all Christian kings" (2004:197). The Battle of Agincourt has also achieved mythic status "forming an integral part of [English] national consciousness, offering a linking of arms across centuries" (Curry 2000:8). The second camp just as fervently condemns Henry's actions, judging his war as "senseless" and deeming the play to be "the exaltation of a Machiavellian conqueror" (Walch 2004:198). Schoenbaum, in a similar manner, describes the polarised readings of *Richard II*. The "two legends" that have been maintained include one that represents him "as a saint and a martyr" and characterises "his sufferings and death" as Christ-like at the hands of traitors (2004:8). The second reading was passed down by the Lancastrians, who were responsible for deposing Richard, which portrays him as a "weak, cowardly, moody man who surrendered himself and abdicated of his own free will" (Schoenbaum 2004:8).

My reading of these kings falls in the middle ground between these polarities since I uncover the complexity of both kings, neither of who is fully saint nor fully sinner. I do, however, lean closer to the Machiavellian reading of Henry V since I critique Henry's abuse of prayer and religious ritual in his mobilisation of war, although I posit that prayer also reveals his vulnerability, emphasising the burden of his father's sin upon him, which adds complexity to his character. I also lean closer to the argument for King Richard as Christ-like in *Richard II*, although I propose that the likeness between Christ and Richard is a gradual process that culminates in his death because he must first be reduced to nothingness in order to reach a true state of holiness. In my analysis of both kings, I contend that prayer is a fundamental weapon in their cache, conducting violence through its various apparatuses, driving the corporeal call to arms or replacing it all together with heavenly warfare.

Henry V: A God of Battles and Soldiers' Hearts

In *Henry V*, the young King Henry V employs prayer rigorously in his effort to transform his attack on France into a sacred imperative, inciting his subjects to war abroad, which usefully distracts them from civil unrest at home⁸. Before his father, King Henry IV, dies, he advises his son:

Therefore, my Harry,
Be it thy course to busy giddy minds
With foreign quarrels; that action, hence borne out,
May waste the memory of the former days (*Henry IV, Part II.4.3.340–343*).

Thus Henry is advised to use battles against other kingdoms to turn his subjects' attention from his father's annexation of the crown and the ensuing internal conflict within England's borders. This piece of advice strongly suggests at least one of Henry's motives for his venture into France. But this motive needs to be opaque in order to be effective since soldiers are unlikely to be mobilised by a bid to distraction and therefore this war needs to appear ordained by God. This process begins with his passion to have this war morally justified by the Archbishop of Canterbury. The Archbishop prays for Henry, asking that "God and his angels guard your sacred throne/ And make you long become it" (1.2.6–7). He then assures Henry that he has a right to the French throne through a very convoluted appeal to Salic law, which derives Henry's claim to the throne through his great-great-grandmother, a daughter to a former King of France. With this assurance from a religious authority, Henry is "well resolved" (1.2.222) that this invasion of France "lies all within the will of God" (1.2.289). With "God's grace" (1.2.262) and "by God's help" (1.2.222), his army will bend France to their awe "or

⁸ Machiavelli argues in *The Prince*, Chapter XV, that "it is necessary for a prince wishing to hold his own to know how to do wrong, and to make use of it or not according to necessity." In this theory, the pragmatic use of war abroad to curtail potential war at home and to unite a disparate kingdom against a common enemy may be viewed as admirable and suggests that some audiences might have viewed Henry's actions in a favourable light.

break it all to pieces” (1.2.225). Attributing the war to the will of God invigorates Henry’s cause, giving him the confidence to undertake it beneath the guise of faith. It also helps to keep his conscience clear since he believes that he has the moral high ground, which enables him to lead the battle with unambiguous focus. Henry justifies impending acts of violence through God’s endorsement, convincing himself, his soldiers, and his kingdom of its validity, and the prayers of blessing that Henry and the Archbishop pray are initial transmitters of this violent impulse.

This need to frame the war as legitimate within a Christian paradigm resonates with Just War Theory. The elementary ideas around Just War were originally articulated by Aristotle who described any war waged by Hellenes against non-Hellenes in the pursuit of glory, strength, and peace as justified (Russell 1975:3). However, Aristotle endorsed motives for fighting such as enslavement and gaining resources, which run contrary to the fully fledged Just War Theory (Husby 2009:79), a term which was then coined and developed by Saint Augustine in his fifth-century book *The City of God*. Augustine described Just War as “a tragic remedy for sin in the life of political societies... [which is] to restrain evil and protect the innocent” (Cahill 1994:4); Augustine embedded this theory in the understanding that the kingdom of God is not yet fully manifested in this world and thus less than ideal endeavours need to be taken to curtail evil actions. However, Augustine also makes room for wars that are commanded by God, such as those in the Hebrew Scriptures, considering these to be truly just (Matthews 2004:333). In the thirteenth century, Thomas Aquinas went on to further develop specific criteria befitting Just War in the *Summa Theologicae*, these being “just cause, competent authority, comparative justice, right intention, last resort, probability of success, proportionality, non-combatant immunity”(Cahill 1994:3).

Henry implicitly attempts to align himself to this theory of Just War by ascertaining whether he has a just cause to invade France, which the Archbishop supplies him. He also approaches the French Dauphin with his claim to the throne, and only when his claim is rejected does he declare war (1.2.260–262), thus presenting this war as a last resort after diplomatic efforts. He considers himself,

his nobles, and his clergy as competent authority for declaring this war, and by default deems his intentions right and just. Although the Archbishop advises him to only take a quarter of his army with him and leave the rest to defend England against the Scottish, it is still “the largest army which had left England since 1359” (Curry 2000:5) and thus a potent force, fulfilling the criteria of probability of success. In terms of non-combatant immunity Henry overlooks this when he later threatens the residents of Harfleur with rape and pillaging (3.3.97–102), a sign to the audience that this war is far from just. However, as far as Henry is concerned, his war aligns with the criteria of Just War Theory and is thus legitimate.

These criteria, however, are exceptionally vague in many instances and open to gross abuse, and therefore, as Karen Armstrong points out, it is impossible “to pinpoint a single, essentialist Christian attitude to war, fighting, and violence” (Armstrong 2014: 205). William Cavanaugh argues that Just War Theory replaced the teachings of the New Testament with Greek philosophy or Roman law, creating justifications for violence that “came in handy during the crusades, the era when the behaviour and example of many Christians was furthest removed from the teachings and example of Jesus” (Cavanaugh 2004:161) who teaches that Christians should love their enemies (Matthew 5:44). Henry is presented by the Chorus as “the mirror of all Christian kings” (2.0.6) and this image needs to be upheld as a powerful symbol behind which he aligns his troops and generals, despite the murky reasoning behind his war and the ambiguous relationship between warfare and Christian values. Thus prayer is an essential tool in this respect, as it overrides any ambiguity regarding the ethics of this war, making it seem wholly just and righteous.

Once in France, Henry appeals to God frequently in battle with beneficial effect, demonstrating the powerful force of prayer as a rhetorical weapon of war. For example he rouses his men’s courage to “once more” (3.1.1) charge the fortress walls lining the French coast by concluding with the victory cry: “God for Harry! England, and Saint George!” (3.1.34). This victory cry rallies God to support their attack, which is then successful. This reference to Saint George, England’s patron saint and

himself a powerful knight would have roused not only the Catholic soldiers of Henry's army but also the largely Protestant audiences of Shakespeare's play. Carol Kaske points out that "although Protestants had officially downgraded all saints, and both Protestants and Catholics alike doubted St. Georges's historical existence, he was immensely popular in England and had been for centuries" (Kaske 2006:171). Therefore this battle cry, which uses God to undergird the ambitions of the king, the country, and the country's patron saint, would hold a mighty sway over the morale of its listeners.

In addition to battle cries, Henry also includes God's providence in diplomatic situations, demonstrating his skill as a politician, when he buttresses his decisions with divine decree. For example, when the French try to hinder Henry's advance, urging him to pay a ransom for France's loss and then withdraw, King Henry retorts, "Yet, God before, tell him we will come on" (3.6.142). In this instance the statement "God before" appears to imply that God both witnesses their attack and goes before them, forging their way. Furthermore, Henry encourages Gloucester, who hopes that the French will not advance, by saying, "We are in God's hand, brother, not in theirs" (3.6.155). Therefore, not only is God for England and going before them into battle, but He in fact holds the army in His hand, protecting and directing them steadfastly. In addition to this, Henry abrogates all responsibility on his part for this military endeavour by claiming that God directs his army's activities and not himself.

Once night has fallen in France and his soldiers sleep soundly on the eve of an impending battle, this pattern of involving God tangibly in the intricacies of this war culminates with Henry's ardent prayer. He strides through his camp greeting his troops "with a modest smile,/ And calls them brothers, friends, and countrymen" (4.0.33-34) from which each soldier "plucks comfort" (4.0.42). Then in disguise he engages with a handful of soldiers, some of whom express disgruntlement with this war, after which he, on his own, deeply reflects on the hollow nature of kingship, which he describes as a mere construct of empty "ceremony" (4.1.221-222). In this vulnerable state, he kneels on the darkened grass fringing the following day's battlefield and passionately prays:

O God of battles! Steel my soldiers' hearts.
 Possess them not with fear. Take from them now
 The sense of reck'ning ere th' opposèd numbers
 Pluck their hearts from them (4.1.271–274).

Henry addresses a vision of God that overlays the antiquarian god of war, Mars or Ares, with the Christian God, trying to amalgamate the useful elements of these different figures for his own purposes. This god of war is also referred to by Lady Percy in *Henry IV, Part II* when she dissuades her father-in-law from joining the rebels in battle where he'd have "to look upon the hideous god of war" (2.3.35). But for Henry, this God is not hideous. He is his only hope. The English army is greatly outnumbered by the French and is fatigued from journeying. The only hope that they have is a miracle for which Henry prays. He prays for courage, fortitude, and a healthy ignorance on his soldiers' part regarding the number of their enemy. Henry's attention then turns to his father's deposition of Richard II, and he pleads, "Not today, O Lord,/ Oh, not today, think not upon the fault/ My father made in compassing the crown" (4.2.274–276) as he heavily feels the burden of his father's sin in deposing King Richard II and seizing his crown, an act of treason. Henry uses his prayer to bargain with God, "perhaps attempting to distract God from the reckoning he fears will be due" (Greenblatt 2001:22). He reminds God of all the rituals and prayers that he has put into place to account for Richard's death and deposition, the five hundred poor who pray for Richard's soul each day in exchange for money, a common medieval practice (Greenblatt 2001:25), and the two chantries that he had built for Richard, which were chapels dedicated to prayers for the dead. However, he acknowledges that all this is too late as they come after the sin was committed (4.1.279–289). This desperate need to be relieved from his father's sins is not fully resolved within this prayer because the prayer is interrupted by a summons from Gloucester, dissolving on the sombre note of Henry's lack of hope concerning his penitence. Therefore the outcome of the prayer hangs in the night air, leaving uncertainty in its wake, creating ambiguity about God's genuine support of Henry's war.

This prayer does something distinct from the other prayers performed in the play since it highlights Henry's psyche more than his strategy, although it still serves to elicit violence as Henry prays for a military victory from a God specifically orientated around war. Henry prays unobserved, thus believing that he converses with God; he is not performing for his soldiers or any other audience, except the audience in the theatre. Thus this prayer supplies insight into Henry's psychological and spiritual state, revealing his desperation for supernatural support and therefore his sense of inadequacy in the face of the impending battle. Henry is genuinely concerned about his soldier's fading morale and his army's bleak prospects for victory. He finds himself lacking, in this moment, the ability to incite courage within his soldiers and himself and therefore longs for God to take up this charge. The "steel" he requests for his soldiers' hearts can also be understood to include a desire for his own heart to be fortified, disclosing his own trepidation before this perilous task. In addition to this need for God's fortification, the prayer also reveals the burden of Richard II's deposition that weighs heavily upon Henry's mind. He is greatly perplexed by the sins of his father, recognizing that his line of accession is in the wrong and that therefore he needs God's continual forgiveness, or in this case, God's temporary memory loss.

These admissions of both fear and guilt embodied in Henry's prayer present him as more vulnerable than he usually appears. His human frailty and brokenness, as well as the crime that enthroned both his father and himself, are brought to the audience's attention. Henry could never reveal these thoughts to his nobles or his soldiers and thus only God and the audience can be privy to them. The effect of this prayer can be two-fold on an audience. Firstly, depicting Henry as fearful and guilt-ridden can endear him further to the audience, as his human fragility makes him sympathetic. The fact that he feels remorse for his father's crime can increase his virtuous appearance, and his distance from the crime by a generation can also make it easier for the audience to overlook it, as he is not directly responsible for the usurpation, although feels the burden of the deed. As Tom McAlidon aptly puts it, the scene helps to "introduce the idea that he feels spiritually inadequate when he prays for divine aid before Agincourt, but to permit the audience not to think so" (2004:49). Thus in terms of my reading

of Henry's employment of prayer in aligning people's spiritual fervour behind his cause, this prayer can also be a means of manipulating the audience into supporting his cause by drawing them into his own inner turmoil and ascribing to them also the need for God to come through for him and his army. However, this prayer can also draw attention to Henry's criminality and illegitimate rule, highlighting his desperate need to win this war as a way of proving to his countrymen that God is for him. This can be alienating and incriminating, further demonstrating his self-centred and manipulative motives behind this war, motives shrouded in spirituality. Both these interpretations point to the effective way in which prayer creates and endorses acts of violence. The first possible interpretation unlocks the audience members' sympathy for Henry, cultivating their support for his violence through their shared experience of his prayer. The second interpretation distances the audience somewhat from Henry, enabling them to critique his tactics and legitimacy, and revealing how he uses prayer to convince himself of his war's legitimacy, steeling up his own heart in order to lead his men in acts of violence. In both cases prayer effectively activates violence.

Through these and other tactics of violence inducing prayer, and through the shared enemy of the French, Henry creates a sense of cohesion, constructing bonds of love and shared purpose amongst his men, men who represent the diverse cultures of Britain, which generates an "imagined community" (Anderson 1991:7) that serves his cause. When analyzing this play, Anja Muller-Wood explains how it uses violent conflict as "the glue binding an ethnically and socially heterogeneous group of men together," which "dramatises a particularly successful case of what anthropologists would describe as shared risk-taking across social boundaries" (2012:364). Henry's prayers and references to God act strategically as lynchpins in this bigger project of binding together this imagined community within the "shared risk-taking" of war. Appealing to God, in these moments, thus aids in nation building.

This building of community through conflict has an ugly face hidden behind a pious mask, and this is exposed most tellingly when Henry threateningly addresses the town of Harfleur. Once his army lands

in France, he demands that the Governor of Harfleur allow his troops to use the city as a military base without fear of resistance. Henry cold-heartedly threatens them with “fell feats/ Enlink’d to waste and desolation” (3.3.94–95) and their “pure maidens fall[ing] into the hand/ Of hot and forcing violation (3.3.97–98), claiming “What is’t to me?” (3.3.94) that these and other horrors come to pass. Henry’s casual threat to rape and pillage Harfleur’s population should they resist his entrance uncovers his underlying transgressive impulses usually shrouded beneath the prayerful and devout exterior of his carefully crafted “Christian King” (1.2.241) persona. Henry uses prayer to transform his violent deeds into sacred acts, yet in this instance he does not attempt to hide his vile intentions. His true character is laid bare, which draws attention to the devious manner in which he uses prayer to mask his underlying cruelty.

In the final moment of the play, prayer again appears as a weapon of repression, especially because the prayer comes from the very mouth of the defeated, legitimizing England’s defeat and rule over France. Queen Isabel prays for the marriage of her daughter, Princess Katherine of France, to King Henry, “the conquered female princess and the conquering king” (Howard 1994:150), likening the metaphor of marriage to the peaceful conjoining of the two kingdoms:

God, the best maker of all marriages,
 Combine your hearts in one, your realms in one!
 As man and wife, being two, are one in love,
 So be there 'twixt your kingdoms such a spousal,
 That never may ill office, or fell jealousy,
 Which troubles oft the bed of blessed marriage,
 Thrust in between the action of these kingdoms,
 To make divorce of their incorporate league;
 That English may as French, French Englishmen,
 Receive each other, God speak this, ‘Amen.’ (5.2.332–341).

Although this prayer appears to posit France and England as two forces of equal stature combined into one realm of love and “blessed marriage” (5.2.336), the position that women held in a marriage in this era was always one of subordination. The prayer endorses this subordination of women by tellingly using the terms “man and wife”, instead of the usually paired terms of man and woman or husband and wife. Katherine is thus only defined in terms of her relation to her husband and not as an autonomous being herself. Therefore the reality of this jointure is France’s submission to Henry’s England. Jean Howard and Phyllis Rackin rightly argue in *Engendering a Nation* that Katherine’s English lesson, that has her learning the English names for various body parts, turns her own body into symbolic terrain that she prepares to be occupied, translating her body from French territory into English territory, “although her occupation will be called marriage” (Howard & Rackin 1997:8). Once again, prayer masks brutal acts of violence, demonstrating its efficacy in bypassing obstacles, subtly seeping into discourse and moulding atrocities into ecstasies. The ritual of marriage and prayer conceals the bloodshed of Agincourt that has brought France to its knees. All those present conclude this prayer with their “Amen.” (5.2.341), thus affirming Henry’s right to rule France through the blessing of his marriage to Katherine. However, we learn from the chorus soon afterward that Henry’s son:

Henry the Sixth, in infant bands crowned King
 Of France and England, did this king succeed,
 Whose state so many had the managing
 That they lost France and made his England bleed (5.Chorus.9–12).

The ensuing battles between France and England and the civil unrest in England confirm the illusory nature of this peace, symbolised by this marriage, for which Isabel prays. The triumphant nature of the marriage scene is swiftly undercut by the disclosure of the devastation to follow, which serves to critique the idea that God in fact endorsed this war and this marriage. The outcome of this marriage brings destruction onto England which could indicate that God was not in fact in favour of this war,

allowing its consequences to humiliate the seeming victors. Henry's battles, destruction, and costs, cloaked in the aura of a sacred quest, achieve nothing of substance, except the original intent to "busy giddy minds/ With foreign quarrels" (4.5.213–214) and even this is short-lived. Therefore, prayers in *Henry V* are grossly abused manipulative instruments of warfare, justifying violence, rousing the spirits of the troops and then solidifying the victory of England over France. The transparent conduit that prayer appears to construct between Henry and God allows for Henry's actions to go unquestioned as they appear unequivocally endorsed by God, yet present no means to test whether God is really their originator. It is comforting for Henry's troops to believe that God fights for them and compelling for Shakespeare's audience to believe that God destined Henry's victory over France. However, the epilogue exposes the utter failure of Henry's war to bring peace and prosperity to his country, and the immeasurable blood that is spilt from future generations. Therefore the play ultimately demonstrates that the abuse of the sacred instrument of prayer in engendering violent quests may appear to supply temporary victory, but that victory can always devolve into chaos as its very premise is corrupt. This is an indictment of Henry's use of prayer as a conveyor of violence as he employs them for strictly self-serving purposes, ignoring his service to God and those whom he leads, shattering the fragile illusion that this war was ever endorsed by God. Thus the impression of gain, as manifested in Henry's annexation of France through his marriage and military victory, is in fact a profound loss.

Richard II: A God of holy lives and a new world's crown

In contrast to Henry V's pragmatic and manipulative use of prayer to effectively and unethically incite acts of violence, Richard II engages prayer, along with religious myth and ritual, to rather fight metaphysical battles regarding his identity as king, which is under threat of dissolution, a dissolution the play charts. Thus prayer activates symbolic violence, signifying a search for transcendent resistance to earthly threat. During his deposition scene, he performs a prayer that dramatises his solitary state and presents an endorsement from God for his kingly identity, thereby drawing on heavenly resources to fight battles on his behalf. Although "he is probably the monarch with the best blood claim to the throne in any of the Shakespearean plays" (Howard 1994:141), he is called into his

throne room before his nobles and courtiers, under indictments of wastefulness and mismanagement of the state, with the understanding that he will willingly surrender his crown to Henry Bolingbroke (later Henry IV, Henry V's father). Richard makes full use of this spectacle to articulate his grievances, to voice his betrayal, and to lengthen the process with signs of faltering, accusations of guilt, and the symbolic smashing of a looking glass, which represents his shattered identity. All this he does with a poignant restraint that redeems some of his previous decadence and folly, at least poetically. When Richard first enters the room he expresses his lack of experience in "submission" (4.1.158) and then activates a prayerful oath in the convention of call and response:

God save the King! Will no man say 'Amen'?

Am I both priest and clerk? Well then, Amen.

God save the King! although I be not he.

And yet, Amen, if heaven do think him me (4.1.163–166).

This evocation of prayer is highly theatrical since it has multiple voices and also invites audience participation. The first line divides into two and would need to be performed with a slight pause after the word "King", so that a lingering silence shapes the spectators, on and offstage, into mutes who will not or dare not openly support Richard as king. This enlists the audience into the same silence as the courtiers, a silence built around the deposition, thus creating audience complicity in the king's fall. With the audience complicit, Richard is even more alone, and thus in greater need of heavenly assistance. He then asks into this silence if no man will say amen and confirm God's protection of their king. He expects no answer and therefore assumes the role of clerk, saying "Amen" himself, confirming God's protection for himself, and suggesting that despite his outward willingness to give up the throne, he continues to identify himself as king. Again he utters "God save the King!", and it is ambiguous to whom he refers, himself or Bolingbroke, creating unease in the court and audience. He again says amen, arguing that it will be spoken if God still acknowledges his kingship, therefore suggesting that his identity as king persists under heaven's decree. Five characters are here

represented – the priest, the clerk, the king, God, and the courtiers/audience who look on. Richard plays the priest, the clerk and himself and then leaves the courtiers and God silent, allowing the ambiguity of their potential responses to hang in the air.

David Tennant's performance of this prayer in the 2013 Gregory Doran production for the Royal Shakespeare Company effectively harnesses the potential of these lines to communicate Richard's claim to the crown, using humour, satire, and pathos fully. Tennant performs lines directly to the audience, with his back to Bolingbroke, who sits squarely on the throne, surrounded by courtiers and nobles. Tennant stands centre stage, and holds his chin up very regally with his arms relaxed at his side in a pose that very confidently owns the space and his title as king. He says the very first "God save the King" with great force and fervour, after which there are tense micro movements and swift glances exchanged between Bolingbroke and the courtiers. Tennant then pauses, waiting for a response he knows he won't receive, and then wryly, in a much quieter voice, asks whether no man will say amen, opening his eyes widely and tilting his head from side to side as if mischievously querying the substance of his onlookers. In a similar tone, he asks rhetorically whether he is both priest and clerk, and then proves that he is by swiftly completing his own oath with an almost inaudible "Amen", after which there is a ripple of laughter from the audience. He then pauses, continuing to gravely gaze out at the audience. Then suddenly he launches into "God save the King" even louder and more forcefully than the first instance, opening his mouth widely. There are fewer reactions from Bolingbroke and the courtiers, a clear sign that they are beginning to consider Richard's utterances innocuous. He then instantly shifts into a satirical grimace, in which he denies his identity as king, clasping his hands against his chest and gazing around at his uncle, the Duke of York, with a maniacal smile. He once more pauses and drops his arms to his side, regaining his serious tone but maintaining eye contact with his uncle. Quietly, and with great conviction, he then says "and yet Amen, if heaven do think him me" with a contemptuous smile on his face, and a finger pointing to heaven when he names it, thus asserting God's endorsement of his rule. He then returns to

his original pose with his arms at his side and his face grave, after which follows a palpable silence from both the audience and the courtiers attesting to the power of his utterances, but also his isolation.

This prayer effectively stages Richard's political solitude since he assumes the role of three of its actors, heightening his lack of support through the empty spaces he must occupy. The silent role in which he casts his onlookers can also add to the effect of his dramatized political solitude, and the unuttered "Amen" resound like loud rejections, which can create discomfort and pity within viewers. Laughter can also fill these silences, such as in the Tennant performance, which can draw attention to the ridiculousness of Richard's deposition as well as to the satirical games that Richard plays as his means of grappling with his diminishing identity. Lastly the "if" (4.1.166) that he ascribes to heaven, in terms of God's ratification of his kingship, manifests the possibility that God continues to support his right to rule, and that if He does, the "amen" that Richard confers upon himself stands for the truth, despite the earthly dismantling of his kingship. Thus this prayer clearly performs his solitary status with regard to his subjects, but it also aligns him with God, who Richard claims supports his position as king when he says "amen". Positioning God in support of Richard, who stands alone, also positions God against those looking on silently, including the audience, and thus this prayer is a powerful act of resistance, activating symbolic violence against those who depose Richard, even as Richard appears submissive.

Richard reactivates this coronation oath further on in the scene in order to advance his claim to the crown once he has, in an exquisitely poignant speech, given up his crown and the other trappings of kingship, asking "God to pardon all oaths that are broke to" [him] and to "keep all vows unbroken that swear to [Henry Bolingbroke]" (4.1.204–205). Four lines later he concludes this speech by delivering his own oath to the newly crowned King Henry IV crying, "God save King Henry, unking'd Richard says,/ And send him many years of sunshine days!" (4.1.210–211). The tone of this prayer is ambiguous and could be played in a number of ways. In light of the poignancy of his speech, which

this oath concludes, it could be a genuine attempt at sincerity in which he tries to forgive Bolingbroke for the oaths he has broken and prays for God to keep the new vows sworn to Bolingbroke “unbroken”, investing in the good of the country from a place of selflessness and graciousness. Alternatively his prayer could be played with utter insincerity that masquerades as intentionally transparent sincerity. This technique would be used to focus specifically on his own “unking’d” (4.1.220) status by creating false and grossly exaggerated goodwill towards Bolingbroke through his saccharine wish that Bolingbroke reign for “many years of sunshine days” (4.1.211). In this interpretation, Richard subverts the real meaning of the oath, an expression of loyalty and love to the king, by using deliberate sarcasm that demonstrates anything but goodwill. This second prayer can articulate Richard’s disdain for Bolingbroke’s accession, which he thinly disguises through his exaggerated sarcastic hopes for Bolingbroke’s future as king so that it takes the appearance of goodwill towards the realm. Thus Richard makes use of prayers both in sincere ways, as in his first activation of this oath, and potentially insincere ways, as in this second activation of this oath, demonstrating his linguistic dexterity in his fervent attempt to assert his identity as king and resist, symbolically, his circumstances. In both cases he reworks a pervasive speech act for his own purposes, channelling his specific criticisms and confrontations through words that are familiar to his listeners, words they would have originally used to endorse his position as king, and thus words that they have rendered hollow and open to re-appropriation. The articulation of this resistance is important to him because he actually believes that all those present are “a sort of traitors” (4.1.236), including himself (4.1.238), for dismantling a God-ordained institution, and these prayers provide him with a powerful mouth piece to voice this belief.

The trajectory leading to Richard’s deposition is partly activated by an exchange of prayer between Richard’s future adversary, Bolingbroke, and his father, an exchange that vividly depicts the ability of prayer to enforce violence, contrasting with Richard’s displays of symbolic resistance. Early in the play, Henry Bolingbroke and his father, Sir John of Gaunt, use prayer to intertwine religion and acts of violence, echoing what Henry V does in that history play. Bolingbroke asks his father to pray for

his victory over Mowbray, a victory in a fight to the death. In other words, he asks his father to pray for him to kill a man. His request for the prayer and Gaunt's prayer that follows are laced in figurative language that mystifies the brutal act of killing, ennobling, and sanctifying it. He employs prayers as symbols for both defence and attack when he asks Gaunt, his father, for his blessing before entering the lists to fight Mowbray. Each challenger has accused the other of treachery against Richard and now joust to find some resolution in this regard. Bolingbroke addresses his father:

Oh thou, the earthly author of my blood—
 Whose youthful spirit, in me regenerate
 Doth with a twofold vigour lift me up
 To reach at victory above my head,
 Add proof unto mine armour with thy prayers;
 And with thy blessings steel my lance's point,
 That it may enter Mowbray's waxen coat,
 And furbish new the name of John of Gaunt,
 Even in the lusty haviour of his son (1.3.69–77).

Bolingbroke articulates what he requires from his father's prayers. The prayers of Gaunt must "add proof unto [Bolingbroke's] armour" (1.3.73), thus fortifying his armour and defending him from death. His blessings, which are also prayers, must "steel [his] lance's point" (1.3.74) and enable him to successfully attack Mowbray, rendering Mowbray's armour as soft as a "waxen coat" (1.3.75). Through this ability to successfully defend and attack, Bolingbroke longs to embody his aged father through his "lusty haviour" (1.3.77). Thus Gaunt not only invigorates his son through prayer but also symbolically reinvigorates himself through his prayers, using violent acts as a means to express this reinvigoration. Underpinning this is the logic that the son fortifies the father through representing him, just as he does in the line of inheritance. He responds to his son's request with a hearty prayer, echoing his son's symbolism:

God in thy good cause make thee prosperous!
 Be swift like lightning in the execution,
 And let thy blows, doubly redoublèd,
 Fall like amazing thunder on the casque
 Of thy adverse pernicious enemy.
 Rouse up thy youthful blood, be valiant and live (1.3.78–83).

Gaunt prays for God to make Bolingbroke's sword "swift like lightning" (1.3.79) and "fall like amazing thunder" (1.3.81). He calls on God to marshal the cosmic powers of the universe to assist his son with the force of a storm, thus demonstrating God's prescribed role in this trial between the two noblemen, as these trials by combat were traditionally believed to be specifically religious, with God meting out the outcome. Gaunt also emphasises the defensive quality of his prayer through his final words, "be valiant and live" (1.3.83), succinctly constructing a protective veneer around his son's life. Gaunt's prayer endorses Bolingbroke's supposedly sacred quest of killing Mowbray by soliciting God's protection over him and comparing him to the force of a cosmic storm in this battle, which offers a wink at his future military prospects in the usurpation of the throne. This intermingling of prayer and physical warfare is comparable to the way in which Henry V, Bolingbroke's son, uses prayer to endorse and motivate his battles. Thus the entrenchment of this pattern is emphasised through its employment by three generations of this family and this contrasts starkly with Richard's reliance on heavenly warfare.

This framing of Bolingbroke as a man empowered and endorsed by God, which begins with the prayer of his father, continues to thread throughout the play with oblique references to God's regard for Bolingbroke's welfare and kingship as expressed by his subjects and himself, although in ascending the throne he transgresses the order believed to be established by God, which contradicts these appeals. This framing begins when Richard speaks begrudgingly of Bolingbroke's popularity with the common man, many of whom "bid God speed him well" (1.4.31) as he leaves the shores of England, demonstrating their hope that God would sustain Bolingbroke. In addition to this, when

Bolingbroke begins the process of becoming king he states, “In God’s name, I’ll ascend the regal throne” (*Richard II*, 4.1.104) thus framing his claim to the throne under divine ordinance. This claim in turn reflects the historical record of Bolingbroke’s accession speech in which he boldly asserts that “God of his grace [h]ath send me” (as quoted in Strohm 1992: 84). Of course, this is a hollow pretext since Bolingbroke gains the throne by whipping up popular sentiment and taking advantage of Richard’s political weaknesses. Yet his apparent piety in aligning himself with God’s name constructs a transparent conduit between heavenly authority and himself that largely convinces his subjects that God ratifies this accession. This ratification appears to convince even his uncle, the Duke of York, an erstwhile supporter of Richard, who explains to his wife that:

heaven hath a hand in these events,
 To whose high will we bound our calm contents.
 To Bolingbroke are we sworn subjects now,
 Whose state and honour I for aye allow (5.2.37–40).

Bolingbroke’s usurpation continues to be imbued with divine validity when the Duke of York describes Bolingbroke’s coronation, stating that his subjects thronged to see him ride through the city with “slow but stately pace” (5.2.10) and cried “God save thee, Bolingbroke!” (5.2.11) and “Jesu preserve thee! Welcome, Bolingbroke!” (5.2.17). These utterances reinforce the idea that Bolingbroke’s claim to the throne is sanctioned by God. It also mimics a conventional regal practice of processing into the city, a regal process that in turn imitates Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem. This representation of the entry into Jerusalem was a popular narrative in late medieval and early modern drama. For example, in the York Corpus Christi Play 25 *The Entry into Jerusalem*, Christ’s disciples arrange a donkey at his request. Christ then mounts the donkey and is led into Jerusalem, performing a condensed version of his iconic miraculous healings, which are then followed by the poetic cries of adoration from eight citizens who look on and proclaim, amongst a wide spectrum of worshipful utterances:

Hayll, prophette, preved without enpere,
 Hayll, prince of pees schall evere endure,
 Hayll, kyng comely, curteyse and clere,
 Hayll, soverayne semely, to synfull sure (489–492).

This medieval drama effectively combines religious discourse with ideas of sovereignty, using the declarations of worship to affirm Christ's identity as King. In *Richard II* this intertwining of religion and sovereignty is crucial in establishing the kingship of both Richard and Bolingbroke, but in quite different ways, with Bolingbroke receiving affirmation of his kingship from the prayers and blessings of the people, whilst Richard confers his own sovereignty onto himself through prayer.

Although Sir John of Gaunt prays for his son's victory over Mowbray, he would never support his son's challenge to the king. Bolingbroke "grows strong and great in substance and in friends" (3.2.31) and his rage swells like "an unseasonable stormy day" (3.2.102), fulfilling the vision of the storm that his father, Gaunt, had prayed would imbue his son. But using military power to threaten King Richard would not be endorsed by Gaunt who "may never lift/ An angry arm against [God's] minister" (1.2.40–41). This belief that Richard is God's minister resonates with the belief that the king had two bodies – the Body Natural and the Body Politic. The former was frail as any man's: it felt sickness and death. The latter was a celestial being and could not die, but was rather transferred after the demise of one king's body natural to the next king's body natural. This "body politic of kingship appears as a likeness of the 'holy sprites and angels', because it represents, like the angels, the Immutable within Time. It has been raised to angelic heights" (Kantorowicz 1957:9) and therefore to challenge Richard's kingship were to challenge this body politic, attempting to dismantle the celestial being that God has ratified; in turn this would disrupt the entire social, political and spiritual order, threatening reality itself. Bolingbroke does just this by covering Richard's "fearful land /with hard bright steel and hearts harder than steel" (3.2.106-107) and leading "both young and old [to] rebel"

(3.2.115). The storm conjured up in Sir John of Gaunt's prayer is made manifest through Bolingbroke's transgression of the laws of God and nature, resulting in cosmic repercussions for England through the storm of civil war to come.

Gaunt's unwillingness to exact revenge on King Richard and his reluctance to explicitly condemn him demonstrates Gaunt's deep and abiding belief that Richard is anointed by God to be king and that none but God can stand in judgement over him. This nuanced position is demonstrated early in the play when Sir John of Gaunt converses privately in his home with his sister-in-law. Richard is allegedly responsible for authorising the killing of her husband, the Duke of Gloucester, Sir John of Gaunt's brother. However, Gaunt does not want to initiate any physical violence against Richard or his accomplices. He explains to his brother's wife that because the very person responsible for the crime, the king, is the one who should be correcting it, they should rather "put[their] quarrel to the will of heaven" (1.2.6) and that heaven, when the hour is ripe, "will rain hot vengeance on offenders' heads" (1.2.4–8). He reasserts this position later in the discussion by declaring that:

God's is the quarrel; for God's substitute,
 His deputy anointed in his sight,
 Hath caused his death, the which if wrongfully,
 Let heaven revenge, for I may never lift
 An angry arm against his minister (1.2.37–41).

Gaunt labels King Richard "God's substitute" (1.2.37) and bars himself from lifting "an angry arm against [God's] minister" (1.2.40–41). He also allows for ambiguity regarding the ethics of King Richard's responsibility for Gloucester's death by stating that "if" the deed is committed "wrongfully,/ Let heaven revenge" (1.2.39–40). Therefore Gaunt guards against openly accusing Richard of the crime, allowing for the possibility, if only hypothetically, that Richard was either

lawful in the killing of Gloucester or uninvolved with Gloucester's death. Bolingbroke's actions grossly transgress the beliefs that even his father holds dear and sets himself against "God's substitute" seeking to take God's part in "the quarrel", which is not only an act of political defiance but of sacrilege. Therefore Bolingbroke, who claims that God supports his usurpation, in effect sets himself up as a challenger to God, which justifies Richard's assertion that God fights for his cause.

In contrast to Bolingbroke's vast military base, Richard must conjure spiritual militia to compensate for his dwindling political support, thus using spiritual resources to conduct symbolic forms of violence and resistance. He asserts that God safeguards his position as king and that God's angels will be fighting for him, hence marshalling divine armies to his cause. He explains to his cousin Aumerle, when Aumerle shows concern about Bolingbroke's rapid growth "in substance and in power" (3.2.35), that:

The breath of worldly men cannot depose
The deputy elected by the Lord.
For every man that Bolingbroke hath press'd
To lift shrewd steel against our golden crown,
God for his Richard hath in heavenly pay
A glorious angel. Then, if angels fight,
Weak men must fall; for heaven still guards the right (3.2.52–58).

Richard uses his appeal to God's mercenaries to strengthen his position as king. He asserts that he has been "elected by the Lord" (3.2.53) to be king and that therefore no earthly power can undermine his status. By stating that God sustains this army for "his Richard" (3.2.56), he positions himself as belonging to God and emphasises God's nurturing tendencies towards him. He also bolsters his vulnerable position by pairing each of Bolingbroke's earthly soldiers with a "glorious angel" (3.2.57)

in God's army, thus countering each attack that Bolingbroke can bring with his own heavenly defence force. He calls Bolingbroke's army "worldly men" (3.2.52) and "weak men" (3.2.58), which highlights their mortality and feebleness, in contrast to the heavenly angels who "guard[s] the right" (3.2.58), placing himself confidently in "the right". He also accuses his subjects of "break[ing] their faith to God as well as us" (3.2.97), suggesting that God too has been betrayed by their revolt, thus strengthening God's motive to fight for him. Through Richard's assertion of God's assured military victory on his behalf, he mobilises spiritual resources to inflict violence upon his enemy, despite his lack of a physical army. Although these heavenly armies do not appear in time to rescue Richard and his clutch of followers, who huddle together in Flint Castle at the mercy of Bolingbroke's troops, the image of an unseen army supporting Richard lends his surrender an aura of foreboding, of potential cosmic repercussions. He appears to be deserted but is robustly bolstered by this vision of angelic militia.

In addition to summoning a heavenly army to intervene for him, Richard also turns to prophecy to establish the threat of future violence, another religious weapon in his cache. Theatrically prophecies are similar to prayers in that they create the appearance of a transparent conduit between the one prophesying and God. They differ from prayer in that they invert the process of communication. In other words, a prayer depicts a character's outpouring to God and a prophecy depicts God's outpouring to a character. A prophecy claims to represent the very voice and promises of God. Paul Strohm points out in *Politique* that prophecy "was the preferred medium of settled power" (Strohm 2005:175) as opposed to astrology, which was favoured by potential powers. Prophecy had a more stable nature and could be used to entrench pervasive visions of the future, supporting the status quo. Astrology, on the other hand, hinged on moving celestial bodies and was therefore marked by malleability which, as Strohm argues, was useful when wanting to reimagine the political landscape. Thus Richard's use of prophecy further entrenches his role as king, reinforcing the status quo by envisaging chaos should the status quo be unsettled. The power of declaring these irrefutable promises of God is demonstrated when Bolingbroke, and the nobles who attend him, reach Flint Castle to

confer with Richard for the first time since Bolingbroke's return from banishment in France. Richard proclaims to Northumberland, who has been sent to summon him into Bolingbroke's presence, that even though he appears "barren and bereft of friends" (3.3.83), they must know that his master:

God omnipotent,
 Is mustering in his clouds on our behalf
 Armies of pestilence, and they shall strike
 Your children yet unborn and unbegot,
 That lift your vassal hands against my head
 And threat the glory of my precious crown (3.3.84–89).

Richard prophetically invokes God's omnipotence, asserting the all-powerful nature of God that will overcome the descendants of Bolingbroke's followers. Through this threat to his enemies' descendants, Richard emphasizes chronological time defined by biological progeny, the time of inheritance, which Bolingbroke refuses. Focussing on descendants also projects Richard's military victory into the future indefinitely, emphasising the unquantifiable ramifications of this act, and the curse that the next generation will inherit, a curse which manifests historically. To achieve this, Richard refers to God's gathering together of His "armies of pestilence" (3.3.86) on his behalf and how this army will injure "children yet unborn" (3.3.87) thus activating the power of heavenly armies and prophecy against those who threaten his "precious crown" (3.3.89) and their heirs. Henry V, as one of these heirs, certainly bears the burden of his father's usurpation as articulated through his prayer, thus fulfilling this prophecy, in part. As Richard has very few current supporters, he cannot simply pray that God will strengthen them in battle. He must instead construct metaphysical armies that will fight for him at some future date, thus throwing open the battlefield to heavenly and forthcoming forces who are fighting on a yet unseen imminent plane. Although replacing his present state of earthly military weakness with a vision of heavenly military strength does not impress Northumberland, who returns to Bolingbroke with the news that Richard will meet him, but that

“Sorrow and grief of heart/ Makes him speak fondly, like a frantic man” (3.3.182–183), it nevertheless serves as a compelling counter narrative, situating Richard’s deliverance in a power out of this world.

Adding to Richard’s construction of an alternative vision of victory, The Bishop of Carlisle also employs prophecy as spiritual weaponry when he passionately attempts to dissuade Bolingbroke and his supporters from deposing Richard, drawing attention to Richard’s “image of God established royalty” (Kantorowicz 1957:34). Once all have arrived at Westminster Hall, the Bishop refers to Richard as “the figure of God's majesty” (4.1.116) and despairs “that in a Christian climate souls refined,/ Should show so heinous, black, obscene a deed” (4.1.121–122). He names Bolingbroke “a foul traitor” (4.1.126) and prophesies that if Bolingbroke is crowned, “the blood of English shall manure the ground,/ And future ages groan for this foul act” (4.1.128–129) and that:

Disorder, horror, fear and mutiny
 Shall here inhabit, and this land is call'd
 The field of Golgotha and dead men's skulls (4.1.133–136).

He predicts chaos and civil unrest for England’s future generations and predicts that the name of the land will be the “field of Golgotha” (4.1.135) which refers to the hill where Christ was crucified. The Bishop extends this meaning into the plural “dead men’s skulls” (4.1.13) and therefore intimates that many shall be crucified there because of the metaphoric “crucifixion” of Richard. By drawing attention to this high profile execution, he vividly alerts them to the danger they face in simulating it. By imagining Richard as Christ, the bishop warns them that they are not just deposing anyone, but the chosen one of God, and that the violent repercussions will be innumerable. Not only is this image a potent metaphor but it points to the genuine understanding of the king as the “shadow” or “imitator of Christ” (Kantorowicz 1957:47) who by God’s grace has been transformed into “a Christus, that is, a God-man” (Kantorowicz 1957:46). The bishop fights his battle for this “God-man” using the violent

and chaotic outcomes that he predicts, which indeed materialise as England is riddled with civil war in the fifteenth century. This moment is thick with dramatic irony, as the characters looking on are dismissive of this warning, and the audience would generally be aware that these prophecies do in fact come true, reinforcing the idea that although Richard appears abandoned, his cause will not go without vindication.

Complementing the bishop's predictions of Richard's land becoming the "field of Golgotha" (4.1.135), Richard also marshals the crucifixion trope in order to imbue his seemingly passive resignation with spiritual vigour and significance, aiding his attack upon his onlookers whom he pierces with insinuations of evil betrayal. Derrick Higginbotham, in his article "Construction of a King", makes this very point with particular focus on how Richard empowers himself in the face of his profound loss of identity. He argues that "by linking himself with this religious icon of a suffering man, Richard participates in re-signifying the submission that he enacts, lending his forbearance a distinctive form of dignity" (Higginbotham 2014:9). This re-signification process in the pursuit of dignity continues as Richard compares the betrayal of his subjects to the betrayal of Christ by Judas, describing how both Judas and his own fickle subjects honoured their master publicly but later broke that trust (4.1.159–163). Richard also compares and contrasts his experience with Christ's by emphasising how Christ "in twelve,/Found truth in all but one: I, in twelve thousand, none" (4.1.161–162) and thus frames himself somewhat audaciously as worse off than Christ in the area of betrayal as Christ at least had some faithful followers, whereas he appears to have nobody. He uses this bold comparison to pierce the hearts of his erstwhile loyal subjects, who are characterised as being more fickle than Christ's disciples. Richard continues this insinuation of guilt when he compares those "that stand and look upon" (4.1.227) his deposition to Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor who handed Christ over to be crucified, although he found Christ innocent. Richard admonishes those that look with pity on his suffering and try to extricate themselves from the great guilt of the act, saying:

Though some of you, with Pilate, wash your hands,
 Showing an outward pity, yet you Pilates
 Have here delivered me to my sour cross,
 And water cannot wash away your sin (4.1.129–132).

By comparing himself with the honoured figure of Christ and his onlookers to the dishonoured figures of Judas and Pilate, Richard elevates himself above his betrayers in order to assert his God-given position as king, although appearing vulnerable and pathetic. Richard harnesses the negative associations of Pilate to smear his usurpers and exact revenge on them through their guilty consciences, thus attempting to further his infliction on them. He compares his fate to being crucified on a “sour cross” (4.1.231) and insists that those who stand by like Pilate and allow it to happen will not be able to escape the guilt that they bring upon themselves. At the end of the play, Bolingbroke, filled with remorse for Richard’s death, desires to visit Jerusalem, declaring, “I’ll make a voyage to the Holy Land,/ To wash this blood off from my guilty hand” (5.6.49–50). Bolingbroke’s crusade to Jerusalem to wash Richard’s blood from off his hands technically would have erased sins under papal decree. This desire to wash away sins echoes the comparison that Richard makes between his usurpers and Pilate, who attempts to wash away the guilt of allowing the downfall of an innocent man. As Pilate’s attempt to wash his crime from his hands is understood to be futile, so Bolingbroke’s action is framed as such. Richard pre-empts this desire to wash away guilt by stating that even “water cannot wash away [their] sin” (4.1.231) thus projecting the spiritual torture of Bolingbroke’s guilt into the future. Richard effectively fights a spiritual battle with his deponents through the evocation of their guilt and torment, aligning them with two ignoble religious figures who found no relief for their sins: Judas and Pilate.

Richard continues to resist through religious imagery as he moves closer and closer to his final moments, his vision of personal redemption shifting into the realm of the next life and his spiritual

battle ceasing to centre on the throne and becoming rather a fight for meaning. In his last encounter with his queen, who is being separated from him and sent back to France, he states:

Hie thee to France,
 And cloister thee in some religious house.
 Our holy lives must win a new world's crown,
 Which our profane hours here have stricken down (5.1.22–25).

He urges his wife to join a religious order and envisions their joint “holy lives” (5.1.24), which will compensate for the loss of his crown and atone for their “profane hours” (5.1.25) that have assisted in this loss. Through spiritual devotion, Richard imagines them winning “a new world’s crown” (5.1.24) which alludes to a rich biblical motif that has God rewarding his faithful with “the crown of righteousness” (GNV 2 Timothy 4:8), “an incorruptible crown of glory” (GNV 1 Peter 5:4) and “the crown of life” (GNV Rev. 2:10) amongst others. This allusion to a crown in the next life also resonates with material in medieval theatre. For example in the York Corpus Christi Play 39, *The Appearance of Christ to Mary Magdalen*, Christ explains how his crown of thorns reveals his “dignité” (106) transforming into his “diademe” that communicates that “dede schall [he] nevere be (108–109). Therefore Christ’s crown is associated closely with his defeat over death, which reflects Richard’s vision of a new world where he might also begin life anew. Another example of a crown being administered after death is in Play 46, *The Coronation of the Virgin*, which depicts Mary’s being crowned queen of heaven with Christ declaring, “Ressayve this croune, my dere darlyng,/ Ther I am kyng, thou schalte be queen” (155–156). This ties in closely to Richard’s assurance to his wife that they shall both be newly crowned together, reigniting their regal identities in heaven and reuniting them as man and wife, despite their separation. Resurrecting such imagery, which explicitly links Richard and his wife to Christ and Mary, also resonates powerfully with Catholic iconography and theatre, which emphasises Richard’s passion and association with the old religion, anchoring him to the past. Thus Richard replaces his earthly crown with a heavenly crown and replaces his earthly

kingdom with a new celestial world. He compensates for the loss of his kingdom through the appropriation of a heavenly realm and transforms his lost temporal crown into a gained spiritual crown, just as the crown of thorns becomes a gleaming diadem. He fights for meaning through this metaphysical vision of the future, seeking to transcend his desolate circumstances and profound loss of identity.

Once in his prison cell, Richard continues to fight for meaning as he reflects on how his self-concept dramatically oscillates between beggar and king, two contrasting spiritual figures. His identity cannot settle on either, yet in death these distinctions will no longer have significance, a concept that resonates with the late medieval *memento mori* trope which reminds all people of their imminent deaths. These deaths reduce both beggars and kings, and all that lie between, to an equal state. Thus he comes to the conclusion that until he or any man “be eased with being nothing” (5.5.40–41) then they “with nothing shall be pleased” (5.5.40), arguing that only once selfhood is completely abandoned can one find true contentment. In *Portraits, Painters, and Publics in Provincial England 1540–1640*, Robert Tittler points out that the *memento mori* trope, which was signified in paintings through skulls, wilting flowers and hour glasses, was a pervasive concept that carried over from the Catholic tradition into the Protestant tradition with examples of its use found in both Catholic and Protestant portraiture (Tittler 2012 :135) and thus a notion with which both Richard as a Catholic character and Shakespeare’s Protestant audiences would be familiar. Richard must embrace his nothingness in order to discover the true something that lies at the deepest part of him and then reveal that something to God. Joseph Candido expresses this in his essay, “King Richard’s ‘I’” in which he argues that Richard shifts from referring to himself predominantly as “we” while he is king and that once his kingship is stripped he begins referring to himself only as “I”. This “I” is ultimately grounded in Richard’s new:

sense of self founded not on elevation and magnification but on lowness and diminishment—an “I” whose deepest affirmation is effacement rather than exhibition, an “I” where nothing, emptiness,

absence, is paradoxically *something*, where becoming invisible to man is the surest way of becoming visible to God (Candido 2001:472).

Richard experiences this paradox once everything has been stripped from him: his crown, his possessions, his subjects, and his title. He must learn to be at ease with being materially nothing if he is to find his true identity, and it is this ease with nothing that enables him to fight his final battle. In this scene, Sir Pierce of Exton arrives in Richard's cell with a small band of armed men whose mission it is to kill Richard. Richard, in his last moment, vividly embraces the will to live, as he has found ease with being nothing, and thus kills two of these guards in self-defence, demonstrating the discovery of a self worth defending, a self very different from that created by his kingship, before he is mortally wounded by Sir Pierce of Exton. As he dies, Richard cries, "Mount, mount, my soul! Thy seat is up on high,/ Whilst my gross flesh sinks downward, here to die" (5.5.111–112). He vividly splits his fleshly self and his spiritual self in his final defence against destruction. Although he has not been victorious in the temporal realm, the play imagines that he will find renewal and reward in the spiritual realm. Through envisaging his soul mounting "up on high" (5.5.111) Richard undermines Exton's attempts to bring him low. It is only his flesh that succumbs to Exton's weapon, but he believes his soul to be unassailable, and he imagines it ascending into heaven to receive his new world's crown. His battle for meaning is successful as in his last moments he embraces the paradox of being at ease with being nothing, for even as he dies and dwindles to nothingness, he recognises the true lodging of his soul and surrenders to its elevation. His embracing of nothingness enables him to see that it is in heaven's new world that he will receive his true glory, and that relinquishing earthly power can be instrumental in achieving this. Therefore Richard's apparent loss is in fact a gain, and his tragedy a triumph.

Conclusion

It is appropriate that Richard's name appears in Henry V's prayer and that he is discussed in reference to houses of prayer filled with the hundreds who pray for him because it is through prayer and spirituality that Richard fights his battle against his enemies, representing the opposite end of the

spectrum when comparing him to both King Henry IV and King Henry V. The prayer Richard utters during his deposition communicates his bid to re-claim the throne. The confidence he places in the heavenly militia to intercede for him and in his God-ordained kingship assists in maintaining his morale, despite his weakened military position. Although Richard's prayer does not appear to work, since God does not swoop down and obliterate his opponents immediately, the prayer suggests future destruction, and moreover is effective in transforming Richard himself, which is the true purpose of prayer. As Søren Kierkegaard argues: "prayer does not change God, but it changes the one who offers it" (Kierkegaard 1847) thus the prayers transform Richard from a state of self-centredness to a state of self-awareness. Richard leans in to the strength of God and in so doing opens himself up to internal change, enabling his perspective to shift from temporary earthly comfort, ego, and status, to a vision of earthly humility and heavenly renewal. As his identity is further stripped, he clings onto notions of Christhood, comparing his usurpers to Judas and Pontius Pilate, and his misfortune to a "sour cross". This lends a dignity to his vulnerable state and further indictment towards those who undo him.

Once deposed, Richard's battle becomes a battle for meaning, meaning that he finds in the profound paradox of being at ease with nothingness. This acceptance of his degraded condition gives rise to his physical fight for his life, a symbol of his discovery of a self worth defending. Ironically it is this moment of physical fervour through which Richard reaches the height of his spiritual quest for meaning. He recognises that his body is and always will be earthbound, whether he is a king or a beggar or both. He pushes his soul towards a throne on high, recognising the sacred value of his metaphysical self, which exists outside of material status. It is this recognition that marks the triumph of his spiritual battle for meaning, which transcends the loss of the temporal battle for his throne. This outcome stands in stark contrast to Henry V's triumph over France in *Henry V* because this success is undermined by his abuse of prayer in the creation of violence, engendering a cruel war of colonisation. I propose that Richard II, despite the loss of his throne and his utter debasement, is in fact triumphant precisely because he wins his battle for meaning through prayer, which elevates his soul.

Chapter 4:

Prayer, Conscience, and Visions of Citizenship in *Henry VIII*

Henry VIII or *All Is True* is Shakespeare's last history play, probably co-written with fellow playwright John Fletcher in 1612–1613. The play dramatizes a key turning point in English history: King Henry VIII divorces his Catholic wife, Katharine of Aragon, and marries the Lutheran, Anne Boleyn. Because the Pope refuses to grant Henry permission for an annulment of his marriage with Katharine, this separation engenders England's cataclysmic split from the Roman Catholic Church and the launch of the Church of England⁹. The play concludes with Queen Elizabeth I's birth, and Cranmer characterizing Elizabeth as a phoenix out of whose ashes the current King James I will rise to rule the country (5.4.40–48). As Woodcock observes, "For many critics this final scene is what everything else has built up towards, the vision for an ideal that justifies how it is achieved" (2011:11). For example, Wilson Knight argues that:

All our long plot of intrigue and suffering, of religious resignation and jovial mirth, the fall of Wolsey and advance of Cranmer, Katharine's righteousness and Anne's sweetness, the grand persons and raucous life-teeming crowds, all are subdued, offer homage to this vision of Elizabethan England (Wilson Knight 1957: 331).

⁹ Although the play depicts the beginnings of the Church of England, it is very much invested in Catholic ritual and pageantry as Jay Zysk notes. He argues that by "using Catholic iconography to stage Protestant history, the play shows how theatre affirms rather than rejects traditional images, iconographies and rituals" (2014:242). This point is significant for the depiction of prayer, as most prayers performed or described in the play are deeply embedded in Catholic ritual, yet are made meaningful and accessible for a Protestant audience. Plot overshadows polemics, in other words. The idea of nostalgia with regards to Catholicism, referred to earlier, also resonates with these depictions. This is important for this argument as it depicts ways in which prayer not only bridges the earthly realm and the heavenly realm but also the past and the present.

Foakes supports this argument and further asserts that the play's primary purpose is to endorse the reign of James I and his heirs. He argues that the birth of Elizabeth I intentionally commemorates the marriage of James's daughter Elizabeth, which took place a few months prior to the first performance of the play (Foakes quoted in Rudnytsky 1991:55). This ideological suturing of the sovereign powers of Tudor—Elizabeth's line—and Stuart—James I's line—makes the play appear to be an affirmation of James I's legitimacy, exalting the providential nature of his reign.

However, I will argue that this political project is rather a smokescreen for another purpose of the play. That purpose is to reveal an alternative eternal spiritual kingdom of God, which contrasts with temporal earthly kingdoms that are fraught with the corruptions and inveiglements of human plotting. This alternative kingdom is not of this world, yet is intimately invested and involved in it. Nor is it a kingdom merely of the afterlife, but rather an invisible reality superimposed upon material reality, offering counter impulses and objectives to those offered by earthly power structures. This kingdom enters human time and space, yet simultaneously transcends it, holding up truth, goodness, humility, and love as its ideals. Prayer establishes access to the divine sovereign of this kingdom, enabling the envisioning and embodiment of alternative forms of citizenship and authority to those offered by earthly powers. A clear conscience is the conduit through which these prayers flow establishing a further mark of citizenship in this spiritual kingdom, severing citizens from all other allegiances. As Julia Reinhard Lupton notes in *Citizen-Saints: Shakespeare and Political Theology* there is a cost involved in citizenship: "From their earliest formulations, citizenship rites come into being by exacting some cancellation, sacrifice, or mortification of prior familial, regional, or cultic allegiances" (Lupton 2005:76). Characters who try to straddle notions of earthly citizenship, which Lupton situates symbolically in Athens, and heavenly citizenship, which Lupton situates symbolically in Jerusalem, are described as "citizen-saints", hybrid creatures, who are pressured to "mortify [their] previous tribal and local ties, [their] native particularism, in favour of naturalization and conversion to a general economy" (Lupton 2005:63). In *Henry VIII*, this process is vividly depicted through the characters who straddle these conflicting paradigms of citizenship, especially Buckingham, Wolsey

and Katharine, who are forced to sever ties with earthly forms of citizenship completely, to be emptied of all that this citizenship affords them, becoming disenfranchised within Henry's kingdom, and released into a full embodiment of citizenship in the kingdom of God.

"Conscience" is a key issue within the play, with the word occurring twenty-four times, throughout all the acts, and amongst all strata of characters, "twice as often as any other work in the Shakespeare canon", as Strohm observes (2011:28). A muddled and guilty conscience hinders access to this alternative kingdom, whilst a clear and purified conscience enables access. The free access and influence of God over one's conscience is an emblem of citizenship within God's kingdom. The inaccessibility of conscience to God's power is indicative of citizenship in the earthly kingdom. Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn are characterized as fully immersed in the earthly kingdom, activating its structures and resources for their own gain and identifying entirely with the earthly power and prestige it affords them. This set of commitments is reflected in the shifting, muddy nature of their consciences. Wolsey is also initially immersed within this kingdom, but as his power is pulled from underneath him he is effectively forced out of earthly citizenship and seeks solace and finally peace within heavenly citizenship. His conscience mimics this, finding serenity at last in this new identity. Buckingham and especially Katharine are identified as citizen-saints who present as honest, spiritually minded characters, seeking to be in the world but not of the world, which leads them to inhabit a spiritualized form of citizenship in counterpoint to the temporal.

Thus, serving the king and serving God are presented as mutually exclusive choices in *Henry VIII*. Characters are either affiliated with one kingdom or the other. They cannot serve both fully, in the play's logic. Shakespeare urges his viewers to choose the alternative kingdom of God, to engage with this kingdom through prayer, examining conscience and evacuating all blockages to this kingdom's influence and therein to find what Wolsey finds once he's lost everything else, "a peace above all earthly dignities" (3.2.380). When characters are rejected from positions of power within the earthly

kingdom, they gain moments of “honesty, lucidity and veracity far removed from the need for pleasing public show” (Woodcock 2011:8), and these moments lead to visions of alternative citizenship mediated by prayer. This vision of alternate citizenship matters because it elucidates Shakespeare’s covert critique of human political authority, enticing audiences towards a notion of citizenship that includes the spiritual. This alternative vision of citizenship serves to destabilize the awe and reification built around earthly powers and to envision genuine hope for those who choose to be citizens of more than the materialistic, temporal world. To make this argument, I draw on the writings of St Augustine to illuminate my analysis, working incrementally through the themes of citizenship, prayer, and conscience in *Henry VIII*. Augustine’s writings were and remain respected by both Catholic and Protestant thinkers, permeating spiritual discourse to the present day.

The play depicts the rise and fall of various conspicuous subjects during the reign of Henry VIII, including Buckingham, Cardinal Wolsey, and Henry’s first wife, Katharine of Aragon. The rise, but not the fall, of Anne Boleyn is also depicted. This structure reflects the “the medieval *de casibus* tradition of tragedy” (Woodcock 2011:2) which uses the Wheel of Fortune trope to represent the inevitable cycle from glory to abjection. It is also “comparable...to the episodic framework of *A Mirror for Magistrates*, which was first published in 1559” (Woodcock 2011:2), the same year that Elizabeth I “established Protestantism as England’s only legal religion” (McClain 2002:381) through the Act of Uniformity. *A Mirror for Magistrates* is a vast collection of dramatic poems by various authors, emanating from the fictional ghosts of statesmen, kings, and nobles from British history. The aim of these poems is to urge the readers “to learn vicariously, in history, what they would otherwise have to learn by hard experience” (Campbell 1938:49), and to remind kings of their God-given responsibilities, making them “fear to be tyrants” (Campbell 1938:53). The play *Henry VIII* follows in this vein, but goes further, urging its viewers to learn to fully inhabit God’s Kingdom through citizenship, prayer, and a clear conscience. The loss experienced by the key characters in fact becomes their gain precisely because they are severed from false notions of citizenship and given new visions of meaningful citizenship, one that is decidedly spiritualized.

Citizenship

The idea of God's kingdom is clearly laid out by St Augustine in his treatise the *City of God* (413-426 CE), a foundational text of the Christian faith. Augustine contrasts the City of God (*Civitas Dei*) with the City of Earth (*Civitas Terrena*). The City of God offers real love whereas the City of Earth offers only selfish love (Versfeld 1990:98). Moreover, the City of God is characterised by "true, good friends" (XIX.8), "orderly coherence in God and enjoyment of God" (XIX.13), and the dismantlement of the powers and principalities of humanity so that God can be "all in all" (XIV.28). Citizens of the City of God live by the spirit and citizens of the City of Earth live according to the flesh, "each seeking peace after his own kind" (XIV:1), although only the City of God provides lasting peace and eternal life. The City of Earth is characterised by "the lust of domination and the pride of empire" (Versfeld 1990:96), often compared symbolically to Rome, which fell in AD 410 to the Goths, an event that "provided a catalyst" (Harrison 2000:197) for Augustine's writings as it vividly illustrates the temporary nature of earthly power. Augustine believed that God breathed into humans the "desire to be members" of his city, but that they could also choose to "reject the love of God" (Versfeld 1990:37).

In the play the vision of an alternative City of God is encapsulated most clearly in Cardinal Wolsey's speech after his corruption and double dealings have been discovered by the king. The king strips Wolsey of his title, influence, and of all the wealth and possessions he has accumulated during his ascent to power. This stripping of earthly signs of status engenders humility within Wolsey, a value that is crucial to citizenship in the City of God (XIV.13). Wolsey is forced to recognize that all of his possessions belong to the king and that only his "robe and [his] integrity to heaven" (3.2.552-528) are his own. He is aware that all he has left in this life are the clothes on his back and God's access to his inner core, which enables him to transform from an earthly citizen into a citizen of this alternative kingdom of heaven, abandoning his "passion for dominance" (XIV.28). Whilst grieving his fall from favour with his loyal protégé, Thomas Cromwell, passion surges through Wolsey, and he cries out:

O Cromwell, Cromwell,
 Had I but served my God with half the zeal
 I served my King, he would not in mine age
 Have left me naked to mine enemies (3.2.455–458).

This lament tersely encapsulates the dichotomy between these heavenly and earthly kingdoms, vividly contrasting Wolsey's service to the king with his service to God. Wolsey claims that he has been brought low by too zealously serving the king, neglecting his service to God, who should be "all in all" (XIV.28). This implies that in serving the king, his practices were not consistently aligned with God's ordinance and thus of a nefarious nature. In fact it contains "a veiled accusation directed against the sovereign" (Mayer 2003:198), insinuating that it was Henry's leadership that influenced Wolsey's double-dealing. Therefore he articulates the mutually exclusive nature of service to God and the king. Serving one of these too zealously will lead to neglect of the other just as citizens of the City of God will worship "the true God" and a citizen of the City of Earth will worship "its own strength as represented by its leaders" (XIV.28). Both cannot be worshipped wholeheartedly. Wolsey characterises God as a compassionate, reliable king, caring for those who faithfully serve Him, whilst Henry is characterised as fickle and negligent, not recognising the service Wolsey has done him and instead rashly rejecting him.

Wolsey concludes the scene with the pith of his epiphany: "Farewell/ The hopes of court; my hopes in heaven do dwell" (3.2.459–460), which further reinforces his revelation that earthly powers will always disappoint and heavenly powers will always follow through. It also points to the notion that "citizens of the holy City of God are merely on earth as pilgrims" (XIV.9) and do not invest in gaining power on earth for its own sake. His "hope" needs to find an alternative dwelling place and he bids farewell to "court", which represents the earthly kingdom, and instead chooses "heaven" for the

home of his hope. Wolsey states that his hopes “*do dwell*” in heaven and not merely that they *will* dwell there. Thus this vision of heaven is not only situated in the future, awaiting him, and his hope once he dies, but is instead a present reality; a reality in which Wolsey can position his hope, with the knowledge that it is secure. This indicates that the City of God and the City of Earth are not geographically separated but “commingled”, separating only ultimately (XVIII.13) and thus citizenship of the heavenly realm can be taken up whilst still on earth. Thus, he places his hope in the City of God, a current reality for which he can gain citizenship through his newfound humility and submission to Christ, its King (XIV.13), no longer seeking glory from men (XIV.28).

Wolsey speaks of “*the hopes*” when referring to the trust he placed in the court, but “*my hopes*” when referring to the trust he places in heaven, which further distinguishes these two realms. Using the definite article for the court reflects an impersonal relationship towards the hope he placed in this earthly kingdom. These hopes belonged to the court, not to him. It is as if these hopes were always outside of Wolsey, elusive allurements that he was chasing but never fully obtained as they were illusions. In contrast to this, the possessive pronoun “*my*”, used to describe his hopes in heaven, demonstrates a personal investment and ownership of this hope. The alternative kingdom is a place where his hope is his own, reinforcing the idea that he is only a pilgrim on earth, not a citizen. Hope is not the unfulfilled promises of court, but rather a reality that Wolsey personally experiences in the present moment once he has realigned himself with God’s City. By placing his hope in this alternative kingdom, Wolsey is able to attain a sense of ultimate security, despite the tumult of his crumbling material reality.

Wolsey’s security in his citizenship of the City of God is further manifested when the rejected Queen Katharine’s faithful servant Griffith relays to her the details of Wolsey’s death, describing how Wolsey wandered wearily to Leicester and there “lodged in the abbey, where the reverend abbot,/

With all his convent, honourably received him” (4.2.19–20). He tells how Wolsey begged sanctuary for a poor old man broken by the tempests of state. There he stayed for three days and after:

full repentance,
 Continual meditations, tears, and sorrows,
 He gave his honours to the world again,
 His blessed part to heaven, and slept in peace (4.2.27–30).

Wolsey unburdens his heart and soul, seeking forgiveness, and expressing grief for his crimes. Unravelling his inner world allows God to bear witness to Wolsey’s conscience and thus reinstate Wolsey as a citizen of God’s City, resulting in Wolsey’s attainment of “peace”, which Augustine argues is our “ultimate good” and “eternal life” (XIX.11). This citizenship is further exemplified through the split made between Henry’s kingdom and God’s kingdom, highlighting the prestige of heaven as it receives Wolsey’s most “blessed part” (4.2.30) whereas the world receives “his honours” (4.2.29), the tarnished trappings of his former life. This illustrates his citizenship in the City of God, in both this life and the next, where the best aspect of him may reside.

Many other appeals to the authority of this heavenly kingdom are woven throughout the play, illustrating the proximity and involvement of this kingdom with earthly affairs, as well as its pre-eminence. When Brandon commands that Buckingham be brought “to the Tower” (1.1.213), Buckingham is compliant and expresses how pleading his innocence will be of no help to him. He prays briefly that, “the will of heaven/ be done in this and all things!” (1.1.209–210). This prayer is affirmed by Lord Abergavenny, who is to accompany him to the Tower. He states, “As the Duke said,/ The will of heaven be done” (1.1.214–215). As Buckingham nears his death he again appeals to heavenly manoeuvrings when he asserts to his crowd of faithful followers that “heaven has an end in all” (2.1.125), acknowledging that heaven shapes a purpose out of all events, illustrating the

sovereignty of Christ (XIV.13). Despite the fact that he is being executed by earthly powers, heaven will ultimately overrule this injustice, transforming the final outcome. He contrasts this consistent providence of God, along with the “unfeigned loyalty and mutual love of true and good friends” (XIX.8) through which “each citizen serves his neighbour in love” (XIV.28), which can be found in the City of God, with the fickleness of many human relationships in the City of Earth, who are self-serving (XIV.28) and very often “fall away/ Like water” (2.1.130–131) once they perceive “the least rub in your fortunes” (2.1.130), except “where they mean to sink ye” (2.1.132). Buckingham articulates the slippery nature of earthly favour, and asserts the sovereignty of God’s edict with confidence, even as he approaches his death. He is confident of his citizenship in God’s City, as he nears the end of his pilgrimage on earth.

Katharine also articulates this assurance of the alternative kingdom’s existence and authority when she is approached in her chamber by Cardinal Wolsey and Cardinal Campeius (3.1.25), who attempt to persuade her to meekly comply with the divorce, assuring her that they have her best interests at heart (3.1.92–97). After the cardinals try to convince her of their desire to prevent her ruin, she passionately contradicts them, stating that it is rather her ruin they desire. She appeals to heavenly judgement, asserting that God is beyond courtly corruption, declaring: “Heaven is above all yet – there sits a judge/ That no king can corrupt” (3.1.198–199). This bold statement asserts God’s authority and integrity over the king and the cardinals, as it deftly criticises both the king and his judges, implying that the king seeks to corrupt the judges and that the judges are corruptible, whereas God does not implement nor succumb to such corruption. In the City of God there is an “orderly coherence in God” (XIX.13) that is incorruptible. Thus, these two realms are sharply distinguished, and Katharine passionately places her trust in the realm which is “above all”, believing that its transcendence and authority overrule Henry and his underlings.

This idea that God is above all earthly political power, thus exhorting earthly rulers to give account of their actions to God, resonates with the teachings of *A Mirror for Magistrates*, which stresses not only “the duties of subjects to their king, but also the accountability of kings to the King of Kings – a part of the theory of divine right less popular with reigning monarchs” (Campbell 1938: 53). That this accountability to God is unpopular with King Henry is noted when King Henry positions himself as the highest power. This is demonstrated towards the end of the play when Archbishop Cranmer is under trial for heresy, while unbeknownst to the king’s council he has the king’s favour, as Cranmer is the man who constructs the argument that enables Henry to divorce Katharine. The king observes the proceedings from a window above the council house and is troubled by the disrespect his subjects show towards Cranmer. He plans to intervene, but first allows the trial to run its course so that he can descend, god-like, to overrule their ruling in the final moments, stating that “tis well there’s one above them yet” (5.2.26) with reference to himself. No higher power than himself is acknowledged. Similarly, in the previous scene he assures Cranmer that he need not fear for his life because “thy truth and thy integrity is rooted/ In us, thy friend” (5.1.115) thus positioning himself at the nexus of reality out of which the integrity of others can grow. Through these examples, it is evident that Henry does not define truth as an absolute derived from God’s resolute perfection, but rather a mercurial entity, derived from his own favour and whims. This is an attempted annexure of God’s foundational role in the realm of truth and integrity and is juxtaposed by Wolsey’s epiphany that his “integrity to heaven” (3.2.454) is all that remains after the City of Earth has abandoned him, making integrity the defining feature of heavenly citizenship. That the king claims to be the earth into which Cranmer must root his integrity is a blatant challenge to the authority of God, and clearly situates Henry as a citizen of the earthly kingdom, worshipping his “own strength” (XIV.28).

Citizenship and Prayer

With the idea of these conflicting realms of citizenship established, I turn my attention to the way prayer relates to these states, directing visions of citizenship towards either the City of God or the City of Earth. The prayers of Anne and Katharine are quintessential examples of this split between the City of Earth and the City of God as they clearly affiliate each woman with a specific contrasting sphere.

Anne's prayers represent the fickle, superficial realm of the City of Earth and Katharine's prayers represent the unswerving, pervasive realm of the City of God. As Henry chooses Anne over Katharine, he is also further affiliated with the capricious earthly structures of power, which are exposed as shallow and ephemeral. Where prayer signifies heavenly citizenship, it is infused with the features of that city – faith, hope, love, truth, goodness, and humility. The prayers of earthly citizens, however, serve to conceal, betray, and reinforce earthly power structures; they are self-serving, reflecting a “passion for dominance” (XIV.28) and selfish desire. In the *City of God*, Augustine argues that we cannot “live rightly out of our own resources” but instead “we must be helped in our faith and prayers by him who gave us the very faith to believe in his help” (XIX.4). Thus, it is God's enabling power that infuses faith and prayer with efficacy, and thus the efficacy of prayer is indicative of the citizenship of those that pray. In a letter to a wealthy widow (Augustine. Trans. Cunningham. 1887: Ch 2. Section 6), Augustine further expands his definition of prayer as arising from an awareness of the desolation of the soul (2.5), as a prolonged desire directed towards God, especially in times of agony (10:19). Prayer for enemies is also acutely emphasised (6:13). He concludes by saying one must strive “in prayer to overcome the world: pray in hope, pray in faith, pray in love, pray earnestly and patiently, pray as a widow belonging to Christ” (16:29). These criteria will be applied to Anne and Katharine's prayers revealing the way each prayer either aligns or deviates from the values of the City of God.

We first discover the self-seeking nature of Anne's prayers when we encounter her in her chamber conversing with an older lady-in-waiting. They discuss the plight of Katharine, and the news of the impending divorce, and Anne appears to lament her “mistress' sorrows” (2.3.53). When Henry's messenger, the Chamberlain, enters and continues to discuss Katharine's dire situation with the women, Anne affirms his hope that “all will be well” (2.3.56) with a simple prayer: “Now, I pray God, amen” (2.3.57) which leaves it sufficiently ambiguous for whom it shall be well. This exemplifies the duplicitous nature of Anne's prayers, as this prayer appears to support Katharine, but in fact could ricochet back onto Anne's own ambitions, affirming her carefully crafted social

ascension. Her duplicity is further suggested once she has been bestowed with the title of the Marchioness of Pembroke, a gift from Henry that includes land and monetary advantage, and she speaks of her prayers and wishes as the only tokens she can give in return, deliberately undervaluing them when she says:

my prayers
 Are not words duly hallow'd, nor my wishes
 More worth than empty vanities; yet prayers and wishes
 Are all I can return (2.3.67–70).

Anne speaks of her prayers as less than holy and her wishes meaningless when she presents them as gifts for Henry. Of course, she is being strategically coy, dutifully enacting her subservience and humility for the King's messenger, whom she hopes will relay these observances to Henry, detailing her piety and poise. She is also equally aware that the messenger will not consider her prayers worthless, which is evident in the fact that she concludes her message with the assurance that she will pray for Henry's "health and royalty" (2.3.73), placing some value on this gesture. However, despite this equivocal game that she plays regarding the value of her prayers, the fact that she speaks of her prayers as not "duly hallow'd" (2.3.68) indicates a subconscious awareness that her prayers are not to be trusted. She also undervalues the spiritual currency of her offering in contrast to Henry's material gifts, holding the material reality in higher esteem than the spiritual. Her prayers are a means to an end. They are signs and enactments of her piety, which slip easily into emblems of her physical desirability, assisting in her attainment of great earthly glory. By the end of the scene it is apparent that she indeed intends to double cross Katharine, as she asks her gentlewoman to hide her social advancement and signs of Henry's favour from Katharine (2.4.107), revealing the fact that her prayers for all to be well are meant only for herself. This demonstrates her citizenship of the City of Earth in that she "seeks glory from men" (XIV.28), praying not in love but with only selfish ambition in mind.

In contrast to this, the first prayer of Katharine is selfless and meant for the betterment of others. It is also a prayer that challenges Henry's authority as it seeks to bring reconciliation where Henry means to find division. Before she even utters her prayers, she is framed as a selfless character, bowing before her king, at risk to herself, to intercede for Henry's subjects who "are in great grievance" due to high taxation (1.2.27–33). The prayer follows in this vein during Buckingham's trial when Katharine attempts to find God's healing for all the brokenness between King Henry and Buckingham, and within the broader kingdom, as she believes Buckingham is innocent. Once the so-called evidence for Buckingham's treachery has been laid out before the king, queen, and courtiers, Wolsey responds with a rhetorical question, asking Katharine, "Now, madam, may his highness live in freedom,/ And this man out of prison?" (1.2.201). Wolsey cunningly attempts to persuade Katharine by presenting Henry's "freedom" as impossible if Buckingham is "out of prison" to make it awkward for Katharine to continue defending Buckingham's possible innocence. Katharine, however, deflects Wolsey's attempt to make her choose sides by uttering a prayer, "God mend all!" (1.2.202). Katharine uses this prayer to articulate her vision for peace between Henry and Buckingham since this prayer is broad enough to embrace an outcome that may include both Henry's and Buckingham's freedom and well-being. The word "all" also envisions a wider project of reparation within the kingdom that fits with her earlier attempt to remedy the social conflicts that have emerged in the kingdom, as various social classes are up in arms against Henry. This short but effective prayer curtails Wolsey's attempt to corner Katharine into choosing sides, enabling her to envision a future shaped by a higher authority than Henry's. Katharine seeks God's intervention in this dispute, looking to the wisdom and healing powers of God to restore the situation. Her prayers align with the aims of the City of God to make God "all in all" (XIV.28) and she uses her prayers on behalf of others, thus serving her "neighbour in love" (XIV.28), bringing heaven on earth.

The culmination of the disparity of Anne and Katharine's prayers appears in the final prayers of each, further exemplifying the association of each with their opposing realms of power and citizenship.

Anne is more explicitly aligned with the earthly power structures, whilst Katharine moves further and

further towards spiritual structures of power. Anne's prayer is public whilst Katharine's is private. Anne's prayer is a civic spectacle and topic of conversation, unseen by the audience, but weighing in on the public perception of her within the world of the play. Katharine's prayer is witnessed only by the audience, invisible to the other characters, an intimate, vivid ecstasy for our eyes alone. Anne's prayer denotes her political ascent in this world, whilst Katharine's prayer activates her elevation into the kingdom of God.

The first defining contrast is in the locations of these prayers. Anne's final prayer is in the public setting of the cathedral during her coronation ceremony, where the curious crowds watch attentively as she formally performs a prayer. This prayer embodies her citizenship in the City of Earth, signifying the politicisation of prayer, in which prayer endorses Anne's political positioning, making her rise to power acceptable and even admirable in the eyes of the public. This links with the use of prayer in *Henry V*, such as the prayer used to endorse Henry V's marriage to Katherine of France, justifying Henry V's annexation of France just as Anne's prayer justifies Henry VIII's marriage to her and divorce from Katharine. This public performance of prayer is described by the Third Gentleman once he joins his fellow scandal-mongers, relaying his experience of the coronation in which he emphasises Anne's "saint-like" (4.1.85) qualities embodied during her prayer, saying: "At length her grace rose, and with modest paces/ Came to the altar; where she kneel'd, and saint-like/ Cast her fair eyes to heaven and pray'd devoutly" (4.1.84–86). The substance of her prayer is unknown, but the gestures and inflections of its appearance, and the gracefulness and beauty of Anne's features as she prays, incite discussion and adoration from the crowd. Thus, the focus is on outward ritual and appearance and not inner conscience. The prayer is an effective political manoeuvre to win the crowd over to Anne's admiration, appearing to apply God's sanction to the match as well drawing attention to Anne's physical beauty.

Katharine's final prayer, on the other hand, is in an intensely private setting, completely void of onlookers but the audience. It is "presented as a private vision of a world of peace and bliss, manifestly distant from the vain shows of court" (Woodcock 2011:11). She is in her bedroom and her prayer is spontaneous and animated, involving interactions with a vision revealed to her, adding a deeper sense of personal autonomy to her prayer. She falls ill and in this state of desolation of both body and soul, seeks comfort, asking her servant Griffith to: "Cause the musicians play me that sad note/ I named my knell, whilst I sit meditating/ On that celestial harmony I go to" (4.2.78–80), followed by sad and solemn music. The following vision then appears. It is an "astoundingly sacralised scene" (Dillon 2012:108) which "is no less than the apotheosis of Queen Katharine" (Dillon 2012:109). It is described in vivid detail in the text:

Enter, solemnly tripping one after another, six personages, clad in white robes, wearing on their heads garlands of bays, and golden vizards on their faces; branches of bays or palm in their hands. They first congee unto her, then dance; and, at certain changes, the first two hold a spare garland over her head; at which the other four make reverent curtsies; then the two that held the garland deliver the same to the other next two, who observe the same order in their changes, and holding the garland over her head: which done, they deliver the same garland to the last two, who likewise observe the same order: at which, as it were by inspiration, she makes in her sleep signs of rejoicing, and holdeth up her hands to heaven: and so in their dancing vanish, carrying the garland with them. The music continues (4.2).

This ceremony elicits an ecstatic response from Katharine in which she holds "up her hands to heaven" (4.2) in worship and adoration, communing with the veracity and comfort of God's kingdom, praying and praising despite being "divorced" (4.1.32) and "removed to Kimbolton/ where she remains sick" (4.1.33–34). She is "given a noble send-off by powers that lie outside and beyond those of her former husband, receiving tokens, not of disgrace and defeat, but of victory through martyrdom: the palm of the martyr...and the garland crown" (Appleford 2010:151) which mimic the iconography of Catholic martyrs' portraiture "such as Edmund Campion (1581) and Robert Southwell

(1595)” (Appleford 2010:167). This alternate reality provides an abundance of joy and comfort to her, drawing her towards its territory in prolonged desire directed towards God in a time of agony (10:19), transforming her identity within it. Representing her as a martyr transforms her abject state into one of victory and admiration, challenging Henry’s decision to divorce her, but also illustrating the improvement of her circumstances once she is fully instated in the City of God, receiving “the fountain of life that we must thirst for in prayer” (14:27). Through this vision, she miraculously “steps aside from the secular narrative into the realm of eternity” (Dillon 2012:109).

Secondly, these prayers of Anne and Katharine are experienced by the audience through contrasting media. Anne’s final prayer is witnessed by the crowd but never by the audience. The audience only experiences the prayer through the reports of the Third Gentleman (4.1.84-94). Thus, the audience is further removed from the prayer, as it is portrayed as a spectacle to be ogled and discussed rather than anything intimate and convincing. The physical observation and idealisation of Anne by the crowd is further evident in the discussion that happens following the prayer, once Anne reveals herself to the crowd. The Second Gentleman, who, moments earlier, laments Katharine’s plight with signs of deep sympathy (4.1.43–44), proves fickle and waxes lyrically about Anne’s sweetness, stating that “she is an angel” (4.1.44) and that he cannot blame Henry’s “conscience” (4.1.47) for this change in wife. This also draws attention to Henry’s fickle, malleable conscience, or rather the use of the term conscience as a pretext for sexual desire, with the focus on Anne’s piety as a pretext for her sexual desirability. This notion of conscience will be dealt with further in the next section. Once more, Anne’s beauty and piety are conflated and idealised, serving as justification for Henry’s decision to marry her in the minds of the crowd. The superficiality of this assessment of Anne’s character, based on a fleeting glimpse of her body and deportment, depicts the superficial nature of public favour. Katharine’s depiction is the exact reverse. The audience is privy to her ecstatic revelation, whilst the other characters, absent from the stage, appear moments later claiming to have seen nothing (4.2.87). Katharine’s prayer is thus an intimate secret shared directly between the audience and herself (Appleford 2010:151), whilst Anne’s prayer is a public piece of pageantry shared only indirectly with

the audience through the reports of onlookers. Thus, the audience relates intimately to Katharine, sharing her spiritual experience and inclining towards its veracity. Similarly, the audience is distanced from Anne, further suspecting the pantomimed nature of her piety. That Henry chooses Anne over Katharine aligns him more closely with the dubious, earthbound space of Anne.

Finally, each of these prayers serves to elevate the women to positions of authority in these contrasting realms. Anne's prayer accompanies a formal ceremony in which she is appointed the Queen of the earthly realm of England, receiving all the "royal makings of a queen" (4.1.89). Katharine's ceremony elevates her to the status of a saint, a sacred citizen of this alternative kingdom. "Echoing Shakespeare's novel use of the verb 'unking' in *Richard II*...Katharine refers to herself as 'unqueened' in her final moments" (Woodcock 2011:8) thus drawing attention to the stripping of her earthly power and status compared to Anne's earthly gain. However, the spirits with whom she interacts reveal to her a glimpse of the ecstasy awaiting her beyond this world, allowing her momentary respite from her wretched state. They welcome her "into heaven with the palm of the victor and the crown of the martyr, apotheosized out of history like a saint in a baroque ceiling" (Appleford 2010:167). She is envisioned as a Queen of Heaven, which mirrors the figure of Mary, the mother of Christ, and similarly reflects King Richard II's vision of himself and his wife attaining "a new world's crown" (*Richard II* 5.1.24) in the life to come, thus transcending the limits placed on them by earthly power. Once the spirits leave her, Katharine calls out to them: "Spirits of peace, where are ye? are ye all gone/ And leave me here in wretchedness behind ye?" (4.2.82–83) This statement proves that the vision lifted Katharine from her wretchedness, as without it the wretchedness returns. Furthermore, Katharine relays to Griffith how the spirits of peace:

promised me eternal happiness,

And brought me garlands, Griffith, which I feel

I am not worthy yet to wear: I shall, Assuredly (4.2.90–93).

This confirms that the vision Katharine receives is not merely a momentary distraction from her sorrow, but a promise that she shall be happy forever once she accompanies these spirits to the other kingdom where she will be crowned with garlands and reside eternally. She expresses that she is unworthy to wear the crown, emphasising her humility, an essential value in the City of God, but also that she shall “Assuredly” become worthy in time. Thus, she recognises her destiny as a title bearer in God’s kingdom and the transformations she shall undergo as she takes up that role.

The force of prayer to enable Katharine’s elevation to the status of a saint and citizen of the heavenly realm resonates with Aristotle’s argument that the features of the good citizen of earthly society are at odds with the features of the good person. That in fact these two concepts are mutually exclusive is argued by Julia Reinard Lupton in her book *Citizen-Saints* in which she explores how “the pragmatic social intelligence of the citizenry [enforce] a mediocrity at odds with the extraordinary, even dangerous, excellence of the philosopher, the hero or the saint” (Lupton 2005:2). Lupton continues to argue throughout her book that these hybrid, centaur-like (Lupton 2005:3) creatures of exceptionality, personified in a wide spectrum of Shakespearean characters who attempt to embody both citizenry and a variety of sainthoods, cannot exist in society, must die either a symbolic death of enforced citizenship into civil society, causing certain identities and freedoms to be stripped, or an actual death into the citizenship and sainthood of God’s City, causing the salient features of these identities to be reconciled through the loss of earthly citizenship, a loss that Katharine undergoes.

Katharine is further associated with the spiritual realm through prayer later in the scene when Griffith urges Patience, a lady-in-waiting, to pray, repeating the word “pray” to highlight the urgency: “She is going, wench: pray, pray” (4.2.99) to which Patience responds “heaven comfort her” (4.2.100).

Griffith and Patience pray for their mistress’s soul, recognising that heaven will supply her with the peace and rest she dearly seeks. Shortly afterwards, the Spanish ambassador, Capucius, arrives with a

message for Katharine from Henry stating that Henry “sends [Katharine] his princely commendations,/ And heartily entreats [her] take good comfort” (4.2.119–120), to which she responds:

O my good lord, that comfort comes too late,
 'Tis like a pardon after execution.
 That gentle physic, given in time, had cured me;
 But now I am past all comforts here but prayers (4.2.121–123).

Thus, Katharine recognises the emptiness of Henry’s “commendations” (4.3.119) and his plea that she “take good comfort” (4.2.120). These hollow offerings are also long overdue and may have been effective had they forestalled her downfall, but are now mere pointless platitudes. Katharine pointedly illustrates how the only things from which she can now derive true comfort are prayers, with the terse phrase “but prayers” (4.2.123). She embraces the reality that there is nothing available to her to ease her discomfort except the relief and intimacy that she finds through prolonged prayer in this time of agony, her desire, and throbbing heart directed to God in her awareness of her own desolation (4.2.2). She has lost all of her finery and fortune. She has lost the love of her king and her outward identity as a queen. In this state the King of England’s words of consolation are meaningless, while engaging with God is genuine relief. Prayer is an access point to the resources of God’s kingdom conveying the delights and tenderness that accompany it. Katharine’s citizenship of God’s City is further evident in the letter she sends to Henry a moment later in which her focus is not on her own well-being but instead is turned selflessly towards her faithful attendants, urging Henry to have some pity “upon [her] wretched women” (4.2.141) and “for [her] men” (4.2.149) in which she asks “that they may have their wages duly paid ‘em,/ And something over to remember [her] by” (4.2. 150-152). She displays selfless compassion, which, accompanied by her prayers, allows her to access her citizenship of the City of God where she finds glory in her humility (XIV.13) and peace in the knowledge that her

pilgrimage in the temporal realm will end before long. She prays “as a widow belonging to Christ” (16:29).

Citizenship, Prayer, and Conscience

Conscience is a central theme within *Henry VIII*, with the word occurring twenty-four times within the play, and it completes the relationship between prayer and these alternative kingdoms that have been established. It is through a clear conscience that prayer can be effectively channelled towards the City of God and its king. A muddied conscience obstructs the flow of prayer towards God and renders prayer something different – a political ploy, a seduction, a deceit. St Augustine writes in the *City of God* that “the greatest glory is the witness of God in the conscience” (XIV.28) and thus it is a clear conscience, transparent before God, which grants glory. This idea of God as witness to the inner workings of individuals is linked to the ability for God to influence and thus align individuals with his kingdom’s values as Katharine Eisaman Maus lucidly explains in *Inwardness and the theatre of the English Renaissance*:

For once one’s vivid sense of the divine witness is lost, most Renaissance religious writers agree, one immediately plummets into moral chaos. Only God’s continuous discipline over the hidden interiors of human beings keeps them virtuous, for the innately corrupt human imagination can always find a way to evade or ignore frail, external controls (Maus 1995:38).

Shakespeare introduces the idea of conscience, God’s discipline over the “hidden interior of human beings”, early in the play when Katharine questions the Surveyor who brings evidence against Buckingham. Katharine is concerned that the evidence he brings forward is false and she urges him to search his soul regarding these utterances. She discloses to the court that the Surveyor was a former employee of Buckingham who “lost [his] office/ On the complaint o’ th’ tenants” (1.2.173–174). She urges the Surveyor not to bring false evidence against Buckingham out of spite for losing his livelihood but to “take good heed” that he charges not “in [his] spleen a noble person/ and spoil [his]

nobler soul”, concluding with added emphasis: “I say take heed;/ Yes, heartily beseech you” (1.2.176–177). She appeals to his intentionality regarding his witness, urging him to evacuate all spiteful motives, to utter only what is good and true for the sake of his own soul and for the life of a noble person. She urges him to search his soul, appeal to his conscience, his “loyal opposition” (Augustine in Strohm 2011:10), the part of him that ought to critique all his inner motives aligning them with truth in order to protect his soul from destruction. This lays out the criteria for a clear conscience, which facilitates efficacious prayer – prayer that is voiced in good faith and with pure intentions leading those that pray into God’s City. With these, and other definitions of conscience in mind, I will examine modes of both muddled and clear consciences within the play and how these relate to the role of prayer in the establishment of citizenship.

Anne Boleyn’s prayers are closely affiliated with the earthly realm and thus it is unsurprising that her conscience is characterised as muddled. Anne converses with the Old Lady in her chamber, and when the Old Lady asks whether Anne would ever desire to be a queen, Anne protests that she “would not be a queen” (2.3.24) “for all the riches under heaven” (2.3.35). The Old Lady is unconvinced and critiques Anne’s reservations about being a queen, arguing that, given half a chance, Anne would seize the opportunity for social advancement and enrichment, and that her conscience would contort itself suitably into any warped configuration by which to justify her actions. She says:

You have too a woman's heart; which ever yet
 Affected eminence, wealth, sovereignty;
 Which, to say sooth, are blessings; and which gifts,
 Saving your mincing, the capacity
 Of your soft cheveril conscience would receive,
 If you might please to stretch it (2.3.28–33).

By comparing her conscience to cheveril, “the soft, pliable leather of a kid” (OED 1998), the Old Lady emphasises the mercurial nature of Anne’s conscience and thus its muddled quality. As Strohm notes, this flexibility is also vaginal in nature, stretching “to receive Henry’s offerings” (2011:28). While Anne denies the ownership of a flexible conscience, her actions suggest otherwise. She eagerly accepts the position of Marchioness of Pembroke, although protesting only moments before that she would not even desire to be a “duchess” (2.2.37). She is clearly open to persuasion. She claims that she is faint to think what might follow and shows outward concern for the queen, whose duty she feels she is neglecting by being away from her. But in the same breath, Anne commands the Old Lady not to deliver news of her newfound favour with the king to Queen Katharine. Thus, Anne is aware that what is beginning to transpire goes against the will and well-being of Queen Katharine and wishes to conceal it from her. She twists her conscience to suit the unfolding scenario, thus confirming that her prayers are “not words duly hallowed” (2.4.68) but tools in her seduction of Henry and establishment of earthly power.

Henry’s conscience appears as a driving force behind much of the action of the play because it is offered as the underlying motive for his divorce from Katharine and subsequent marriage to Anne. His conscience features so prominently that a 2010 production at the Globe Theatre, directed by Mark Rosenblatt, chose to embody his conscience as a marionette, which followed him around the stage (Billington 2010). Henry portrays himself as tormented by guilt for marrying his brother’s wife, and thus claims that his conscience is a “wild sea” (2.4.197), “full sick, and yet not well” that he must “rectify” (2.4.200). He attributes his tormented conscience to the “speeches utter’d/ By the Bishop of Bayonne” (2.4.168–169), a French ambassador, sent to enquire about a marriage between Princess Mary, Henry’s daughter, and the Duke of Orleans. In the middle of the negotiations, the bishop took a “respite” (2.4.174) in order to verify the legitimacy of Mary since her mother married her deceased husband’s brother. Henry explains to his courtiers how “This respite shook/ The bosom of my conscience, entered me,/ Yea, with a spitting power, and made to tremble/ The region of my breast”

(2.4.178–181). He portrays this assault on his conscience in torrential terms, a violent shaking and splitting of his conscience that leaves the deepest part of him trembling. His mind and heart have been profoundly penetrated by this hesitation on the French ambassador's part regarding his marriage, and the result is that he is utterly unsettled to his core. Thus, Henry presents his conscience as deeply disturbed by external objective arguments regarding the legitimacy of his marriage, rather than afflicted by any personal desire to end his marriage for the sake of attraction to another. He confirms this by stating that if anyone can prove his "marriage lawful" (2.4.223) he will be content to retain Katharine as his queen (2.4.224).

However, early in the play a dubious shadow is cast over the integrity of Henry's conscience, suggesting that it is muddied. This is evident in a pithy but telling conversation between the Lord Chamberlain and the Duke of Suffolk, who discuss Henry's doubts about the validity of his marriage, as well as Henry's new found interest in Anne Boleyn:

LORD CHAMBERLAIN: It seems the marriage with his brother's wife

Has crept too near his conscience.

DUKE OF SUFFOLK: No, his conscience

has crept too near another lady (2.2.15–17).

This conversation succinctly expresses what many courtiers may be thinking, but are not at liberty to articulate to King Henry. The Duke of Suffolk uses the word "conscience" as a euphemism for sexual desire, claiming that the guilt that Henry associates with his conscience is in fact a pretext for the lust he feels towards Anne. Henry's attraction to Anne is evident at the ball prior to this discussion, which takes place at Wolsey's estate, York Place, the setting where Henry first dances with Anne and makes it clear that he finds her physically appealing. He exclaims after the dance: "The fairest hand I ever touch'd. O beauty!/ Till now I never knew thee" (1.4.76–77) and then later enquires after Anne from

the Lord Chamberlain, calling her “fair lady” (1.4.93), “a dainty one” (1.4.97) and claiming that he is too much heated (1.4.104) after this encounter, thus emphasising his sexual desire for her. This also complements the vaginal connotations of Anne’s conscience, as Henry’s conscience takes on a phallic quality, “a reformulation of the medieval understanding in which conscience ‘pricks’ its guilty host” (Strohm 2011:28) and instead seeks to prick or penetrate the object of desire symbolised by Anne’s flexible, vaginal conscience. Thus, it is not the words of the French ambassador that have entered Henry’s conscience, driving this urge for a divorce forward, but rather Henry’s desire to enter Anne Boleyn, that compels him.

It is fitting that it is at Wolsey’s lodgings that Henry first encounters Anne because it is Wolsey who is initially associated with having influence over the workings of Henry’s conscience. The Duke of Norfolk, however, fears the influence Wolsey possesses, claiming that “He dives into the king’s soul, and there scatters/ Dangers, doubts, wringing of the conscience,/ Fears, and despairs; and all these for his marriage” (2.2.25–27). The Lord Chamberlain even goes as far as to describe Wolsey’s influence as “witchcraft” (3.2.18), attributing a dark force to Wolsey’s machinations within the king’s conscience. Suffolk prays that the king will one day see the truth about Wolsey, claiming that the king will never know himself until he does. This is significant as “self-knowledge and conscience had been linked by ancient philosophers” (Godman 2009:66) and thus Henry’s lack of self-knowledge is further evidence of a muddled conscience. Therefore, those close to King Henry cast aspersions upon the veracity and legitimacy of the wrangling of his conscience, attributing these disturbances to some malevolent outside force and a lustful inner motive. As Mayer aptly puts it, the term conscience “is divested of much of its religious and political meaning...[and] turned into a euphemism to describe Henry’s whims or indeed his sexual appetite” (Mayer 2003:194).

As King Henry is nursing this muddled conscience, it comes as no surprise that the only time he is shown praying, his prayer is hidden from the audience and the other characters, so that it is

completely opaque, shutting off his inner world. This contrasts with King Claudius in *Hamlet*, whose prayer of confession is exposed to the audience, enabling the audience a deeper excavation of his struggling conscience. In Henry's case, the audience is not privy to the contents or tone of his prayer, and thus the revelation of Henry's conscience remains obscured. Henry's prayer is also depicted as "reading pensively" from a prayer book, the formal and formulary nature of which contrasts with Katharine's spontaneous and heartfelt expressions of prayer. Henry desperately seeks a formulaic solution to his problems, in the midst of his confusion and clouded conscience. Lords Norfolk and Suffolk approach Henry, wishing to distract him from his wrangled conscience:

NORFOLK opens a folding door. The KING is discovered sitting, and reading pensively.

SUFFOLK: How sad he looks! Sure, he is much afflicted.

KING HENRY: Who's there? Ha?

NORFOLK: Pray God he be not angry.

KING HENRY: Who's there, I say? How dare you thrust yourselves
Into my private meditations! (2.2.62–65).

Henry responds aggressively to these onlookers, treating them as intruders and not merely concerned observers who view his struggles with compassion. He accuses them of thrusting themselves into his private spiritual world, characterising them as assailants who purposefully mean to attack his peaceful prayer. Henry's hostile reaction to his onlookers is similarly a hostile reaction to the audience, who also gaze in on him as he meditates and prays. He does not want his inner world to be exposed to anyone. He is defensive about this observation, longing for concealment, rejecting transparency. This defensiveness speaks of a grief and guilt that he no doubt feels regarding the dissolution of his marriage, a dissolution that a large part of him desires, but a small part, perhaps the true voice of his conscience, his "loyal opposition", cannot fully condone. This voice may have been activated by his prayer, yet it is a voice that is inconvenient to him as it thwarts his intents, and thus he blocks it out, muddies it intentionally. He embraces his lust, but his repressed grief and guilt is projected onto the lords, whom he scolds:

You are too bold.

Go to, I'll make ye know your times of business.

Is this an hour for temporal affairs? Ha? (2.2.70–72).

At this point, Wolsey approaches and Henry's temperament transforms radically into one of eager warmth and affection for Wolsey and his counsel. Henry stops mid-sentence and turns to Wolsey with rapture, gaining great comfort from Wolsey's presence, exclaiming "Who's there? My good lord, Cardinal? O, my Wolsey" and stressing how Wolsey is a "cure fit for a king" (2.2.74) and a balm for his "wounded conscience" (2.2.74). This shift in mood encapsulates the power that Wolsey exerts over Henry at this point in the play. It also indicates the reliance that Henry places on Wolsey's counsel and intervention as opposed to any counsel and intervention he may have received from God in his time of private prayer. Prayer has revealed to Henry the truth of his condition which has disheartened Henry, who wants to believe that his planned actions are sanctified. This leaves him further confused within himself and hostile towards his lords, whereas Wolsey's presence brings comfort as Wolsey tells him what he wants to hear, obscuring his conscience. He does not pray again in the play, an indication that he has allowed his conscience to be muddied, blocking the flow of his prayers.

Henry's muddied conscience is further emphasised a few scenes later when Katharine is approached in her chambers by Cardinal Wolsey and Cardinal Campeius. They have come to persuade her to comply peacefully with Henry's desire for a divorce, warning her that if she resists she may fall out of the king's favour and find herself in a state of abjection. Before they arrive, she is apprehensive about their approach, inferring that "they should be good men" and that "their affairs [should be] righteous" (3.1.22) but reflects on the sage proverb that "all hoods make not monks" (3.1.23). Although Katharine is a devout Catholic, she does not automatically trust the clerics of her faith, recognising that all are susceptible to hypocrisy, especially in the service of the City of Earth, in which these

priests are invested. This also resonates with Augustine's teaching that the City of God and the Church are not coterminous. Citizens of the City of Earth can find their way into the church community and indeed into positions of power, thus Katharine makes no exception for these cardinals. She uses the standards of God's goodness to critique their actions, showing concern that they do not live up to the righteousness and clear consciences expected of them in their positions. Thus, even before the cardinals appear, their duplicity is fore-grounded and the inability of their vestiges to bestow virtue on them is made clear. Katharine, on the other hand, has absolute faith in her integrity and therefore when Wolsey asks for a private audience with Katharine, she declares that whatever he has to say can be said publicly as she has nothing to hide:

Speak it here.

There's nothing I have done yet, o' my conscience,

Deserves a corner. Would all other women

Could speak this with as free a soul as I do. (3.1. 29–37)

Katharine emphasises her aligned, clear conscience that enables her to freely expose herself to an audience of those who attend her, as well as to the Cardinals whose motives she distrusts. She declares that "truth loves open dealing" (3.1.39) drawing further attention to the alignment of her conscience as well as her desire to share her dealings with the collective of women with whom she associates, longing also for them to have the right to speak freely. She contrasts this love of truth with the accusation of deception that she levels towards the cardinals, and by association, Henry. She cuts in bitingly whilst Wolsey demands she listens, wishing she "had never trod this English earth" (3.1.142), claiming that the English "have angels' faces, but heaven knows [their] hearts" (3.1.144–145). Her assessment of the English as duplicitous, with heaven having true insight into their deceptive hearts, exposes their consciences as muddied, those of the cardinals, certainly, but more importantly the conscience of Henry, whom she does not overtly refer to, but who is certainly encapsulated within this clutch of angel-faced, evil-hearted English. This indictment of the English

may appear to alienate Katharine from the English audience, but Wolsey and Campeius have been framed as dissembling from the outset, and thus the audience is more likely to empathise with Katharine, critiquing their own country, and their own selves, encouraging audience members to search their very souls.

Buckingham is presented as a sympathetic character with a clear conscience through which prayers can flow freely and from which requests for the prayers of others can also freely flow. He is introduced early in the play during a discussion between the Two Gentlemen who speak concernedly about his tenuous position at court since accusations of treachery have been levelled against him. After further discussion of Buckingham's faltered and then reposed demeanour in the face of his death sentence, the Second Gentleman passionately contrasts the public opinion of Cardinal Wolsey with that of Buckingham:

All the commons
 Hate him perniciously and, o' my conscience,
 Wish him ten fathom deep. This Duke as much
 They love and dote on, call him 'bounteous Buckingham,
 The mirror of all courtesy' (2.1.63–67).

The Second Gentleman appeals to the credence of his own conscience when defending Buckingham, thus ascribing meaningful assurance of his belief in Buckingham's innocence and Wolsey's villainy. He names him "the mirror of all courtesy" (2.1.54), associating him with the clear reflection of goodness in this world. This alignment of Buckingham with the clarity and integrity of a conscience is reinforced when Buckingham calls on his own conscience to attest for him. He urges the sorrowful crowd who accompany him to his execution to, "Hear what I say, and then go home and lose me" (2.1.58). He acknowledges that he will die as a traitor but declares: "Yet, heaven bear witness,/ And if

I have a conscience, let it sink me,/ Even as the axe falls, if I be not faithful!” (2.1.62–64). He swears by his conscience, stating that if he is lying about being faithful to king and country, then it is his conscience that must bring about his downfall. He asks heaven to witness this declaration of his faithfulness, and thus he recognises the standard of heavenly judgement within his conscience above the judgement of the king and earthly courts. This act attests to his citizenship of the City of God since he aspires to be judged only by God, recognising the supremacy of God’s verdict.

This alignment within his conscience enables him to confidently ask those “few that loved” (2.1.72) him to “be bold to weep for” (2.1.73) him and go with him “like good angels” (2.1.76) to his execution, asking them to “Make of [their] prayers one sweet sacrifice,/ And lift [his] soul to heaven” (2.1.78–79). The actor playing Buckingham places his early 17th century Protestant audience into the role of early 16th century Catholics who follow faithfully after him, inviting them to offer prayers for his soul. These prayers prayed by a crowd before an execution would not only supply comfort for the condemned individual, but were also believed to facilitate the salvation of their soul as “Catholics believed that prayers said on behalf of the soul of the deceased eased the soul’s torment in Purgatory and helped it ascend to heaven” (McClain 2002:396–397). Buckingham feels no reticence in urging these prayers because he is utterly convinced of his innocence before God and man, and stands by the smooth alignment of his conscience through which these prayers are directed into heaven. In Buckingham’s final moments, he declares:

All good people

Pray for me. I must now forsake ye. The last hour

Of my long weary life is come upon me.

Farewell, and when you would say something that is sad,

Speak how I fell. I have done, and God forgive me (2.1.132–136).

Buckingham asks that all “good people” (2.1.132) pray for him, thus additionally associating the goodness and integrity of those who pray with the efficacy of their prayers. He has no reservation in asking these good people to make their effective prayers available to him and in urging them to think of this event as “something that is sad” (2.1.135), thus reasserting his innocence and the clarity of his conscience. And showing “how – *verbally* at least – a subject’s conscience may challenge the official notions of justice and faith” (Mayer 2003:191). In his last breath, he prays for God’s forgiveness, further cleansing his being of the guilt of other crimes and readying himself for death. This prayer for forgiveness is freely prayed as he stands transparently before God, his conscience exposed, owning anything that is reprehensible and making his peace. An aligned conscience thus allows the free flow of Buckingham’s prayers and the prayers of his supporters towards God.

The idea of a clear conscience facilitating prayer and access to God’s Kingdom is most powerfully exemplified by Cardinal Wolsey’s spiritual reawakening. Wolsey appears as an antagonist during the first half of the play and other contemporary literary treatments of the Reformation hinge on “sectarian attacks” which “usually demonise by depersonalising” (Mayer 2003:197) characters such as Wolsey. However, “Shakespeare and Fletcher never allow this process to reach completion, as Wolsey’s intense and complex personality comes gradually to the fore in the course of the play” (Mayer 2003:197) and unlike in Samuel Rowley’s play, *When You See Me, You Know Me* (1605), “the only other surviving play from this period in which Henry appears onstage as a character” (Rankin 2011:349), Shakespeare “devotes significant attention to Wolsey’s remorse following his fall from power” (Rankin 2011:358).

The play gives Wolsey moving lines in which he unravels his crimes and shortcomings, reaching a new understanding of himself in relation to God, redefining his citizenship. He reflects upon the disgrace in which he finds himself, closely conversing with Thomas Cromwell, offering him advice before they part. He urges Cromwell to “fling away ambition” (3.2.441) for “by that sin fell the

angels” (3.2.442), arguing how, therefore, “can man, then,/ The image of his maker, hope to win by it?” (3.2.422-443). This alludes to the myth of origin surrounding Satan and his demons, who fell from heaven by trying to attain God’s status. Wolsey argues that if demons were wrought through ambition, then man, who is made in the image of God should reflect the godly value of humility. This comparison alludes to the words of Wolsey’s ghost in *The Mirror for Magistrates*, when he declares, “so great was my pryde,/ For which offence, fell Lucifer from the skyes” (358–359) by which Wolsey compares his fall from grace to Satan’s fall from heaven, as Satan deigned to be like God. It also resonates with the words of Conscience in *Mundus et Infans* who pleads with Mankind to “beware of pride, and you do well./ For pride Lucifer fell into hell” (Lester 2014, 341–342) demonstrating how Conscience itself urges characters from pride. Augustine also references pride abundantly as the defining feature of the citizens of the City of Earth, stating that “pride is a perverse reaching upwards, by desertion of him to whom the soul should cling as its source, to make itself as it were its own source and fount of being” (XIX:13), describing pride as a form of self-sufficiency that excludes God to the detriment of the soul. Thus, Wolsey’s pride defines him as a citizen of the City of Earth, and his shift to a stance of humility, redefines him as a citizen of the City of God.

Wolsey urges Cromwell to live with honesty and to bear love for those that mean to harm him, avoiding corruption as a route to success, and directing all of his zeal to “thy country’s, thy God’s, and truth’s” (3.2.448–449) for then if he were to be doomed he would become “a blessed martyr” (3.2.524). This emphasis on humility and integrity speaks to the cultivation of a clear conscience, which emerges through service to God and truth, enabling true service to one’s country, unencumbered by political machinations. Therefore, even if earthly power structures turned against him, he would still be honoured in a heavenly sense and be deemed a martyr. Becoming a martyr through spiritual honour in death and separation from the state resonates with Katharine’s attainment of martyrdom, a moment which plainly illustrates Wolsey’s argument that living for God and truth enable a clear conscience and a streamlined passage to God’s realm, regardless of the rejections of this world.

Not only does this alignment of conscience enable access to God's alternative kingdom, but it also brings genuine happiness and peace to those who possess it. This is evident when Cromwell questions Wolsey as to his state of mind regarding his fall from grace. Wolsey describes himself as "truly happy" (3.2.378) and premises this feeling on a deep sense of self-knowledge and the experience of: "A peace above all earthly dignities,/ A still and quiet conscience" (3.2.380–381). The conscience is "still" for it is at rest, in place, aligned, clear, no longer wrangled, tormented, maligned, muddied. The conscience is quiet as it has no further admonishments to deliver to Wolsey. It is no longer trying to urge him from his pride and folly. This loyal opposition can at last fall into a blissful silence as it has at last been heard and, more importantly, heeded. This brings with it a peace that surpasses all the dignities and majesties of the City of Earth, redefining Wolsey as a citizen of the City of God who attains "the greatest glory...the witness of God in the conscience" (XIV.28). This insight draws attention to the relief that Wolsey finally attains once all of his dubious deeds are in the light. Deeds such as over taxing the people for wars and pageantry, leading to riots, and then "although Henry revokes the terms of the taxation it is the cardinal who seeks to claim the credit in public opinion" (Woodcock 2011:7) displaying his dishonesty, greed, and manipulation of public opinion. Once this peace is attained his thoughts are no longer rife with anxiety regarding who will uncover these corruptions, and he can let go of all need to justify, rationalise, and conceal his actions. This serene, transparent conscience, he recognises, is more desirable than all of the riches, palaces, and titles one can gain through earthly ambition and corruption. It transcends the glories of this world and reaches a glory divine.

This "still and quiet conscience" (3.2.381) clears a path for the directing of prayer, enabling Wolsey to attain this transcendent peace. When Griffith relays the tale of Wolsey's death to Katharine, he indicates how prayers of "repentance...and continual meditations" (4.2.27–28) are interwoven with Wolsey's journey to a peaceful death and allow him to die in union with God. Griffith's last words describing Wolsey are that "he died fearing God" (4.2.68) and Griffith considers this to be a state of

greatest honour. Katharine, who considers Wolsey her enemy, is moved by this tale and learns to see him in the end in a gentler light (4.2.69–75), praying for her enemy (6:13) as an emblem of her own divine citizenship, declaring, “Peace be with him!” (4.2.75). Thus, prayer becomes a means and a measure of Wolsey’s spiritual transformation, signifying to Katharine and the audience the truth of this change. This recuperation of Wolsey’s integrity, and the sympathetic light in which he dies, indicates the power of the City of God to transform even the most wayward of souls, by cultivating a clear conscience through which prayer can freely flow, subverting and transcending the earthly powers that have cast these souls aside. Wolsey’s citizenship, prayer, and ultimately clear conscience lead him into heavenly peace which is eternal life.

Conclusion

What is fascinating about *Henry VIII* is that even though it is presented for a Protestant audience and concludes with an exaltation of Queen Elizabeth I, it offers a compassionate and vibrant characterisation of the overtly Catholic Queen Katharine, who is vividly depicted as a martyr. The accused traitor Buckingham and corrupt Cardinal Wolsey are also dignified through Catholic ritual in their final hours as Buckingham requests prayers for his soul as he nears his death and the comfort of a Catholic abbey provides Wolsey with his final resting place and spiritual renewal through prayer. Is Shakespeare tacitly and perilously aligning himself with Catholic recusants, paying lip service only to the Church of England through amiable portrayals of its founders and maintainers such as Archbishop Cranmer and Queen Elizabeth I, but beneath this, voicing his true allegiances, or do both views co-exist? Although there are many theories regarding Shakespeare’s religious beliefs, sometimes supported by dubious and threadbare evidence, this is not something we can know. Nor do I feel we need to know to appreciate what Shakespeare achieves in this play. By using these historically Catholic characters, Shakespeare singles out accessible archetypes: the innocent accused, personified by Buckingham, the corrupt brought low by pride, personified by Wolsey, and the unfairly rejected and vulnerable, personified by Katharine. In his intricate treatment of the spiritual journeys of these

characters, Shakespeare transcends religious polemics, through the pervasive presence of God's Kingdom in contrast to the kingdom of the earth, a theme that resonates across his fictional Catholic England of the 1530s into the Protestant England of the 1610s and beyond, as exemplified by the endurance of theological works such as Augustine's *City of God*. Through his emphasis on this other realm of power, Shakespeare challenges and subverts not only the authority of Henry VIII and James I, but all past and future temporal power. He demonstrates that falling away from these powers into a new realisation of divine authority is in fact a blessing to those that undergo this descent. Therefore, although on a superficial level the play mimics the Wheel of Fortune trope from the *de casibus* tradition, in which lofty characters are brought low, Shakespeare and Fletcher do something far more profound with the portrayal of these three character arcs. Through the enrolment of these characters as citizens of the City of God, and the alignment of their consciences through which efficacious prayers can flow, each of these character's trajectories is transformed into a fall, not from, but into grace.

Conclusion: Prayers and Plays

Through my exploration of the role of prayer within Shakespeare's plays, I uncover many purposes and possibilities that prayer provides, drawing attention to the ways in which prayer can be heartfelt or manipulative, sincere or strategic, or an ambiguous mixture of these. I argue that prayer can conduct filial attachment, erotic desire, battles for power, and visions of citizenship. These can be projected towards a sovereign being, often defined as God, or evoke something more earthbound, often with fatal consequences¹⁰.

Genre is pertinent in shaping these roles of prayer in the plays because it delineates the landscape of concerns and symbolic resources that shape the meaning of prayer in any given play. In the tragedies, prayer takes on a deeply psychosocial role, mirroring characters' relationships with one another and exposing those dark and delightful spaces that emerge from human interaction. Relationships with fathers and relationships with lovers are crucial bonds that occur across the tragedies, informing much of the action that takes place within them. Thus the tragedies are served well by prayer since it allows the plays to evoke a complex subjectivity and dynamic social relations, investments that only increase the sense of the loss that tragedies try to induce in audiences. In the history plays, prayer takes on a political role, doing things that construct and maintain power, negotiating, endorsing, and manipulating events for the sake of the realm. The way prayer can construct an alternative realm also challenges earthly political power, opening up interplay between these contrasting authorities, which extends the drama in multiple directions across time and space. Although there are interesting moments of prayer in the comedies, I did not find an overall pattern in the depiction of prayer, and thus the comedies did not feature in this study. This indicates the different priorities of comedies, where the focus is placed on the unravelling of complex plots leading to restorative resolutions

¹⁰ It is striking that Shakespeare is able to make equally powerful observations regarding the innermost worlds of his characters as well as regarding the outermost worlds in which they conduct themselves. Brook observes this when he stresses that most playwrights either explore "inner depth and darkness, or else shun these areas, exploring the outside world – each one thinks his world is complete. If Shakespeare had never existed we would quite understandably theorize that the two can never combine" (Brook 1990:40).

amongst characters, rather than deep excavations of the soul or overt political engineering. That said, the comedies often have a supernatural element within them, with gods, spirits, or fairies featuring as part of the action, resonating with the idea of an alternate reality, another metaphysics, that the other genres of Shakespeare's plays articulate¹¹.

Moreover, prayer presents itself in multiple ways within the plays. At times, characters assume traditional postures of prayer, such as Claudius in *Hamlet* who urges his knees to bow, taking on a conventional pose. Similarly, Anne Bullen in *Henry VIII* prays as part of a coronation ceremony, every gesture prescribed and beheld. These embodiments of prayer comment on the potential theatricality of prayer. It can be a hollow act that is convincing only from the outside. Richard II mines this opportunity for theatricality when he activates a conventional oath—"God save the king,"—in new ways, drawing attention to how ritual can be taken for granted and how it can be reanimated to do powerful work. Prayer books are also depicted, such as those used by Ophelia in *Hamlet* and Henry VIII in his eponymous history play. In both cases, these are not represented in favourable ways because they appear to mask the inner realities of the characters and provide formulaic solutions to something that escapes such formalism. The being to which characters pray also varies. Henry prays to a God of War, Desdemona prays to Comfort, reflecting an aspect of divinity that they lean towards and revealing how characters can project their own required image onto the divine. Prayer can also be metaphorical. It symbolises kissing in the *Romeo and Juliet* sonnet, and Anne speaks of her prayers as gifts that she gives to Henry VIII. This metaphorical dimension also evokes a sense of currency enabling prayer to represent a transaction of sorts, epitomised by Henry V's negotiations with God where prayers are his bargaining chips. In all these cases, prayers carry impulses, but those impulses are often misdirected, not reaching that sweet spot that Claudius

¹¹ Because the law forbade the Christian deity and other specifically Christian spiritual beings from being depicted on stage, supernatural worlds had to be drawn from antiquity and folk lore. Alison Shell points out that "there is a kind of piety so sensitive to inappropriateness that it blocks imaginative Christian discourse altogether, and obliges writer to explore secular alternative" (Shell 2014:21). Shell's proposition leaves me curious as to how prayer may have been presented by Shakespeare were he free to depict Christian spiritual beings i.e. if the Christian God were embodied and able to respond.

speaks of but never experiences. Spontaneous prayers such as Ophelia's pleading with the heavens to help Hamlet or Katharine's ecstatic gestures towards God during her vision are examples when this impulse is effectively channelled towards the divine.

Shakespeare does not define this divine being specifically, and the nature of this being also shifts from play to play; his metaphysics is not doctrinaire, in other words. This lack of specificity is not to say that Shakespeare lacks a yearning for the divine or a deep awe for what this possible spiritual reality could impart. His plays allude to the ineffable mystery of the divine, who can only be understood in part, and the playwright grapples with this mystery throughout his career, exploring different facets of divinity, such as father, lover, warrior, and ruler, in different plays, and the ways these different identities elicit manifold outpourings from characters. As *Henry VIII* was most likely Shakespeare's last play, I suggest that it is a culmination of all of his spiritual findings, the play in which he weaves these findings all together, which is why it presents such a cohesive spiritual reality. This cohesive spiritual reality is paradoxically mapped out upon a definitive historical moment that shook religious and political life in England to its core. Prayer, together with a clear conscience, offers stability within this disorder, enabling productive communing with a deity who offers the citizens in that deity's realm something more valuable than anything in this world.

David Kastan says of Shakespeare, "I am not claiming him even as a believer. I don't know what or even if he believed" (Kastan 2014:2-3), which is a safe position to hold. How can we tell what Shakespeare believed when his plays present such a wide spectrum of world views and his characters articulate and enact such varying embodiments of spirituality, especially in moments of prayer? But this position is too safe for me. I suggest rather that out of Shakespeare's handling of prayer, there emerges a robust, defined picture of how characters and by implication audiences can access the divine, most often a Christian deity. This conclusion matters because it challenges the idea that

Shakespeare's theatre is thoroughly secular and instead creates a nuanced picture in which the sacred blends with the secular in the plays, showing the different ways that the divine shapes humanity.

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