MONASH University

“Maim’d Rites”: The Sacrament of Penance and Self-Deception in Shakespeare’s Plays

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A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at

Monash University in 2023

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Abstract

This thesis explores Shakespeare’s experimentation with the structures of the Sacrament of Penance and its Reformed afterlives as a dramaturgical device for representing psychological complexity in his characters. It offers an analytical method which identifies, analyses, and compares secular imitations of the elements of the Sacrament of Penance (examination of conscience, confession, contrition, penance, restitution, and absolution) across Shakespeare’s plays. I call such instances Quasi-Sacraments of Penance, or QSPs. A QSP is an instance of attempted, failed, achieved, or rejected moral introspection, which results in either self-knowledge and reconciliation, or self-deception and manipulation. This new hermeneutic offers alternative pathways in the characterological analysis of Shakespeare’s plays.

Declaration

This thesis is an original work of my research and contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma at any university or equivalent institution and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, this thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

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Date: 29/6/2023

Publications during enrolment

Schumann, Angela, and Peter Groves. "'As it is an Evil': Defensive Equivocation in *Measure for Measure*". *English Studies*, vol 102, no. 6, 2021, pp. 651–670.

Schumann, Angela. "'Que je sois ignorante': une lecture thomiste de l'aveuglement chez Shakespeare et Dante". *Dante et Shakespeare: cosmologie, politique, poétique*. Eds. Isabelle Battesti and Pascale Drouet. Classiques Garnier, 2020.

Schumann, Angela. "'But as a Form in Wax' : An Ecofeminist reading of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*", *Colloquy*, issue 30, 2015, pp. 42–60.

Acknowledgements

My warmest thanks to Peter Groves, my supervisor. What you owed to me was an hour a month (I think), and what you gave was years of unconditional support, unrestricted time, patience, nurturing, and friendship. You have painstakingly moulded me into the researcher I am today, and my gratitude for that can never be fully expressed. Thanks also to my second supervisor, Constant Mews, to the staff and students at Monash, to Roberta Kwan for your helpful advice and encouragement, to my wonderful friends, and to the other academics who generously gave time and encouragement to support me. I could not have done it without you all. Finally, thanks to Mum, Damien, Christie, Jules, Ja, Sam, Sarah, Jack, Charlie, and Michelle: you guys have been with me, believed in me and encouraged me every step of the way, and I would not be here without you. This one belongs to all of us. *Deo gratias*.

Chapter 1

Introduction

One of the reasons that Shakespeare's plays are so enduring in their appeal is the psychological verisimilitude of his characters. Over four hundred years after they were created, they still captivate audiences around the world today.[1] When Macbeth says "To know my deed, 'twere best not know myself" (2.2.70);[2] when Hamlet, after having his old friends Rosencrantz and Guildenstern murdered, claims in response to a mere mention of their names, "They are not near my conscience" (5.2.58); and when Isabella pleads "Let me be ignorant" (*MM* 2.4.76), and in doing so betrays an awareness of the thing she wishes to be ignorant of, a complex and sophisticated psychological model is apparent. This psychological model is of a mind that has a subconscious, is not fully visible to itself, and practices complex self-deception. It is a mind that startlingly resembles our own.[3]

This raises the question of what might have suggested to Shakespeare the sophisticated psychological model found in his characters. What did he draw upon for inspiration? In addition to Shakespeare's powers of observation, some have pointed to the emergence of bourgeois capitalist individualism as an inspiration for the interiority of Shakespeare's characters.[4] An area that has been overlooked, however, as a source for Shakespeare's rich psychological model is the Catholic penitential tradition. While this may seem like an odd choice, as the practice of Catholicism was outlawed in England shortly before Shakespeare's birth, Shakespeare's plays contain a wealth of language, theology, plot devices, jokes, and practices taken from the medieval Sacrament of Penance. Furthermore, Catholic penitential

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[1] The same cannot be said for (say) the characters of Restoration heroic tragedies or eighteenth-century sentimental comedies, plays which present rather narrow culturally-bound assumptions about human behaviour (impossible operatic dilemmas between Love and Honour, for example), that lost their power to convince an audience as soon as the cultures behind them changed.

[2] All references to Shakespeare's plays will be taken from the Riverside edition (1974), unless otherwise indicated.

[3] Samuel Johnson was perhaps the first to notice Shakespeare's innovative representation of interiority and self-deception. Consider, for example, his perceptive account of Posthumus' soliloquy at the beginning of Act 5 of *Cymbeline*:

> This is a soliloquy of nature, uttered when the effervescence of a mind agitated and perturbed spontaneously and inadvertently discharges itself in words. […] He first condemns his own violence; then tries to disburden himself, by imputing part of the crime to *Pisanio*; he next sooths his mind to an artificial and momentary tranquillity, by trying to think that he has been only an instrument of the gods for the happiness of Imogen. (Wilson, 608).

[4] See, for example, Terry Eagleton: "Like most of Shakespeare's villains, in short, Lady Macbeth is a bourgeois individualist, for whom traditional ties of rank and kinship are less constitutive of personal identity than mere obstacles to be surmounted in the pursuit of one's private ends" (49). As Groves and Hiller observe, "It is now almost a commonplace that the Early Modern period saw the beginnings of a new sense of the private self as distinct from society, a new awareness of interiority. Protestants communing in silence with their God was just one aspect of this, as was on a more mundane level the development of private apartments in large houses, or even the new habit of keeping diaries." (7-8).

theology uses a psychological model similar to the one used by Shakespeare in that it is predicated on the mind hiding parts of itself from itself.

This thesis will explore the role of Catholic penitential theology, and its transformation in the Reformation, in Shakespeare's creation of psychologically complex, self-deceiving characters. I propose a new hermeneutic which identifies and analyses secular imitations of the elements of the Sacrament of Penance (examination of conscience, confession, contrition and attrition, penance, restitution, and absolution), and the ways in which they are complicated by Reformed theology, in Shakespeare's plays. I call such instances Quasi-Sacraments of Penance, or QSPs. QSPs are situations in which a character is presented with an opportunity for moral self-examination, and responds to it using the language and structures of the Sacrament of Penance in a desacramentalised, secular context (the parameters of this will be expanded on later in this chapter). These secular imitations of the elements of the Sacrament of Penance show characters either growing in self-awareness and reconciling with others, or deceiving themselves and manipulating others as a result. I will argue that Shakespeare uses the elements of the Sacrament of Penance as a dramaturgical device for creating psychological complexity in his characters.

This thesis challenges the 20th century trend of downplaying the importance of religion in Shakespeare's plays. It offers new evidence of the richness of Shakespeare's engagement with Christian penitential structures and the complex ways in which religious language and structures are used in the plays, and argues for their integral role in creating the illusion of psychological depth in his characters. This reading extends beyond the untheorized character studies approach offered by A. C. Bradley, and also offers an argument against the 20th century reactionary thrust against character studies propounded by the New Critical school.[5] This reading shows that behind character analysis is a conscious, experimental theoretical structure, which validates readings that go beyond the formalist or phenomenological approach.

The purpose of my study is not to engage in the debate over Shakespeare's confessional status. This thesis will explore Shakespeare's artistic experimentation with Catholic penitential structures, but it does not seek to comment on Shakespeare's personal religious convictions (or lack thereof). Neither does it suggest that Shakespeare's poetics and influences are exclusively, or even predominantly, Catholic. I acknowledge the rich variety of ideas that permeate Shakespeare's work, including those of the Reformation, atheism, classical mythology, and humanism, and intend in this thesis to explore the effects of one source of artistic inspiration among many.

Shakespeare's plays engage with Catholic penitential language, structures and theology in a way that shows that Shakespeare and his audiences were familiar with them. For example, Duke Vincentio lectures Juliet on the distinction between contrition and attrition in *Measure for Measure* (2.3.30–34), and Claudius' distress while praying in *Hamlet* hinges upon a recognition that in the Sacrament of Penance confession and contrition are void without restitution (3.3.51–6). In addition to this, there are frequent references to the Sacrament of Penance throughout Shakespeare's corpus. These include the use of Juliet's confession to

[5] See, for example, L. C. Knight's *How Many Children Had Lady Macbeth? An Essay in the Theory and Practice of Shakespeare Criticism* (1933), which criticises earlier character analysis such as that of A. C. Bradley as being naïve, and accuses it of treating characters as real people with lives beyond the text.

Friar Lawrence as a cover for her marriage to Romeo (2.4.180-2), Hamlet's instruction to have Rosencrantz and Guildenstern executed with no "shriving time allow'd" (5.2.47), and Leontes' comparison of his friendship with Camillo to the relationship of a penitent and confessor:

> … I have trusted thee, Camillo,
> With all the nearest things to my heart, as well
> My chamber-councils, wherein, priest-like, thou
> Hast cleans'd my bosom: I from thee departed
> Thy penitent reform'd. (1.2.235–9)

Many instances of Catholic penitential structures and language in Shakespeare's plays, especially the more overt instances, have been identified and explored. A. C. Bradley, for example, recognizes Hamlet as playing "father confessor" to Gertrude in the 'closet scene' (138). However, there is no comprehensive study of secular imitations of the Sacrament of Penance across Shakespeare's dramatic corpus and how they relate to the representation of psychological verisimilitude. This thesis addresses this gap and explores how Shakespeare develops QSPs across his dramatic career as a device for showcasing psychological complexity.

The Sacrament of Penance: A theology of self-examination

Shakespeare and his audience lived amid the reverberations of the cultural paradigm shift caused by the Reformation. The practice of confession and penance had been legally reformed shortly before Shakespeare's birth, creating a culture in which people were adjusting to a new way of dealing with their sins. Previously, for most of Shakespeare's parents' lives, and still in most of Europe, confession of sins was a sacrament: a formalized ritual regulated by the Church. Despite the institutionalized nature of the practice, the confession of sins to a priest was strictly confidential and protected. The importance of confidentiality was emphasized by the IV Lateran Council in 1215, which instituted severe penalties for any priest who broke the seal of confession:

> [I]f anyone presumes to reveal a sin disclosed to him in confession, we decree that he is not only to be deposed from his priestly office but also to be confined to a strict monastery to do perpetual penance. (Evans, Can. 21)

This afforded (assuming good faith on the part of the priest and penitent) a space of intimacy and trust such as that described by Leontes, in which the "nearest things to [the] heart" could be safely revealed. The intimacy with one's confessor was often increased by the longevity of the relationship, as one could have the same confessor for decades if remaining in a single parish. Regulations around the prescription of particular penances for particular sins fostered a sense of stability and informed expectations, and the granting of absolution gave a sense of security that one's sins had been forgiven. Long lists of sins known as confession manuals or penitentials assisted people in examining their consciences. These further contributed to a sense of stability, knowability, and categorisation regarding sin and repentance.

Reformers such as Martin Luther, and in England Bishop John Jewel, opposed the practice of the Sacrament of Penance, as had the Wycliffite or 'Lollard' movement in England since the late 14th century. They saw the Catholic church's mediation and regulation of the confession of sins as an unnecessary and harmful interference in the sinner's relationship with God. Reformers rejected the Sacrament of Penance in favour of people confessing their sins directly to God, unmediated and unregulated. Reformers recognised, however, that scripture commands Christians to confess their sins to one another: "Acknowledge your fautes one to another" (James 5:16)[6]. The confession of sins to other people was therefore retained, but in a different manner. Rather than confessing to a priest, laypeople were encouraged to confess their sins to each other in keeping with the newly established "priesthood of all believers". The confession of sins was desacramentalised, and transformed into an unregulated, flexible, and personalised practice.

This deformalisation of the confession of sins posed an interesting problem for Reformed believers in the sixteenth century. There was doubtless a sense of relief and empowerment for many people in no longer having to confess their sins and submit to the spiritual authority of priests. However, the lack of structure would also have brought with it anxieties around how this new form of dealing with sins would work. Without a formulaic examination of conscience, what would introspection look like? What criteria would the mind use to examine itself? Without a priest, or some disinterested authoritative substitute, will a person be sufficiently objective in reviewing potentially sinful behaviours? Will they impose upon themselves adequate restitution? Will people be able to recognise their own scrupulosity? Without the confidentiality guaranteed by the Sacrament of Penance and enforced by the Church, could one's sins be safely confided in another person? How would the personal, professional, or political relationship between two believers affect the quality of their confession of sins to one another?

These questions confronted newly reformed early modern Christians, including Shakespeare[7] and his contemporaries. These questions also held rich dramatic potential for Shakespeare. The majority of Quasi-Sacraments of Penance in Shakespeare's plays are predicated upon problematic secular imitations of the structures of the Sacrament of Penance involving the above questions. In these scenarios the structures are corrupted or exploited, producing psychologically complex manipulation and self-deception.

In order to discuss Shakespeare's engagement with the structures of the Sacrament of Penance it is necessary to understand its theology. The theology and practice of the Sacrament of Penance emerged in the Early Church, developed in the middle ages and was formalized in 1215 at the IV Lateran Council. The theology of the Sacrament of Penance addresses, through a moral and spiritual framework, the psychological tendency towards self-

[6] All biblical references are taken from the Geneva Bible (1599) unless otherwise indicated. According to Shaheen, "The vast majority of Shakespeare's biblical references cannot be traced to any one version, since the many Tudor Bibles are often too similar to be differentiated" (11). However, "Shakespeare's references are often closer to the Geneva Bible than to any other version. It was the most popular version of the day, and it is only natural to assume that he owned a copy" (11). Nonetheless, "the Geneva was not the only version to which Shakespeare referred. At times he is closest to the Bishops' Bible. There are also a number of passages in which he is *least* like the Geneva and closer to the other versions of his day" (12).

[7] Whether or not Shakespeare's personal beliefs aligned with those of a particular Christian faith, or any faith at all, he was nominally a baptised (Anglican) Christian, and for the most part probably attended Church weekly as the law required.

deception.[8] It has multiple structural features that show an emphasis on introspection and uncovering hidden motives and desires, such as confession to a priest, confidentiality, and the examination of conscience.

The Sacrament of Penance was designed to restore the relationship of the baptized Christian, after having sinned (known as a 'penitent'), with God and the Church. The sacrament consists of four essential elements: sorrow of heart (contrition), confession of sins to a priest, performance of penance (satisfaction), and absolution from the priest. The first three elements—contrition, confession, and satisfaction—must be fulfilled by the penitent, while the fourth element, absolution, is granted by the priest. While the practice and institution of the sacrament took centuries to develop, these four elements have sat consistently at its core. Historian Thomas Tentler observes that there is "a rough continuity between the institutions of forgiveness in the early church and those that were known on the eve of the Reformation" (Tentler, 3). He explains that throughout this time and into the present day, these "four substantive elements persist" (Tentler, 3).

The Council of Trent (1545-63) defined the first requirement of the Sacrament of Penance, contrition, as "a sorrow of mind, and a detestation for sin committed, with the purpose of not sinning for the future" (XIV.4). Contrition could either be 'perfect' or 'imperfect'. Perfect contrition arises from a sorrow at having offended God, whereas imperfect contrition, known as 'attrition', "commonly arises either from the consideration of the heinousness of sin or from the fear of hell and of punishment" (XIV.4). Attrition is considered satisfactory for fulfilling the requirement of contrition: the Council of Trent states that attrition "not only does not make one a hypocrite and a greater sinner, but is even a gift of God and an impulse of the Holy Ghost" (XIV.4). The distinction between contrition and attrition is explained by Duke Vincentio when he is impersonating a friar-confessor in *Measure for Measure*:

> lest you do repent
> As that the sin hath brought you to this shame, [public disgrace]
> Which sorrow is always toward ourselves, not heaven,
> Showing we would not spare heaven as we love it,
> But as we stand in fear— (2.3.30-34)

Even though attrition is sufficient, the Duke nonetheless probes Juliet as to the quality of her contrition, warning her against the inferior kind. Both attrition and contrition are represented in Shakespeare's characters. Richard III, for example, expresses an approximation to attrition when he articulates his fear of hell after being visited by the ghosts of his victims:

> Cold fearful drops stand on my trembling flesh
> …
> All several sins, all us'd in each degree,
> Throng to the bar, crying all, 'Guilty, guilty!' (5.3.181, 198-9)

Lady Macbeth also expresses attrition through her horror of the damnation that awaits her because of Duncan's murder: "Hell is murky" (5.1.36). 'Perfect' contrition is expressed by

[8] In this way it is oddly like the much later rise of science, in that it represents a systematic reasoned attempt to obviate human cognitive bias.

Juliet in *Measure for Measure* in response to the Duke's interrogation: "I do repent me as it is an evil" (2.3.35).

The second requirement, confession of sins, requires the penitent to "confess each and every mortal sin which is called to mind by due and careful examination." (Waterworth, Council of Trent, *Can. de poenit.,* vii). Further qualifications are added to this, with an injunction to "confess even hidden sins and those that are against the last two precepts of the Decalogue" (Waterworth, *Can. de poenit.,* vii). The emphasis on "careful examination", "hidden sins", and invisible sins of thought (the "last two precepts of the Decalogue", or Ten Commandments, are about coveting), indicates an awareness of self-deception and subconscious cognition. This awareness of psychological complexity is shown by thinkers in the early Church when discussing sin and penitence. Augustine of Hippo, for example, articulates the struggle against self-deception endemic in moral self-examination: "Cleanse me, O Lord, from my secret sins … I will not deceive myself lest my iniquity be a false witness to itself" (*Confessions*, 1.5.6). Pope Gregory I (commonly known as Gregory the Great) similarly states in the late sixth century:

> [T]here are some vices which give the appearance of righteousness, but they proceed from twisted depravity, for the malice of our enemy hides itself with such art that it often depicts errors before the eye of the deceived mind as virtues (*Moralia in Iob*, 32.22.45).

This shows that the theology of the confession of sins centers on a perception of the mind as having a proclivity towards self-deception. This perception is manifested in the emphasis on examination of conscience prior to confession, and in the requirement to confess to a priest (called 'auricular confession'), who ideally provides an objective and expert perspective that can combat the mind's tendency to conceal 'secret sins' from itself or disguise vices as virtues.[9] The IV Lateran Council defined the priest's role as being analogous to that of a doctor, who must assist the penitent with self-examination in order to diagnose and eliminate sin:

> The priest shall be discerning and prudent, so that like a skilled doctor he may pour wine and oil over the wounds of the injured one. Let him carefully inquire about the circumstances of both the sinner and the sin, so that he may prudently discern what sort of advice he ought to give and what remedy to apply, using various means to heal the sick person. (Can. 21)

The emphasis on 'prudent discernment' and 'careful enquiry' suggests an awareness of the intricacy of the mind and its ability to self-deceive.

There are many instances in Shakespeare's plays of characters confessing sins in secular imitations of auricular confession. Sometimes these confessions are straightforward, such as Edmund's admission, "What you have charg'd me with, that I have done" (*Lr* 5.3.163). At other times they are more complex, such as Hamlet's confessing to Ophelia "I am very proud, revengeful, ambitious, with more offenses at my beck than I have thoughts to put them in, imagination to give them shape, or time to act them in" (3.1.123-6). Hamlet's self-accusations

[9] For an excellent study on moral self-deception and the representation of vices disguising themselves as virtues in the writings of the patristics, see Newhauser.

suggest self-examination and ‘hidden’ sins of thought. However, they also function as a threat against Ophelia and those who have forced her to help them spy on him. Hamlet’s use of the structures of the Sacrament of Penance in this scene (“Nymph, in thy orisons / Be all my sins rememb’red” (3.1.88-9) to attack Ophelia (“wise men know well enough what monsters you make of them” 3.1.138-9) is an example of Shakespeare’s experimentation with the corruption of the elements of the Sacrament of Penance in a secular context.

The third requirement of the Sacrament of Penance is satisfaction. Satisfaction involves penance, or punishment, for one’s sins. This can be “voluntarily undertaken”, “imposed at the discretion of the priest according to the measure of [one’s] delinquency”, or “by the temporal scourges inflicted by God, and borne patiently by [the penitent]” (Trent, XIV.9). Penance is discussed in Shakespeare’s plays in places such as *The Winter’s Tale*, in which Cleomines claims that Leontes has “paid down / More penitence than done trespass” (5.1.3-4) after having destroyed his own family. Paulina, on the other hand, argues that

> A thousand knees
> Ten thousand years together, naked, fasting,
> Upon a barren mountain, and still winter
> In storm perpetual, could not move the gods
> To look that way thou wert. (3.2.210–214)

For Cleomines penance is finite and transactional. For Paulina, Leontes’ sin is unforgivable, and penance is ineffectual. In addition to penance, one might also be required to perform restitution as part of satisfaction. Restitution involves restoring what has been lost or damaged, such as returning stolen goods. Claudius, in *Hamlet*, identifies his unwillingness to perform restitution—to relinquish “My crown, mine own ambition, and my queen” (3.3.55)—as a barrier to his salvation: “May one be pardon’d and retain th’ offense?” (3.3.56). His spiritual despair centers on his awareness that withholding restitution renders repentance insincere.

The problem raised by Cleomines and Paulina of how much penance was appropriate for a given sin was addressed in the middle ages through the development of handbooks of penance known as confession manuals, or penitentials. Penitentials originated in Ireland in the sixth century, and contained long lists of sins along with the appropriate penance a priest should impose for each sin (Tentler, 9). These documents “guided the priest in inducing candor, determining guilt, and prescribing remedies for sin” (Frantzen, ix). Although initially designed to be used by priests, confession manuals grew in popularity with the laity, particularly towards the late middle ages. Two confession manuals, for example, St. Antoninus of Florence’s *Confessionale: defecerunt scrutantes scrutinio* and Andreas de Escobar’s *Modus confitendi* were “among the most frequently printed books in the fifteenth century” (Tentler, 39). Laypeople used confession manuals to help with the examination of conscience, which was encouraged by the Church as a nightly practice to reflect upon the day and help with self-awareness.[10]

The final element of the Sacrament of Penance is absolution. Absolution consists of a speech act performed by the priest which mediates God’s forgiveness of the penitent: “I absolve thee, &c” (Trent, XIV.3). Absolution constitutes “the remission of… the punishment due to sin,

[10] See DeRosa, 286, and Durr, 225–6.

granted by the Church… [which] frees man from sin" (Hanna). Absolution is analogically performed in Shakespeare's plays. Cordelia, for example, responds to Lear's repentant invitation to revenge herself upon him ("you have some cause") by saying "No cause, no cause" (4.7.74). Van Dijkhuizen observes that "she obliterates her father's wrongdoings and effectively denies that they have occurred, in a gesture reminiscent of divine forgiveness as a radical erasure of sin" (*A Literary History,* 58).

The theology of the Sacrament of Penance outlined above was part of the fabric of English and European medieval culture. The cultural interest of the middle ages in sin, confession, repentance and self-examination manifested itself in practical texts, poetry and drama. As Frantzen argues, "The heightened spiritual awareness achieved in confession was sustained by means of prayer, preaching, and poetry." (11-12). Catholic penitential culture, therefore, influenced the literary and dramatic culture that Shakespeare inherited. One of the earliest examples of the dramatization of penitential theology is Prudentius' *Psychomachia*. *Psychomachia* is an early fifth-century poem considered to be one of the first and most influential medieval allegories. It depicts an embodied performance of moral self-deception and introspection through a battle between corresponding vices and virtues, the vices craftily disguising themselves as virtues. Avarice, for example, disguises herself as thrift: "What amounts to plundering and thieving and greedily concealing acquisitions / She would flaunt under the tender name of care for one's children".[11]

Medieval morality plays, which were still popular during Shakespeare's childhood, were also predicated on Catholic moral and sacramental theology, and provided a theatrical medium through which ideas about sin, grace, repentance, and salvation were explored. The late fifteenth-century play *The Summoning of Everyman*, for example, follows the allegorical journey of 'Everyman'—unambiguously representative of humanity—from sin to salvation. In this journey Everyman meets 'Confession', who invites him to salvation through the "precious jewel" of penance:

> [Confessyon]:
>
> I wyll you comforte as well as I can.
> And a precyous iewell I wyll gyue the,
> Called penaunce, voyder of aduersyte; (12.556-8)

Morality plays retained their popularity into the sixteenth century and had considerable influence on early modern English drama. One such morality play, *The Cradle of Security*, is known to have been performed at Gloucester—less than forty miles from Stratford-upon-Avon—between 1570 and 1574, which means that Shakespeare may have seen it as a child.[12] There are also explicit references to morality play conventions in Shakespeare's plays, such as in *Richard III* when Richard says "Thus, like the formal Vice, Iniquity, / I moralize two meanings in one word" (3.1.82-3).

[11] *Quod rapere et clepere est auideque abscondere parta, / natorum curam dulci sub nomine iactet.* (*Psychomachia*, 562-63, CCL 126:169).

[12] See Willis' *Mount Tabor, or Private Exercises of a Penitent Sinner* (1639), in which Willis, born in the same year as Shakespeare, describes how his father took him to see the morality play sometime between 1570 and 1574 at the Bothall in Gloucester. He writes that "The sight took such impression in me that when I came to man's estate, it was as fresh in my memory as if I had seen it newly acted."

Other medieval writers such as Dante and Chaucer also drew on penitential theology and the psychological model it offered to create psychologically sophisticated characters comparable to those of Shakespeare. Dante's Francesca, for example, uses language that implies self-deception when she explains why she is in hell. Her language suggests a lack of agency in the adultery she committed: "Love, who absolves no one beloved from loving, / seized me so strongly with his charm" (*Inf* 103-4). The conflation of lust with love, the characterisation of it as an irresistible and almost violent force, and the use of penitential language ("absolves") to justify what she understands to be sin create a sophisticated representation of self-deception and subconscious cognition. Similarly, Chaucer's 'Prioresse' in the General Prologue of *The Canterbury Tales* is represented as performing moral self-deception. She is described as "charitable and so pitous" (A142), and "al… conscience and tendre herte" (A150). However, the text reveals that her charity only extends towards mice (A144) and "smale houndes" (A146), to which she feeds delicacies (A147); there is a notable absence of charity towards the poor. This suggests her having disguised the vice of wasteful sentimentality as the virtue of charity through subtle, subconscious self-deception.

Chaucer was widely available in Shakespeare's time, and Shakespeare clearly draws upon "The Knight's Tale" in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. As for Dante, Claudio's fear of being "blown with restless violence round about / This pendant world" (*MM* 3.1.124–5) after death coincides strikingly with Dante's punishment for the lustful in *Inferno*, which is what Claudio is being executed for. The possibility that Shakespeare could read Italian is strengthened by his reproduction in *Othello* of unusual words from the Italian source, Cinthio's *Il Moro*, which do not appear in the French, such as "acerb" (*acerbissima*). This shows that the characterological model of self-deception and subconscious cognition drawn from the penitential tradition in medieval literature was available to Shakespeare and may have influenced his own characterization.

Reformed Penance in Elizabethan and Jacobean England

In the decades leading up to Shakespeare's birth reformers developed a revised version of the penitential model they had inherited from the medieval church. This revised version downgraded confession from a sacrament to a personal, unregulated practice between an individual and God, or between laypeople. The priest, the seal of confession, confession manuals, the imposition of penances, and absolution were removed. This new theology provided opportunities for reimagining unregulated self-examination and confession in a secular context, which I will argue Shakespeare exploits in his plays.

Martin Luther prescribed two types of reformed confession: "(a) the confession and plea for forgiveness made to God alone and (b) the confession that is made to the neighbor alone" (*Exhortation*, 8). The second type, confession to one's neighbour, could be made generally or in private. General, public confession of sin, where "we mutually confess our guilt and our desire for forgiveness" (*Exhortation*, 10), was prescribed for daily practice as a community. This could be achieved through praying the Lord's Prayer (*Exhortation*, 10). Private confession to one's neighbour was also recommended:

> If something particular weighs upon us or troubles us… this private form of confession gives us the opportunity of laying the matter before some brother. We may receive counsel, comfort, and strength when and however often we wish. (*Exhortation,* 13).

Here the hearer of sins— "some brother"—need not be a cleric, but can be anybody. Clarence in *Richard III* confesses to his jailer (1.4.1-75), and Hamlet, in a much more problematic way, confesses to Ophelia in the nunnery scene, in which Shakespeare experiments with confession between individuals with a power imbalance.[13]

English authorities adopted Luther's desacramentalised and de-institutionalised approach to confession and repentance over the course of the English Reformation. While the practice of the Sacrament of Penance was initially preserved during the early Henrician Reforms and in Cromwell's *Ten Articles* of 1536, it was opposed by Edward VI. It was reinstated by Mary I, but finally rejected in the *Thirty-Nine Articles*,[14] and outlawed permanently in 1559 by the Elizabethan Act of Uniformity.[15] The Act mandated "imprisonment" for repeat offenders (1 *Elizabeth*, Cap. 2). Anglican Bishop John Jewel articulates the English adoption of Luther's penitential reforms, instructing Elizabethans to confess "either in the secret thought of thy heart before God, or else in the hearing and presence of men" (Jewel, n. pag). Like Luther, he makes it clear that the confession "in the hearing and presence of men" must not be clerical, but must occur among "every one of the faithful". This, he argues, is because "the Priests[']
… hear[ing] the private confessions of the people, and listen[ing] to their whisperings … is no commandment or ordinance of God" (Jewel).

What became of the four core elements of the Sacrament of Penance (contrition, confession, satisfaction, and absolution)? Contrition was retained. The Elizabethan *Book of Homilies* affirms that "we must be earnestly sorry for our sinnes, and vnfeignedly lament and bewayle that wee haue by them so greeuously offended our most bounteous and mercifull GOD" (Griffiths, 537). Interestingly, this definition excludes the imperfect version, attrition (repentance motivated by fear of damnation). This raises the problem of uncertainty regarding whether the motivation for one's repentance is of the right kind. The second element, confession of sins, was retained in its non-clerical form as outlined above by Luther and Bishop John Jewel. Satisfaction was replaced by the more generalised instruction to "[amend] [one's] life" (Griffiths, 452). This may include restorative action towards a wronged party: "when the godly have taken offence at any of our doings that are evil, we must give all heed to content their minds, and reconcile ourselves again unto them (Jewel).

The last of the four elements, absolution, was not retained in the reformed model of confession. Formal absolution was considered unnecessary, as the reformers believed that God's forgiveness should not be mediated or interfered with by a priest, and that Christ's

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[13] This will be explored in Chapter 3.

[14] Article 25 of *The Thirty-Nine Articles* states that "Penance [is] not to be counted for [one of the] Sacraments of the Gospel, being [one of] such as have grown partly of the corrupt following of the Apostles" (Gibson).

[15] The Act of Uniformity forbade the use of "any other rite… administration of the sacraments, or other open prayers, than is mentioned and set forth in [the *Book of Common Prayer*]", on pain of "imprisonment" (*1 Elizabeth, Cap. 2*). A document by the Archbishop of Canterbury in the late 1570s demonstrates the targeted elimination of the practice: it requires the names to be reported of "any man or woman" who "resorteth to any popish priest for shrift or auricular confession" (Edmond Archbishop of Canterburie, primate of all England, *Articles to be enquired of within the prouince of Canterburie in the metropoliticall visitation of the most reuerend father in God* (1577, 1580), Art. 40. STC 10155.7).

sacrifice on the cross was a once and forever absolution from all sin for the elect. People were encouraged to have faith that they had been forgiven. This absence of the audible reassurance provided by the speech act of absolution left room for anxiety over whether one *had* been forgiven. This is expressed by Clarence in his distressed uncertainty over whether God will punish his family for his sins:

> Oh God! if my deep pray'rs cannot appease thee
> …
> Yet execute thy wrath in me alone!
> O, spare my guiltless wife and my poor children! (*R3* 1.4.69, 171-2)

By the time Shakespeare was born in 1564, five years after the Act of Uniformity was passed, conformity to Anglicanism had been written into law, and the Reformed version of confession was the only legal one. As Christopher Haigh points out, however, these top-down changes did not necessarily represent the attitudes and practices of the populace, as in many parishes "Catholic priests and traditionalist laity were in large majorities" (252). In many areas "the bishops and officials of the Church of England had long struggles to impose the Prayer Book and Injunctions on the parishes", and Catholic practices persisted for decades (252). According to Alan Dures, in certain areas numbers of Catholic recusants even grew during Elizabeth's reign and beyond:

> In Lancashire the increase in recusancy was dramatic. The Archiepiscopal Visitation of 1578 recorded 304 recusants, yet by 1590 this had risen to 534, a figure which probably underestimates real recusant strength. By the first year of James's reign the number had risen to over 3,500. (27)

This means that the competing theologies of Catholic and Reformed confession were part of the lived experience of Shakespeare and his audiences, providing a rich opportunity for artistic experimentation.[16]

Discussing Religion in Shakespeare

My study of Shakespeare's engagement with the structures of the Sacrament of Penance contributes to the current 'Turn to Religion' in early modern English studies. The term 'Turn

[16] An example of the theological sophistication of ordinary people during this period can be found in *The Oxford Book of English Talk*, which shows a record of the trial of Elizabeth Driver, a farmer's wife, who was martyred for her Protestant faith in 1558:

> *Chancellor.* Woman, woman, what saiest thou to the blessed sacrament of the aulter? Doest thou not beleve that it is very fleash and bloude after the wordes be spoken of consecration?
>
> …
>
> *Driver's Wife.* I wyl saye nothing to it. For you wyl neither beleve me nor your selves: for yesterdaye I asked you what a sacrament was, and you sayde it was a signe, and I agreed therto, and sayd it was the truth, confirming it by the scriptures, so that I wente not from your owne wordes: and now yee come and aske mee agayne of such a sacrament as I tolde you I never read of in the scriptures. (Sutherland, 43-44)

to Religion' was coined in 2004 by Jackson and Marotti, who observed that "Religion [is] once again at the centre in interpretations of early modern culture" (167). The Turn to Religion describes a renewed interest in religious structures and traditions in the works of Shakespeare and his contemporaries that has been growing in the critical field since the turn of the millennium. This movement is evidenced by publications such as *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare and Religion* (Hamlin, 2019), and has been tracked by studies such as "The Turn to Religion in Early Modern English Studies" (Jackson & Marotti, 2004), "Exploring the Critical Turn to Religion in Early Modern Drama Studies" (Munro, 2015), "Recent Studies in Religious Conversion" (Stelling, 2017) and "Shakespeare and Religion" (Cox, 2018).[17] The 2021 World Shakespeare Congress evidenced this development, devoting two seminars to questions of religion in Shakespeare.[18] As Graham Ward notes, "Religion is, once more, haunting the imagination of the West" (*True Religion*, vii).

Current discussion of religion in Shakespeare follows centuries of debate over the question of Shakespeare's personal religious affiliation. Whether Shakespeare was a loyal Anglican or a covert Catholic (or, indeed, an atheist or an agnostic) has been the subject of much argument. Evidence from Shakespeare's life regarding his personal religious loyalties is inconclusive. Shakespeare was baptised into the Church of England and attended services weekly as the law required. But he also had family ties with the underground Catholic Church: his mother belonged to the staunchly Catholic Arden family, and the Jesuit martyr Robert Southwell was a distant cousin. The topic of Shakespeare's religious loyalties was particularly controversial in the nineteenth century, which saw both Shakespeare's status growing as a national English icon, and Catholic emancipation in 1829.[19] Revd. F.D. Maurice named Shakespeare as one of "the children of the Reformation" (63), while others like Henry Sebastian Bowden argued for a Catholic Shakespeare.[20] The debate continued through the twentieth century and into the present,[21] some authors taking a more extreme approach to the question of Shakespeare's religious partisanship.[22] This thesis will not engage with the question of Shakespeare's personal religious affiliation, or lack thereof. Instead, this thesis explores how as an artist Shakespeare draws on the psychological model presented by the Catholic penitential

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[17] Books from the last two decades on the subject of Shakespeare and Religion include Beatrice Batson, Ed. *Shakespeare's Christianity: The Protestant and Catholic Poetics of* Julius Caesar*,* Macbeth *and* Hamlet (2006); Hamlin, *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare and Religion* (2019); Beckwith, *Shakespeare and the Grammar of Forgiveness* (2011); Shapiro, *Shakespeare and the Jews* (2016); Sterret, *The Unheard Prayer: Religious Toleration in Shakespeare's Drama* (2012); Graham and Collington, *Shakespeare and Religious Change* (2009); Jackson and Marotti, *Shakespeare and Religion: Early Modern and Postmodern Perspectives* (2011); McCoy, *Faith in Shakespeare* (2013); Loewenstein and Witmore, *Shakespeare and Early Modern Religion* (2014); Jensen, *Religion and Revelry in Shakespeare's Festive World* (2008); Adelman, *Blood Relations* (2010); Kastan: *A Will to Believe* (2014); Shell, *Shakespeare and Religion* (2010); Groves, *Texts and Traditions: Religion in Shakespeare 1592-1604* (2006); Mayer, *Shakespeare's Hybrid Faith* (2006); Fernie, *Spiritual Shakespeares* (2005); Holland, *Shakespeare and Religions* (2001); Baker, *Shakespeare, Theology, and the Unstaged God* (2019).

[18] http://wsc2021.org/

[19] For a good summary of the nineteenth century debate over Shakespeare's brand of Christianity, see Foulkes, Richard. "William Shakespeare: The Model Victorian Protestant." *Shakespeare*. vol. 5, no. 1, 2009, pp. 68–81.

[20] see Bowden, 1899.

[21] For a good summary of the debate, see John Cox's "Shakespeare and Religion" (2018); McCoy's *Faith in Shakespeare* (2013) pp7-15 (from the Romantics to 2013); Parvini's *Shakespeare and Contemporary Theory* (2012); and Richmond's *Shakespeare, Catholicism & Romance* (2000) pp 13-16.

[22] See, for example, Claire Asquith's *Shadowplay: The Hidden Beliefs and Coded Politics of William Shakespeare* (2005), and Richard Wilson's *Secret Shakespeare: Studies in Theatre, Religion and Resistance* (2004) which argue for Shakespeare's active involvement in Catholic resistance.

tradition, and experiments with its structures and with how those structures were complicated by Reformed theology, in his characterization. This thesis investigates literary experimentation, not partisanship.

The twenty-first century studies of religion in Shakespeare that comprise the Turn to Religion show a refreshing departure from the debate over Shakespeare's personal beliefs. In 2003, for example, Taylor and Beauregard's collection of essays entitled *Shakespeare and the Culture of Christianity in Early Modern England* sought to push beyond the debate over Shakespeare's personal religion. It aimed instead to establish the effect of contemporary religious history on Shakespeare's thought: "This collection of essays attempts to move the conversation 'to the next level', to a point where we can more maturely estimate the presence of Catholic, Protestant, and secular strands in Shakespeare" (Taylor & Beauregard, 24).

The Turn to Religion in Shakespeare studies was spearheaded by works such as Stephen Greenblatt's *Hamlet in Purgatory* (2001). In this book Greenblatt explores the role that the Catholic doctrine of purgatory played in the formation of the medieval imagination and in Shakespeare's art. In these analyses Greenblatt demonstrates the pervasive presence of purgatory in the individual and collective psyche:

> The notion of suffrages—masses, almsgiving, fasts, and prayers—gave mourners something constructive to do with their feelings of grief and confirmed those feelings of reciprocity that survived, at least for a limited time, the shock of death. (102-3)

He then argues that the theological and political significance of purgatory manifests itself in *Hamlet*. He argues that Shakespeare uses King Hamlet's ghost as an expression of the cultural loss of the belief in purgatory due to the Reformation. This, for Greenblatt, is manifested in the Ghost's emphasis on memory, even over revenge: "what is at stake in the shift of emphasis from vengeance to remembrance is nothing less than the whole play" (Greenblatt, 208). The critical field has progressed since Greenblatt's study, but it nonetheless presents a watershed in studying religion in Shakespeare. While my methodology departs from Greenblatt's new-historicist approach, which reads *Hamlet* as an expression of early modern grief for the connectivity with the dead provided by purgatory, it does seek, like Greenblatt, to study the extent of Shakespeare's engagement with a Catholic theological tradition in his plays.

Studies of Confession in Shakespeare's Plays

The Sacrament of Penance in Shakespeare's plays had been observed in the twentieth century, with A. C. Bradley's identification of Hamlet as a "father-confessor" (138) to his mother in 1905, and Robert Grams Hunter's 1965 book, *Shakespeare and the Comedy of Forgiveness*. In this book Hunter studies the "*dénouement* of forgiveness" (2) in *The Winter's Tale*, *Cymbeline, The Tempest*, *All's Well That Ends Well* and *Much Ado About Nothing*. He argues that the comic ending of each of these plays depends on forgiveness, and that they perform a secular reimagining of the medieval theatre of grace and redemption.

In the last two decades there have been important studies exploring the Sacrament of Penance in Shakespeare's plays. Most have focussed on *Hamlet*, *Measure for Measure*, *The Winter's Tale*, *Cymbeline, The Tempest* and *King Lear*. These studies have analysed confessional scenes in a handful of plays, or in a single play. They have explored the ways in which Shakespeare's engagement with confession reflects contemporary attitudes and beliefs, explores political power dynamics, or expresses a nostalgia for medieval sacramental confession. None of these studies offers a comprehensive framework for analysing and comparing secular imitations of the elements of the Sacrament of Penance across Shakespeare's plays. Neither do they explore how Shakespeare uses these elements to create psychological complexity in his characters. My thesis addresses this gap. What follows is a survey of the most pertinent studies of Shakespeare's engagement with the Sacrament of Penance and a discussion of how this thesis builds on or departs from them.

Joseph Sterrett's "Confessing Claudius: sovereignty, fraternity and isolation at the heart of *Hamlet*" (2009) examines *Hamlet* in light of the "confessional culture" of Elizabethan England. This includes not merely Catholic and Reformed versions of confession, but also extends to the publication and circulation of often-sensationalised legal and personal confessions. Sterrett highlights the performative nature of confession in Elizabethan culture: "We could distinguish between confessions that appeal for forgiveness or reconciliation and those that seek to evangelise and 'guide' by way of holy example. In either case they illustrate the outward orientation of a confession as a display." (745). Sterrett explores confession, which he argues "lies at the heart of *Hamlet*" (749), in light of the famously ambiguous confession of the Earl of Essex, arguing that the play expresses the anxiety around whether "real interiority" can ever truly be expressed or confessed (749). Sterret's focus on the external, performative nature of confession neglects the interiority represented in secular imitations of confession in the play, which I will explore in this thesis.

Sterrett also argues that Claudius' confession expresses the problematisation of reformed confession: "it is here [Claudius' confession] that the key to the play's programme of failed confessions lies, perhaps suggesting that confession no longer works in the Protestant world" (752). Sterrett's argument for the source of Claudius' inability to successfully confess does not, consider the implications of the requirements of the Sacrament of Penance, which Claudius invokes. Sterrett argues that:

> Claudius is caught not principally in his inability to imagine a bridge between the competing imperatives of power and piety, but in his isolation. He cannot find a prayer because he cannot conceive of anyone listening and can find nothing definitive, a soul within or a friend without, that can give his prayer meaning. (756)

This overlooks the stated reason for Claudius' failed confession: though he feels contrition (by convention, soliloquists do not lie), he cannot make satisfaction by performing restitution and relinquishing "[his] crown, [his] own ambition, and [his] queen" (*Ham* 3.3.55). My reading of penitential scenes in *Hamlet* will take into account the interiority and psychological complexity produced by the text that Sterrett's reading neglects. It will also, however, build on Sterrett's idea that Shakespeare represents confession as "no longer work[ing] in the Protestant world". This statement is oversimplified, but I will argue that the adjustment to the Reformed format for confessing sins posed some problems, such as a

secular power imbalance between participants in confession like Hamlet and Ophelia or Angelo and Isabella, which Shakespeare exploits in interesting ways.

In 2011 Sarah Beckwith published the seminal book *Shakespeare and the Grammar of Forgiveness*, in which she explores the relationship between the Sacrament of Penance and Shakespearean scenes of forgiveness. The book examines the significant impact of medieval and early modern penitential practices on Shakespeare's works, and on the language surrounding confession, acknowledgement, and reconciliation: "The Medieval home of the language of acknowledgment is the sacrament of penance, and the earliest uses of the word 'acknowe' are intimately bound up with the histories of this sacrament" (2). In chapter 3, "Repairs in the Dark", Beckwith argues that in *Measure for Measure* the Duke's usurpation of the clothing and spiritual authority of a friar-confessor reflects not only the contentious practices of James I who reportedly disguised himself in order to observe the populace, but also the anxiety of English people regarding the installation of the monarch as head of the Church and the resultant blending of spiritual and political power: "As friar [confessor], the Duke can procure the secrets of the soul so that they become fully available to the sovereign state" (73). While some studies of confession in *Measure for Measure* see, like Beckwith, the Duke's usurpation of a confessor's authority as problematic, others do not.[23] My study builds on Beckwith's reading of the Duke as combining secular and spiritual power in order to manipulate others. It will also show how these instances of the Duke's impersonating a friar-confessor depict moral self-deception on the part of the Duke.

The majority of Beckwith's book focuses on forgiveness in Shakespeare's late plays, in relational and linguistic terms. She argues that in these "post-tragic" plays forgiveness is intergenerational, public, and involves a risk-taking gift of self predicated on self-understanding. Beckwith sees in these plays a continuity with medieval theatre and penitential practice, arguing, for example, that "Posthumus's language in the prison scene in act 5, scene 3… is shot through… with a vocabulary straight from the medieval confessional" (106), and that in *The Winter's Tale* "Shakespeare returns with a renewed intensity to the structures and practices of penitence" (135). She explores Prospero's manifestation of the deeply human problem of aching for recognition and justice from somebody who hurt us, that they may "acknowledge the full dimensions of that hurt", when, almost paradoxically, "our very survival might depend on overcoming this fact" (147). She argues that this problem informs his ambivalent and unsatisfying forgiveness of his enemies at the end of *The Tempest*, delivered "in the absence of any possible response" (168). *Shakespeare and the Grammar of Forgiveness'* grounding in ordinary-language philosophy and medieval and early modern theology offer fresh perspectives on confession and forgiveness in Shakespeare's plays, and provide a point of departure for subsequent work on this topic.

Jan Frans van Dijkhuizen's book, *A Literary History of Reconciliation: Power, Remorse and the Limits of Forgiveness* (2018), examines confession and forgiveness in Shakespeare's plays in terms of power relations, and draws on many of Beckwith's arguments and observations. Van Dijkhuizen argues that "His [Shakespeare's] plays frequently examine the ways in which scenes of reconciliation work to sustain or challenge power relations and hierarchies between generations, genders and social classes, or between insiders and outsiders" (49). He analyses the interrelation of reconciliation and power across a subsection

[23] For an overview of critical discussion of the Duke's use of confession Foucauldian terms see p. 77.

of Shakespeare's plays, and the Early Modern literary transition of remorse from exclusively a position before God, to a relational position before another person. He argues that in *Measure for Measure* "the language of forgiveness serves almost exclusively as an instrument of state power" (50), while in *King Lear*, *Winter's Tale* and *The Tempest* the question of whether one can grant forgiveness without power is explored. In *Measure for Measure*, as Beckwith has noted,

> The problem explored is that this form of power requires untrammelled, godlike access to the inner lives of subjects, and unlimited knowledge of their actions. This is made possible, of course, by the duke's disguise as a friar, and he continues to draw on the spiritual power which his disguise accords him even after he has resumed his identity as duke. (55)

In *Lear*, however, Cordelia's forgiveness of her father obliterates Lear's misdeeds, and transcends socio-political power structures. It invites "comparison to divine grace" (62).

Van Dijkhuizen echoes Beckwith's conclusion that Shakespeare's plays present a space in which justice and recognition in the wake of wrongdoing is not always achievable, and so forgiveness requires a gift of self, freely given:

> No amount of remorse or penance can render genuinely destructive wrongs forgivable, and in such cases, reconciliation, like divine grace, can only be an unconditional gift. In other words, to transfer divine forgiveness to the human sphere is to turn interpersonal reconciliation at least potentially into a form of grace. (75)

This, he argues, while transgressed in *Measure for Measure* and manifested in *King Lear*, is problematized in Shakespeare's late plays:

> [S]uch forgiveness is not fully realized in the time of either *The Winter's Tale* or *The Tempest*. In the latter play, it is explicitly transferred instead to the audience's response, and with that to a world beyond that of the play. Prospero can only pray ardently for the forgiving generosity which he seeks from the audience – although he also suggests that they can forgive him simply by the ritual, and almost unavoidable, act of applauding. (76)

Both Beckwith and van Dijkhuizen draw on the idea that the performance of confession in Shakespeare's plays is a continuation of the medieval theatricality and ritual of the Sacrament of Penance, and experiment with the problematization of expression, speech act and epistemology caused by the Reformation's relegation of confession to the internal space.

Similarly, John Parker's chapter, "Antinomian Shakespeare: English Drama and Confession across the Reformation Divide" (Kevin Curran, ed. *Shakespeare and Judgement*, 2016), reads in Shakespeare's plays a continuity with medieval practices through the mechanism of the Sacrament of Penance: "Despite the friars' banishment, the abolition of mandatory confession, and the loss of penance as an official sacrament, the old machinery persisted on stage, as players regularly revived for popular merriment the lost institutions" (177). Parker goes so far as to claim that "we can see evidence throughout Shakespeare's corpus for a kind of nostalgia… a longing for the old penitential system, as overseen by mendicants in particular." (188). Parker's speculation regarding Shakespeare's "longing" for the Catholic

penitential system reaches beyond the scope of my research. His recognition, however, of Shakespeare's interest in the dramatic potential of the Sacrament of Penance, is one that I build on in my research.

Another significant work on Shakespeare's representation of confession is Paul Stegner's *Confession and Memory in Early Modern English Literature* (2016), which explores the connection between memory and private rituals of confession in a variety of Early Modern writers. In his chapter on *Hamlet* ("'Try What Repentance Can': *Hamlet,* Confession, and the Extraction of Interiority"), Stegner observes that "auricular confession permeates *Hamlet* even though the rite had effectively ceased to be administered in post-Reformation England" (106–7). He identifies Hamlet as "desir[ing] to uncover and judge the conscience of others" (121), and—echoing Bradley— "adopting the role of father confessor" (107). Stegner astutely observes that both Hamlet's quasi-confession of Gertrude and Claudius' repentance function as "maimed" (120). He argues that Hamlet uses the structures of the Sacrament of Penance to "negotiate the tensions between inward thoughts and outward actions" (110), and that "Hamlet's role as confessor complements his role as avenger" (110). My thesis will expand on this study, exploring ways Hamlet not only exploits the role of confessor but also of penitent in order to manipulate others.

Similarly, in his article "Masculine and Feminine Penitence in *The Winter's Tale*" (2014), Stegner argues that Camillo and Paulina represent competing masculine and feminine approaches to penitence in their advice to Leontes in the wake of his destruction of his family, and notes the how the relationship between Leontes and Camillo imitates that of penitent and confessor:

> Leontes's speech recreates the relationship between penitent and confessor: Leontes makes a complete disclosure of his secrets ("all the nearest things to my heart"); Camillo offers a form of shriving ("priest-like ... thou hast cleansed my bosom"); and Leontes in turn becomes a "penitent reformed." Further, Leontes's repetition of the term "satisfy" evokes the doctrine of penitential satisfaction. (189)

The methodology I use in this thesis of identifying and analysing secular imitations of the elements of the Sacrament of Penance is similar to this identification of the elements in Leontes' and Camillo's interchange. I will build on this methodology to produce a hermeneutical framework for analysing elements of the Sacrament of Penance across Shakespeare's *oeuvre*.

An interesting approach to the study of the impact of the Sacrament of Penance on Shakespeare's work is taken in Heather Hirschfeld's 2014 book, *The End of Satisfaction: Drama and Repentance in the Age of Shakespeare*. Hirschfeld adds to the discussion of the ramifications of the Reformation on Early Modern theatrical representations of confession through a study of the use of satisfaction. Hirschfield approaches the concept of 'satisfaction' as broadly defined in terms of revenge, finance, and sex. She then explores the ways that this concept was problematised in early modern drama in light of the Reformation's controversies surrounding penitential satisfaction before God: "The plays I study document thematically and linguistically the problem of satisfaction as it emerges from the Protestant desacramentalisation of penance and the challenges to traditional notions of repentance that accompanied it" (2-3). Although the study moves beyond representations of the Sacrament of

Penance, it nonetheless demonstrates the impact of penitential structures on Shakespeare's plays, in which my research is grounded. It also highlights the theatrical opportunities presented by the 'problems' of reformed confession, such as a lack of satisfaction. It is these 'problems', I argue, that Shakespeare exploits as ways of representing psychological complexity such as self-deception and manipulation in his plays.

Other recent works exploring confession and the Sacrament of Penance in Shakespeare's plays include Jennifer Flaherty's "Confession as performance in *Hamlet* and *Measure for Measure*" (2013), in which Flaherty explores the tension between the performance of religious and legal confessions in these two plays, and between the dual audiences of these confessions: "the earthly audience of paying spectators and the heavenly audience of God" (1); Allison Deutermann's "Hearing Iago's Withheld Confession" (2013), in which Deutermann analyses the physiology of Iago's silence and the significance of his refusal to confess as a subversion of the typical revenge trope;[24] Martha Oberle's "I Have Sinned: The Sacrament of Penance in *The Winter's Tale*" (2010); Kathryn Swanton's dissertation: "Shakespeare's later plays and Golden Age comedias" (2015); and Lara Smith's "Pardon My Great Profaneness: The Sacrament of Penance in Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale*" (MA Diss., 2005).

These studies demonstrate a growing interest in the Sacrament of Penance in Shakespeare's plays. As has been said, there is no comprehensive study of secular imitations of the elements of the Sacrament of Penance across Shakespeare's plays—particularly more subtle instances such as those in the history plays and *Macbeth*—nor of how they relate to self-knowledge and psychological verisimilitude. My research addresses this gap and contributes to the growing body of scholarship showing how integral confession, and more generally religion, is to Shakespeare's works. It departs from previous studies of representations of confession as isolated instances, across a single play, or across a handful of plays. Instead, it offers a study of the relationship between all instances of secular-theological confessions in Shakespeare's plays, and a method for meaningfully categorizing them in terms of characterization.

Thesis Methodology and Structure

Studies to date have largely focussed on the more obvious imitations of the Sacrament of Penance in Shakespeare's plays, and no consistent hermeneutic has been applied. There has been no comprehensive or methodological study of Shakespeare's engagement with the Sacrament of Penance across his dramatic career. In this thesis I undertake such a study. This thesis offers a new hermeneutic which identifies, categorises, analyses and compares secular imitations of the elements of the Sacrament of Penance (examination of conscience, confession, contrition/attrition, penance, restitution, absolution) across Shakespeare's plays in terms of how they manifest the representation of psychological complexity. I call these secular imitations of the Sacrament of Penance Quasi-Sacraments of Penance, or QSPs. A QSP is a character's imitation of one or more of the structures of the Sacrament of Penance in

[24] 2013 also saw The Shakespeare Association of America hold a seminar at their Annual Conference entitled "Shakespeare and Confession": https://shakespeareassociation.org/saa-archives/archived-seminar-abstracts/2013-2/

response to ‘sin,’ defined as an actual or perceived moral failing. This occurs either through a genuine attempt to achieve self-knowledge and reconciliation, or through a perversion of the structures resulting in self-deception and manipulation of others. QSPs can be shown onstage, unlike actual sacraments, which were forbidden in Elizabethan and Jacobean theatre (we do not see Juliet’s confession to Friar Lawrence, for example, or Katerina’s wedding to Petruchio, despite the latter’s huge potential for visual comedy).

While a connection to penitential language or practises has been noticed in many of these QSPs before, some of the QSPs identified in this thesis have not yet been recognised as representing an approximation to the structures of the Sacrament of Penance. As I worked my way through the plays identifying these instances of secular appropriation of the elements of the Sacrament of Penance, certain patterns began to emerge. While not all QSPs fit neatly into categories, and I did not want to force an arbitrary categorisation, many of them do. I have therefore developed a classification system for the QSPs which is useful in enabling comparisons of scenarios and characters across plays through the use of this hermeneutic. The categories that emerged are:

Type of QSP	Type of Penitent	Type of Confessor
• Quasi-confession • Quasi-examination of conscience • Rejection of confession and/or introspection	• Willing • Unwilling • Corrupt	• Corrupt • Unwilling • Seducible • Incompetent • Effective

The first type of QSP is the **quasi-confession**, in which one character, in imitation of a penitent, confesses a sin (or quasi-sin) to another character, who imitates the role of priestly confessor. Not all of the (analogous) elements of the Sacrament of Penance may be present, but at least one is, and often all are. The second type of QSP is a **quasi-examination of conscience**, in which a character engages in moral introspection (either sincerely or as an exercise in self-deception as an attempt to stifle their conscience). The third type is a **rejection of confession and/or moral introspection** when the opportunity is clearly available. In this scenario a character is offered an opportunity for moral introspection and/or confession of their ‘sins’, and they reject it in favour of self-deception and/or manipulation of others.

The first type of penitent is the **willing penitent**. This is a character who feels genuine remorse for their sins, has or desires self-knowledge, and seeks confession and redemption. When paired with an effective confessor, they can achieve a genuine secular instance of confession, repentance, reconciliation, and self-knowledge. The second type of penitent is the **unwilling penitent**. They are forced by another character into confessing their supposed sins against their will. They are usually paired with a corrupt confessor, and forced into playing the penitent in an exercise of power. The third type of penitent is the **corrupt penitent**. This is a character that performs a corrupted imitation of elements of the Sacrament of Penance in order to deceive themselves and manipulate others, forcing another character into the role of confessor. They are usually paired with an unwilling confessor.

The first type of confessor is the **corrupt confessor**. This is a character who forces another character into the role of penitent, and, through manipulation, forces them to confess their supposed sins, while giving them supposed moral instruction. The corrupt confessor is always in a position of secular power over the penitent, and uses this power to manipulate their interlocutor within a penitential framework. They are usually paired with an unwilling penitent. The second type of confessor is the **unwilling confessor**. They are forced into the position of hearing another character's supposed sins, often for the purpose of justifying those sins. They are usually paired with a corrupt penitent. The third and fourth types of confessor, the **seducible** and **incompetent** confessor, are used in a similar way to the unwilling confessor — that is, to endorse the sinner's behaviour through a kind of false absolution. The difference is that these characters participate in the QSP willingly. They, too, are usually paired with a corrupt penitent. The fifth and last type of confessor is the **effective confessor**. This is a character who facilitates genuine moral introspection in another character, through having the insight and power to openly criticise the penitent, and the goodwill to do so for their benefit. An effective confessor, when paired with a willing penitent, can facilitate a genuine secular instance of confession, repentance, reconciliation, and self-knowledge.

Only situations arising from sin (or perceived sin) are included in the definition of a QSP. Non-moral introspection and confession of things other than sins, such as love or identity, are not included in the definition. *All's Well that Ends Well*, for example, is a play that is built upon a string of confessions.[25] These confessions, however, are not for the most part of sins (or even, more broadly, offences), but of love, identity, and desire, and are therefore not included in the study. Similarly, Benedick and Beatrice's comical self-deception regarding their attraction to each other and subsequent confession of love in *Much Ado* ("the world must be peopled… I do spy some marks of love in her" 2.3.242–6) is also excluded from the definition of a QSP, as these self-deceptions are about folly rather than sin.

Thesis Structure

This thesis will analyse occurrences of QSPs chronologically in order to examine how Shakespeare developed the dramatic device across his career. Chapter 2 will explore the emergence and development of the QSP device in Shakespeare's earlier dramatic works (*Richard III, Richard II, 2 Henry IV, Henry V*). Chapter 3 will analyse and compare QSPs in *Hamlet*. Chapter 4 will analyse and compare QSPs in *Measure for Measure*. Chapter 5 will analyse QSPs in *Othello* and *Macbeth*. Finally, Chapter 6 will explore successful secular imitations of the Sacrament of Penance in *King Lear* and three Late Plays: *Cymbeline, Winter's Tale,* and *The Tempest*.

[25] Helena is forced by the Countess to confess her love for Bertram; Bertram confesses his love to Diana; Parolles 'confesses' the information about his countrymen to his 'captors'; prior to that, when he is alone, he 'confesses' his hypocrisy aloud to himself, and unwittingly confesses it to the eavesdroppers; He later humbly confesses his foolishness to Lafeu; Bertram boastingly confesses his sleeping with Diana to the other lords; Bertram's mother and Lefeu make a kind of ameliatory confession to the king on his behalf, and the king absolves; When Bertram thinks Helena is dead he 'confesses' that he was a fool and didn't appreciate her "My high-repented blames, / Dear sovereign, pardon to me" (4.3.37). Whilst Bertram is a liar and this is a corrupt confession, he is not self-deceived in the interesting way that characters like Hamlet, Duke Vincentio or Henry V are, as will be shown. He is lying simply, and knows that he is. Diana 'confesses' her supposed loss of virginity; Bertram is forced to confess his lies regarding Diana.

Chapter 2

Early Emergence and Development of the QSP Device: The History Plays

QSPs in *Richard III, Richard II, 2 Henry IV, Henry V*

The history plays *Richard III, Richard II, 2 Henry IV,* and *Henry V* were written relatively early in Shakespeare's career (c. 1591-99) and contain his first experiments with secular imitations of the structures of the Sacrament of Penance (QSPs). Each of these plays represents a character being given an opportunity for confession, repentance, and/or moral introspection in some form, signalled by explicitly religious and penitential language. The character's response to this invitation varies in different circumstances and is used by Shakespeare to portray psychological complexity, showing either successful moral introspection and repentance, or self-deception and manipulation. In these early experiments, Shakespeare tends to stick fairly closely to the language and intentions of the sacrament itself; only later does he begin to explore a more thoroughly secular application of it. This chapter will identify and analyse the emergence of the QSP structure in these early plays, and trace its development as a dramaturgical device for representing moral introspection, self-deception, repentance and manipulation.

QSPs in *Richard III*

Shakespeare's first experimentation with the representation of psychological complexity through secular imitations of the Sacrament of Penance is found in *Richard III*. In this play both Richard and his brother Clarence have dreams which reveal to them the eschatological consequences of their sins. Both characters respond to these dreams with language invoking the Sacrament of Penance, and both show subconscious cognition, moral introspection and degrees of self-deception.

The first QSP occurs in 1.4.1-75. In this scene the imprisoned Clarence recounts a vivid and visceral dream he has had that moves him to repent of his sins and confess them to his jailer shortly before he is murdered. Clarence's reflection on his dream and confession to the jailer contain between them analogical approximations to the elements of the Sacrament of Penance.

In this dream Clarence's conscience is stirred by his imaginative apprehension of moral truths. The dream represents the hollowness of earthly riches:

> Wedges of gold, great anchors, heaps of pearl,
> Inestimable stones, unvalued jewels,
> All scatt'red in the bottom of the sea:
> Some lay in dead men's skulls, and in the holes
> Where eyes did once inhabit (1.4.26-30)

The grievous nature of his treachery:

> O then began the tempest to my soul!
> I pass'd (methought) the melancholy flood,
> With that sour ferryman which poets write of,
> Unto the kingdom of perpetual night.
> …
>
> Then came wand'ring by
> A shadow like an angel, with bright hair
> Dabbled in blood, and he shriek'd out aloud,
> "Clarence is come—false, fleeting, perjur'd Clarence[…"]
> (44-7, 52-5)

And the terror of hell:

> ["]Seize on him, Furies, take him unto torment!"
> With that (methoughts) a legion of foul fiends
> Environ'd me, and howled in mine ears
> Such hideous cries that with the very noise
> I, trembling, wak'd, and for a season after
> Could not believe but that I was in hell (57-62)

Clarence's "dismal terror" (7) constitutes attrition, or imperfect contrition. His repentance is caused by a fear of divine punishment, which satisfies the first of the Sacrament of Penance's requirements.

This prompts the analogical fulfilment of the second requirement of the Sacrament of Penance. Clarence's dream features rich sensory stimulation and multiple characters, vividly arrayed, appearing to him and accusing him ("…Then came wand'ring by / A shadow like an angel, with bright hair / Dabbled in blood; and he shriek'd out aloud" 52-4). This dream invokes the medieval tradition of morality plays, and other artistic devices designed to instigate self-examination and germinate the penitential process, such as doom paintings. The dream proves salutary, as Clarence confesses his sins to the Keeper, who falls into the role of quasi-confessor: "Ah, Keeper, Keeper, I have done these things, / That now give evidence against my soul" (66–7). This satisfies the requirement for confession of sins.

The third requirement, a performance of—or at least a willingness to perform—penance, is less obviously fulfilled, although Clarence does show an intention of praying "deep prayers" in an effort to "appease" (69) God, prayer being a common form of penance prescribed in a medieval or early modern confession.[26]

This imitation of the Sacrament of Penance is completed by the Keeper's consolation of Clarence, agreeing to "sit by [him] awhile" (73), and granting him a quasi-absolution through invoking God to give Clarence peace and rest: "God give your Grace good rest" (75).

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[26] See Sarah Hamlin, 135-143.

Despite the quasi-fulfilment of the requirements of the Sacrament of Penance in this secular setting, and the sincerity of Clarence's repentance, the interchange is nonetheless beset with anxiety regarding its efficacy. Clarence says that his "soul is heavy" (74), and is unsure of God's forgiveness: "if my deep prayers cannot appease Thee" (69). He also fears that God's wrath may extend to his "guiltless wife and … poor children" (72). The Keeper expresses empathy ("No marvel, lord, though it affrighted you; / I am afraid, methinks, to hear you tell it" 64-5) and compassion ("I prithee sit by me awhile" – "I will, my lord" 73, 75). He even imitates the confessor in asking clarifying questions ("Had you such leisure in the time of death / To gaze upon these secrets of the deep?" 34-5). Despite this, and despite the good intentions of both parties (neither quasi-penitent or quasi-confessor seeks to corrupt the process), the efficacy of the quasi-confession, spiritually and emotionally, is ambiguous, because of the absence of the key component of absolution.

In subsequent QSP scenarios the focus shifts to experimentation with characters deliberately using the structures and language of the Sacrament of Penance in order to justify immoral behaviour or manipulate others. It is not until King Lear that Shakespeare will represent a successful secular imitation of the Sacrament of Penance in which the role of confessor and penitent will be effectively imitated from within the 'priesthood of all believers'.

The device of a dream producing an examination of conscience and subsequent confession is revisited towards the end of the play. In 5.3.118-206 Richard is visited by the ghosts of his victims charging him with his sins. Richard responds to this dream with penitential language: "Have mercy, Jesu! Soft, I did but dream. / O coward conscience how dost thou afflict me!" (178-9). This use of penitential language facilitates a representation of a complex psychological response, as Richard's initial anxiety upon waking is the temporal punishment for his sins that has been threatened in the form of his loss of the upcoming battle: "Give me another horse! Bind up my wounds!" (177). This contrasts with Clarence's visions of eternal punishment in his dream and represents a merely secular version of attrition. In the absence of formal penitential rites, Richard's fear of damnation is expressed as a fear of abandonment in battle: "will our friends prove all true?" (213). This also suggests a *contrapasso*—an ironic eschatological punishment for sin that either resembles or inverts the sin itself, frequently represented in Dante's *Inferno* (Round through that air with solid darkness stain'd" (III.28)—as Richard's anticipation of treachery echoes his betrayal of all of the figures in his dream.

Richard subsequently engages in a form of self-examination in which a fractured identity is expressed and explored:

> What do I fear? Myself? There's none else by.
> Richard loves Richard, that is, I [am] I.
> Is there a murtherer here? No. Yes, I am.
> Then fly. What, from myself?
> Alack. I love myself. Wherefore? for any good
> That I myself have done unto myself?
> O, no! alas, I rather hate myself
> For hateful deeds committed by myself! (182–9)

The relentless epistrophe on 'myself' signifies the imprisonment in the self that characterizes damnation.

This self-examination expresses a radical loneliness, with no reference to metaphysical possibilities. Richard confesses his sins in purely legalistic terms: “All several sins, all us’d in each degree, / Throng to the bar, crying all, “Guilty! guilty!” (198-9), despite his initial cry to God, “Have mercy, Jesu!” (178). Richard conceives of no punishment beyond the loss of temporal power, and, unlike Clarence, rejects contemplation of the eschatological ramifications of his sins (he tells his troops before the battle: “Conscience is but a word that cowards use, / Devis’d at first to keep the strong in awe” –5.5.309-10).

Both Richard’s and Clarence’s dreams show Shakespeare experimenting with self-deception and subconscious cognition. Clarence dreams that his brother (Richard) accidentally pushes him overboard as they are escaping to France, causing him to drown: “my brother Gloucester /… from my cabin tempted me to walk / Upon the hatches” (1.4.11-13). Significantly, the verb ‘tempted’ has diabolic connotations. He continues:

> Methought that Gloucester stumbled, and in falling
> Strook me (that thought to stay him) overboard
> Into the tumbling billows of the main. (1.4.18-20)

This scenario analogically represents Clarence’s actual position at this point in the play: Richard did tempt Clarence into performing acts that would spiritually endanger him, and Richard will betray Clarence and have him murdered, which Clarence has subconsciously apprehended. The dream also represents Clarence as not being able to cope consciously with the idea of his brother’s treachery through framing the murder as an accident. This represents the psychological phenomenon in which perception is shaped by desire.

Similarly, Richard’s dream shows him that he is damned because of the murders and treachery he has committed. His dream also uses eschatological language and images: “Let me sit heavy on thy soul tomorrow! … Despair, and die!”. These are mediated through the use of ghosts, which point towards the eternal consequences of Richard’s actions.

While Clarence’s dream reveals to him the moral reality of his position, it obscures his suspicion of Richard’s treachery. Richard’s response to his dream similarly shows self-deception, but this time it is a moral self-deception. The punishment and revenge that he imagines is restricted to the upcoming battle, while the much more significant eternal consequences of Richard’s sin invoked by the theological language throughout the scene are ignored.

While there are echoes here of the structures of the Sacrament of Penance — contrition, examination of conscience, confession, and even a potential confessor presented by Ratcliffe, to whom Richard cries “O Ratcliffe, I fear, I fear!” (214) and who comforts him, saying “Nay, good my lord, be not afraid of shadows” (215) — there is neither a faithful analogical engagement in the elements, as with Clarence in 1.4, nor a corruption of them in order to ease the conscience through self-deception and manipulation of others, as will be the case in later QSPs. Richard’s QSP represents a rejection of the opportunity for confession and repentance.

The conscience-fuelled, morally revelatory dreams that bookend *Richard III* show Shakespeare’s earliest experimentation with the language and structures of the Sacrament of Penance in a secular setting. Both show a nuanced experimentation with psychological complexity through the subconscious apprehension of moral truths, and, in the case of

Richard, through self-deception. While Clarence's approximation of auricular confession prior to his death creates an ambivalent sense of salvation, Richard's represents a failure to engage with penitential structures in an effective manner.

QSPs in *Richard II*

The last example from *Richard III* suggests that when a character has a moment that invites penitence, the refusal of it may be meaningful. This is expanded upon in the following examples from *Richard II*. Ernst Kantorowicz observed in 1956 that *Richard II* is "the tragedy of the King's Two Bodies" (26) in his aptly named book, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Medieval Political Theology*. Kantorowicz explores the complex relationship of the king's 'body politic' and 'body natural' as represented by Shakespeare in the character of Richard II, and the slow and painful dissolution of the former. Kantorowicz observes that in the play "we encounter … cascading: from divine kingship to kingship's 'Name,' and from the name to the naked misery of man" (27). He shows how Richard, who understands himself to be "God's substitute . . . anointed in his sight" (1.2.37), claims that "The balm of consecration resists the power of the elements, the "rough rude sea," since 'The breath of worldly man cannot depose / The deputy elected by the Lord' (III.ii.54ff)" (27). Kantorowicz then argues:

> Man's breath appears to Richard as something inconsistent with kingship. Carlisle, in the Westminster scene, will emphasize once more that God's Anointed cannot be judged "by inferior breath" (IV.i. 128). It will be Richard himself who "with his own breath" releases at once kingship and subjects (IV.i.210), so that finally King Henry V, after the destruction of Richard's divine kingship, could rightly complain that the king is "subject to the breath of every fool." (27-8)

In my analysis of QSPs in this play I will explore the problematic nature of Richard's self-perception of divinity in the context of personal moral introspection. I will argue that Richard's QSPs show an internalisation of the divine 'body politic' which prevents successful introspection and confession. The penitential language used in Richard's monologue in 3.3.147-59 constitutes a rejection of the opportunity for moral introspection and confession. Richard says:

> I'll give my jewels for a set of beads,
> My gorgeous palace for a hermitage,
> My gay apparel for an almsman's gown,
> My figur'd goblets for a dish of wood,
> My sceptre for a palmer's walking staff,
> My subjects for a pair of carved saints,
> And my large kingdom for a little grave,
> A little little grave, an obscure grave —
> Or I'll be buried in the king's high way,
> Some way of common trade, where subjects' feet
> May hourly trample on their sovereign's head;

For on my heart they tread now whilst I live,
And buried once, why not upon my head? (3.3.147–159)

In this monologue, Richard uses penitential language to express his grief. He imagines himself as a hermit, a mendicant, and a pilgrim. While he lists the outward trappings of a holy and penitential life, he does not mention anything like a penitent heart, or performing acts of charity and piety. The shallowness of this rhetorical, performative fantasy becomes apparent with his rapid descent into self-pity about how he shall have an obscure and undignified burial, and that "subjects' feet / May hourly trample on their sovereign's head" (156–7), showing that even in his imagination he cannot relinquish his status as king. Richard's focus seems to be on his "little grave, / A little little grave, an obscure grave" (153–4), which suggests a classical obsession with how one is to be remembered on earth. This runs contrary to a Christian eschatological attitude, which led to the tradition of *contemptus mundi.* The hollowness of Richard's intention to lead a penitential life, and the self-pitying nature of this masochistic fantasy, is confirmed later in the monologue when he admits "I talk but idley [sic]" (3.3.171).

Richard's second QSP occurs in Act 4 Scene 1, in which he is instructed to publicly confess to his crimes:

Rich. God save King Henry, unking'd Richard says,
And send him many years of sunshine days!
What more remains?

North. No more, but that you read
[*presenting a paper*]
These accusations, and these grievous crimes
Committed by your person and your followers
Against the state and profit of this land; 225
That by confessing them, the souls of men
May deem that you are worthily depos'd.

Rich. Must I do so? and must I ravel out
My weav'd-up follies? Gentle Northumberland,
If thy offences were upon record, 230
Would it not shame thee in so fair a troop,
To read a lecture of them? If thou wouldst,
There shouldst thou find one heinous article,
Containing the deposing of a king,
And cracking the strong warrant of an oath, 235
Mark'd with a blot, damn'd in the book of heaven.
Nay, all of you that stand and look upon me
Whilst that my wretchedness doth bait myself,
Though some of you, with Pilate, wash your hands,
Showing an outward pity, yet you Pilates 240

> Have here deliver'd me to my sour cross,
> And water cannot wash away your sin.
>
> North. My lord, dispatch, read o'er these articles.
>
> Rich. Mine eyes are full of tears, I cannot see;
> And yet salt water blinds them not so much 245
> But they can see a sort of traitors here.
> Nay, if I turn mine eyes upon myself,
> I find myself a traitor with the rest;
> For I have given here my soul's consent
> T'undeck the pompous body of a king; 250
> Made glory base, and sovereignty a slave;
> Proud majesty a subject, state a peasant. (4.1.220–252)

In the scene of his deposition, Richard is asked to read aloud the crimes for which he is being deposed. He refuses, invoking the divinity of his kingship through repositioning himself as a Christ-like victim, and comparing his accusers to Pilate. He lists their sins instead of his own (which may be an allusion to Jesus writing in the sand in John 8:1–11), and finally smashes a mirror wherein he claims all his 'sins are writ'.

Peter Ure in the Arden 2 edition points out that this demand for a public confession from Richard "seems to be a Shakespearian invention" (fn. 222, p. 138). Ure suggests that "Shakespeare may have wanted to give Northumberland some prominent action and to make clear that the articles did exist, but to avoid the dramatically unmanageable business of presenting them with Holinshed's fullness by making Richard evade the task" (fn. 222, p. 138). I think that there is a much more interesting reason why Shakespeare included a demand for Richard to confess his sins, namely so that he could craft a sophisticated dance of self-deception and sophistry as Richard wriggles out of it.

Richard reframes what Northumberland calls "grievous crimes" as "weav'd-up follies" (l. 229), suggesting a kind of child-like innocence on the part of Richard, and a consequent victimization. He juxtaposes this with Northumberland's "offences" (l. 230), the word 'offence' carrying much graver moral connotations (*OED* 2a) and lacking the quality of ignorance implied by 'folly'. Instead of confessing to his sins, Richard substitutes his own confession with a confession of Northumberland's (229–242), namely deposition and "cracking the strong warrant of an oath". While Richard claims his own sins amount to folly, he declares that Northumberland is "damn'd in the book of heaven" (236). Having repositioned Northumberland and his other accusers as the villains, he now manoeuvres himself into the position of righteous accuser:

> Nay, all of you, that stand and look upon me
> Whilst that my wretchedness doth bait myself,
> Though some of you, with Pilate, wash your hands,
> Showing an outward pity — yet you Pilates
> Have here deliver'd me to my sour cross,
> And water cannot wash away your sin. (237–242)

Richard has transformed himself from justly accused, to foolish, to innocent, to victim, and now finally to Christ himself, the just accuser. Richard imagines himself as both Christ the innocent victim and Christ seated in judgement, being both 'wretched' on his 'sour cross', and also condemnatory: "you Pilates"; "water cannot wash away your sin".

Northumberland again instructs him to read aloud his crimes.

North. My lord, dispatch, read o'er these articles.
Rich. Mine eyes are full of tears, I cannot see;
And yet salt water blinds them not so much
But they can see a sort of traitors here.
Nay, if I turn mine eyes upon myself,
I find myself a traitor with the rest;
For I have given here my soul's consent
T'undeck the pompous body of a king;
Made glory base, and sovereignty a slave;
Proud majesty a subject, state a peasant. (243–252)

Richard again avoids confessing his sins by shifting the focus onto the sins of others. His eyes are too tear-filled to see his own crimes, but not tear-filled enough to miss the treachery of others. This produces a subconscious confession, however, of Richard's self-deception.

Ocular imagery speaks to the themes of self-awareness and sin, and invokes theological concept of the *vulnus ignorantiae* — the 'wound of ignorance' inflicted on the soul by the Fall that partly hides the sins from the sinner.[27] Because of this 'wound of ignorance', Richard cannot see himself or his sins clearly. While tears of penitence might wash away his blindness, his tears of self-pity blind him to his faults. This also alludes to Matthew 7:5: "Hypocrite, cast out the beame out of thine owne eye first, & then shalt thou se perfectly, to pul out the mote that is in thy brothers eye.". This is not simply saying that we must mend our own faults before pointing out others', but also that these faults impede our *vision* – that we won't see the faults of others clearly until we clear our eyes through moral self-examination and penitence. Richard is subconsciously admitting that his sins are real, but that he is not willing to see them.

Richard now performatively follows the direction of Matthew 7:5: "Nay, if I turn mine eyes upon myself, / I find myself a traitor with the rest". This micro-examination of conscience and confession becomes a tool for self–justification. In naming himself an accomplice "T'undeck the pompous body of a king; / Ma[k]e glory base, and sovereignty a slave; / Proud majesty a subject, state a peasant" (250–52), Richard has imagined for himself a kind of agency, as though he had the power to stop his deposition and yet suffered it willingly. He is therefore, in a sense, again likening himself to Christ (which is a prominent trope throughout the play — e.g. 4.1.170), who allowed and in a sense willed his own crucifixion.

Richard next constructs a fantasy of incorporeality, in which he is "a mockery king of snow, / Standing before the sun of Bullingbrook, / To melt myself away in water-drops!" (260–62).

[27] According to Aquinas, ignorance is one of the four wounds to the soul caused by the Fall: weakness, ignorance, malice and concupiscence: "Therefore in so far as the reason is deprived of its order to the true, there is the wound of ignorance" (*ST* I-II Q.85. Art.3)

He then literally enacts this self-deconstruction through smashing a mirror (288). This motif will be used again in *Hamlet*, in which, when facing the son of the man he has murdered, Hamlet uses semantic satiation and grammatical dissociation in order to represent himself as mad, a victim, and finally, non-existent (see p.64ff.). In both cases, these characters seek to 'disappear' rather than confess.[28] This desire is expressed more forcefully by Angelo (*MM*), who would rather die literally than confess: "Let my trial be mine own confession… sequent death is all the grace I beg" (5.1.371–2). When Richard requests the mirror, and Northumberland attempts, for the third time, to make him read the accusations, Richard promises that "They shall be satisfied. I'll read enough, / When I do see the very book indeed / Where all my sins are writ, and that's myself." (273–75). Richard's promise of satisfaction, in this context, alludes to the satisfaction required as the third and final element of a sacramental confession. Unsurprisingly, however, Richard does not deliver the promised confession, satisfaction, or introspection (implied by the mirror). In identifying himself as "the very book indeed / Where all my sins are writ", and then smashing the mirror which represents that book, Richard symbolically circumvents the need for confession or forgiveness through the annihilation of his identity, and with it, his sins.

Richard's initial criticism of the 'public confession' Northumberland has staged for him is, according to the Catholic sacramental tradition and Reformed practices, sound. When Richard complains

> Must I do so? And must I ravel out
> My weav'd-up follies? Gentle Northumberland,
> If thy offences were upon record,
> Would it not shame thee, in so fair a troop,
> To read a lecture of them? (228 –32)

he is not necessarily objecting to the Sacrament of Penance, but rather to a public confession, which was no longer used in Catholic penitential rituals, the seal of confession being imposed since the Fourth Lateran Council (see Can. 21). Similarly, while public confession was recommended by reformers, it was of general sins only. There was no requirement to confess specific sins to anybody other than God. Richard draws attention to this through his use of the word "shame", rather than 'guilt'. "Shame" in this period denotes an external experience only (of public embarrassment and disapproval) (*OED* 1c), rather than an internal reality: shame is experiential, whereas guilt is ontological. Therefore, Richard is highlighting the misuse of the structures of confession as a tool for public humiliation and political justification. Although this scene does not easily fit itself into the categories laid out in Chapter 1, we can nonetheless see here the germination of Shakespeare's experimentation with the use of the structures of the Sacrament of Penance to portray manipulation and self-deception, particularly in a political context.

Richard's final QSP occurs in his soliloquy as he sits in prison at the opening of Act 5 Scene 5. His catastrophic downfall creates an opportunity for, and an expectation of, self-examination, highlighted by his use of religious language. Rather than pray, however, or

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[28] This is a motif Shakespeare may have taken from Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*, which was first performed several years before *Richard II*. In this play Faustus, when faced with his damnation, wishes that he could dissolve: "O soul, be chang'd into little water drops, / And fall into the ocean, ne'er be found." (5.2.185-6)

examine his conscience, as the audience might reasonably expect, Richard ponders his situation without introspection. His only "thoughts of things divine" (5.5.12), which he acknowledges are "[t]he better sort" (11) of thought, are a brief intellectual dismissal of apparent scriptural contradictions:

> The better sort,
> As thoughts of things divine, are intermix'd
> With scruples and do set the word itself
> Against the word,
> As thus: "Come, little ones," and then again,
> "It is as hard to come as for a camel
> To thread the postern of a small needle's eye." (5.5.11–17)

The inconsistency that Richard chooses is easily resolved, especially in his current condition of poverty. Scripture claims that God calls all people to come to Him, but that first we must renounce our attachment to worldly riches, because "surely it is easier for a camel to go through a nedles eye, then for a riche man to entre into the kingdome of God" (Luke 18:25). There is no logical fallacy here. In fact, this passage should be of great comfort to Richard, as it indicates that in his present state it is much easier for him to go to heaven than it was when he was king. However, he gives no more thought to eschatology until he condemns his murderers to hell ("Go thou and fill another room in hell" – 5.5.107).

Not only does Richard neglect any penance, self-examination or prayer, he also—again invoking the divinity of his 'body politic'—imagines himself as a kind of god. This, of course, becomes problematic in the context of the individual soul before God. He likens his prison to a pre-Genesis void, and himself to the creator:

> My brain I'll prove the female to my soul,
> My soul the father, and these two beget
> A generation of still-breeding thoughts;
> And these same thoughts people this little world (5.5.6–9)

Richard says in his final lines, "Mount, mount, my soul! Thy seat is up on high / Whilst my gross flesh sinks downward, here to die" (5.5.111-12). Considering that Richard says this in the absence of moral introspection, prayer, and repentance, Richard commits what would have been considered the 'unpardonable sins' of final impenitence (dying without confession or contrition) and presumption (Aquinas, *ST* II–II, 142. Q2.). The dubious nature of Richard's claim to be, according to Christian theology, 'seated up on high' in the afterlife—an afterlife which is evoked mere lines before by Richard in a reminder to his murders of the "never-quenching fire" (108) of hell—reinforces his moral self-deception and rejection of the penitential practices required of him by the religion of whose rewards he feels assured.

A more explicit QSP is performed by Richard's enemy, Bullingbrook, at the end of the play. This final QSP takes place in 5.6.30-52, and in it Bullingbrook, now King Henry IV, performs a quasi-confession to Exton and his lords regarding his causation of the murder of Richard. In this dialogue the king performs a corrupt quasi-confession in which he attempts to make Exton his moral scapegoat. Through the use of religious and political rhetoric, Henry manipulates the powerless Exton and his Lords, who function as his unwilling and

incompetent confessors, unable to criticise their new king, and in doing so deceives himself in order to appease his conscience.

> *Exton*. Great King, within this coffin I present
> Thy buried fear. Herein all breathless lies
> The mightiest of thy greatest enemies,
> Richard of Burdeaux, by me hither brought.
> *K. Hen*. Exton, I thank thee not, for thou hast wrought
> A deed of slander with thy fatal hand
> Upon my head and all this famous land.
> *Exton*. From your own mouth, my lord, did I this deed.
> *K. Hen*. They love not poison that do poison need,
> Nor do I thee. Though I did wish him dead,
> I hate the murtherer, love him murthered.
> The guilt of conscience take thou for thy labor,
> But neither my good word nor princely favor.
> With Cain go wander thorough shades of night,
> And never show thy head by day nor light.
> Lords, I protest my soul is full of woe
> That blood should sprinkle me to make me grow.
> Come mourn with me for what I do lament,
> And put on sullen black incontinent.
> I'll make a voyage to the Holy Land,
> To wash this blood off from my guilty hand.
> March sadly after, grace my mournings here,
> In weeping after this untimely bier. (5.6.30-52)

Exton's announcement that he brings Henry's "buried fear" not only publicly incriminates Henry, but also likens Exton to a confessor in the following ways: he confronts Henry with his sin, literally manifested as Richard's body, and contradicts him when he tries to deny it ("From your own mouth, my lord, did I this deed"). In response to this Henry performs an analogical approximation to confession, contrition and penance, whilst at the same time attempting to use Exton as a scapegoat. These imitations of penitential elements suggest, in addition to political pageantry, self-deception through an attempt to ease his conscience without having to relinquish his kingship.

Exton comes at the end of a procession of Henry's lords announcing who they have killed for him, and being rewarded and praised for it. The others have the tact to highlight their victims as "traitors" (5.6.15) and "grand conspirator" (5.6.19) in order to justify the killing, but Exton lacks the subtlety to call Richard 'false king' or to suggest a plot Richard was hatching to have Henry assassinated and reclaim the crown. Henry's initial reaction is denial, labelling the murder (or rather, the public revelation of the murder) "A deed of slander". 'Slander' has two possible meanings, namely the spreading of a false report, or the shame and disgrace caused by wrongdoing (*OED*, "slander" 1a, 3a). Henry's usage combines the two, indicating a subconscious admission of wrongdoing and a desire to have the allegation of said wrongdoing perceived as false.

After Exton insists that the king requested the murder ("From your own mouth, my lord, did I this deed"), Henry no longer attempts to deny it. Instead, through a pair of platitudes, he implicitly confesses and shows contrition for his sin. Firstly, he says "They love not poison that do poison need, / Nor do I thee" (38-39). This is an implicit admission of his guilt, as is the clause that follows it, "Though I did wish him dead" (39). Next, he claims "I hate the murtherer, love him murthered" (40). This cleverly implies remorse without expressing it, and analogically fulfills the requirement of contrition.

Just as Richard attempted to minimize his sins through drawing attention to Northumberland's in 4.1.228–242, Henry, with less poetic skill, attempts to transfer the guilt of his conscience onto Exton: "The guilt of conscience take thou for thy labor" (41). He tries to switch places morally with Exton, having Exton carry the internal burden of a guilty conscience, while Henry need merely wash the external burden of blood from his hand (50). This rhetorically reverses the reality in Henry bears the moral responsibility for the murder, and Exton bears the bloody hands. Having figuratively transferred his guilt onto Exton, Henry then completes Exton's transformation into a scapegoat by banishing him in an ironic echoing of his own banishment at the start of the play. Henry even goes so far as to compare Exton to Cain, which implicitly equates Henry, his banisher, with God.

Henry continues to perform contrition through the language of grief: "mourn[ing]" (47), "lament[ation]" (47) and "woe" (45). In addition to this, he produces imagery of redemption: "That blood should sprinkle me to make me grow" (46). The syntax Henry uses here rhetorically reduces his agency. He has not said 'that I should spill blood' but "that blood should *sprinkle* me to *make* me grow": 'blood' is active and uses the transitive verb while 'me' is the object with an intransitive verb. This is also an allusion to Christ's redeeming blood, which both nourishes and saves the faithful, as Shakespeare's audiences would have been aware.[29] Henry therefore represents his murder of Richard as a salvific event which indirectly benefitted him, while at the same time subconsciously condemning himself as being like those who killed Christ.

Henry next orders the performance of mourning through clothing: "Come mourn with me for what I do lament, / And put on sullen black incontinent" (48). While Richard is a ceremonial king, believing in the magic power of ceremony and the ontology of kingship, Henry is not. However, in this passage he is very concerned with appearance, symbol and ritual because he sees the value and necessity of it in maintaining power.

Henry analogically fulfills the requirement of penance through resolving to "make a voyage to the Holy Land, / To wash this blood off from my guilty hand" (49–50). In doing so he rhetorically appeases his lords, who also function as his confessors through witnessing him admit to his sin. Tactfully, he only admits to the blood on his "guilty hand" after he has announced the remedy for it.

Henry has analogically confessed his sin, expressed contrition for it, and promised penance through his pilgrimage to the Holy Land, thereby outwardly satisfying the requirements for the Sacrament of Penance. He is not, however, willing to perform restitution and renounce the

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[29] This popular, central image from John 6:53-58 ("Whosoeuer eateth my flefh, and drinketh my blood, hathe eternal life") is invoked, for example, in George Herbert's 1609 poem, "Death": "But since our Savior's death did put some blood / Into thy face" ll.13-14.

benefit he has gained from it, namely his kingship. Significantly, he does not request a priest in order to make an actual sacramental confession as he knows that he does not regret the murder of Richard and is not willing to perform restitution. In this respect Henry can be seen as a prototype for Claudius (both, interestingly, making a comparison to Cain). Henry's soliloquy marks a first attempt by Shakespeare to explore the spiritual dilemma of a corrupt Catholic caught between the benefits of a mortal sin and their fear of damnation.

It is interesting that as soon as Henry becomes king he engages in moral self-deception through an appropriation of penitential language and structures, which we have already seen in Richard II and which we will see again and again in monarchs and rulers in Shakespeare's corpus (Henry V, Hamlet, Claudius, Duke Vincentio, and Macbeth). This shows an interest on the part of Shakespeare in the corrupting influence of power and the tendency towards self-deception associated with it.

Henry's attempt to satisfy the requirements of sacramental confession shows a desire both to redeem himself in the eyes of the public, and to appease his conscience. In oscillating between presentations of himself as innocent (34–36), guilty (38–40, 50), victim (34–36), repentant (45), redeemed (41, 46, 49–50 — his proposed pilgrimage of penance implies that he will find redemption), and righteous judge (41–44), he performs a less sophisticated echoing of Richard's quasi-confession in 4.1, and he performs it for three audiences: the public, his private conscience, and God. None are convinced, but as his monologue ends the play, all are silenced, for now. Shakespeare will continue to experiment with Henry performing moral self-deception and manipulation through an imitation of the elements of the Sacrament of Penance in *Henry IV, Part 2*.

QSP in *Henry IV, Part 2*

As Henry IV lies on his deathbed in *2H4,* 4.5.183-240 he performs another corrupted quasi-confession, this time with his son, Prince Hal, as his willing and seducible confessor. In this dialogue Henry reflects on the sins he committed in the past in order to acquire and keep the crown. Through rhetoric and self-deception, he reduces his apparent moral responsibility for his sins and imagines that God has forgiven him for them. In the Catholic tradition the Sacrament of Penance is most ardently desired at the hour of death, it being the final chance for a person to save their soul.[30] Henry is aware that he is dying (108-9), and therefore it would be striking to an Elizabethan audience that he does not ask for a confessor. Instead, Henry confesses his murder of Richard to his son in euphemisms:

> God knows, my son,
> By what by-paths and indirect crook'd ways
> I met this crown, and I myself know well
> How troublesome it sate upon my head. (4.5.183–6)

[30] The importance of this is emphasized by Kanerva: "In the medieval ecclesiastical tradition, preparation for death was largely a matter of enabling salvation of the soul and its state in the spiritual afterlife. It was important to receive absolution of one's sins and the proper sacraments before breathing the last breath, which ensured burial in consecrated ground" (18)

In saying “God knows” Henry implicitly obviates the need for not only auricular confession, but for the reformed confession directly to God. Henry linguistically reduces his agency by describing the regicide as a chance encounter.[31] His mention of “by-paths and indirect crook’d ways” invokes descriptions of sin in Scripture: “Prepare ye the way of the Lord: make streight in the desert a path for our God” (Isiah 40:3), but also suggest a reduction of agency: a wanderer who is lost rather than a calculating politician. Henry also suggests that he has performed penance for his deed due to how “troublesome” his rule has been. Henry continues to reduce his agency when he speaks of his “friends”, “By whose fell working I was first advanc’d” (204, 206), “fell” meaning cunning, treacherous, and villainous (*OED* adj. 1a, 1b). The adjective is used to describe his friends only, while his role is positioned as passive: “I was first advanced” rather than “I first advanced”. His friends’ sinister nature is further emphasised by his reference to their “stings and teeth” (205).

Having attempted to confess and justify his taking of the crown, Henry then confesses to engaging in Machiavellian tactics in order to maintain it, in the form of advice to Hal. He reveals how he had planned to lead his army on a crusade in order to distract them from raising complaints against him, “Lest rest and lying still might make them look / Too near unto my state” (204– 212). This is not only an extremely unethical way to prevent rebellion, but also a confession that Henry’s so-called crusade is not planned as a religious expedition, but a purely political manoeuvre. Henry further corrupts the quasi-confession by teaching his confessor (Hal) to commit the same sin. He advises him to keep his nation in a constant state of war in order to maintain self-interested political stability:

> 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. (212–15)

Having euphemistically confessed his sins, Henry performs contrition through asking for God’s forgiveness: “How I came by the crown, O God forgive”. Hal, playing the seducible confessor, provides a quasi-absolution through a self-interested endorsement of his father’s sins: “You won it, wore it, kept it, gave it me; / Then plain and right must my possession be”.

Henry attempts to fulfill the final requirement, satisfaction, through a loophole. Upon learning that his castle contains a room called “Jerusalem”, he chooses to interpret it as a divinely-inspired loophole via which he can keep the promise he made at the outset of his reign to perform penance for killing Richard by making a pilgrimage to the Holy Land:

> Laud be to God! Even there my life must end.
> It hath been prophesied to me, many years,
> I should not die but in Jerusalem,
> Which vainly I suppos’d the Holy Land.
> But bear me to that chamber; there I’ll lie;
> In that Jerusalem shall Harry die. (235–40)

[31] This absolving rhetoric is parodied by Falstaff in *H4.1*, in response to the rebel Worcester’s claim at the battlefield that “I have not sought the day of this dislike”. When the king prods “You have not sought it? How comes it, then?” Falstaff answers “Rebellion lay in his way, and he found it”. (5.1.26-28).

This tokenistic semiotic superstition signals a final attempt to appease his conscience through self-deception. It is a practice that will continue in *Henry V* in which Hal's certainty that "plain and right must my possession [of the crown] be" is shown to be false.

QSP in *Henry V*

Prince Hal, now Henry V, shows a deep anxiety regarding how his father "met" the crown, and the implications for his own moral and political position. In 4.1.289-305 Henry performs a quasi-confession directly to God in which he functions as a corrupt penitent attempting to manipulate God in order to avoid punishment for his father's sin.

> O God of battles, steel my soldiers' hearts,
> Possess them not with fear! Take from them now
> The sense of reck'ning, if th' opposed numbers
> Pluck their hearts from them. Not to-day, O Lord,
> O not to-day, think not upon the fault
> My father made in compassing the crown!
> I Richard's body have interred new,
> And on it have bestowed more contrite tears,
> Than from it issued forced drops of blood.
> Five hundred poor I have in yearly pay,
> Who twice a day their wither'd hands hold up
> Toward heaven, to pardon blood; and I have built
> Two chauntries, where the sad and solemn priests
> Sing still for Richard's soul. More will I do;
> Though all that I can do is nothing worth,
> Since that my penitence comes after all,
> Imploring pardon. (4.1.289-305)

Henry's choice to address God as "God of battles" suggests a conflation of the Christian God with Mars, which problematises Henry's theology and, as Grace Tiffany observes, his Christian identity:

> the idea of Henry as pagan warrior is introduced early by the Chorus, who, though he calls Henry ''mirror of all Christian kings'' in the second act (2.Cho.6), in the play's prologue has linked him to ''Mars'' (Pro.6). On the eve of Agincourt, Henry's own emblematic resemblance to Christ in Gethsemane when he kneels and prays is compromised by the fact that he seems to pray not to God but to Mars. (Tiffany, 5)

This combination of Christian and pagan iconography reflects what I will argue is the mercenary nature of Henry's prayer. It shows that he is willing to compromise Christian theology and ethics in order to succeed in his military campaign. This utilitarian undermining of Christian theology is shown by the rhetorical and polysemic language used throughout, particularly regarding penance.

Henry asks God to take from his soldiers “The sense of reck’ning, if th’ opposed numbers / Pluck their hearts from them.” (290–1). In the context of this passage ‘reckoning’ means counting, or calculating (*OED*, “reckoning”, 3a): Henry asks that his soldiers become unable to count their opponents lest they be overcome with fear at how badly they are outnumbered, and not be able to fight well. There is also a second, more sinister semantic possibility. “Reckoning” also refers to the Last Judgement, or the account one will have to make of one’s life when one meets God after death (*OED*, “reckoning”, 1a). It is used in this sense earlier in this scene: “The king hath a heauy reckoning to make, if his cause be not good” (4.1.134). If this meaning of the word is applied, then Henry is asking that his soldiers will not be impeded by scruples about the state of their souls when they realise, upon seeing how outnumbered they are, how close they are to death. This second meaning is pertinent because it could only occur at a subconscious level: Henry would never consciously ask God to prevent his soldiers from examining their consciences. He sees this lack of moral awareness that he desires for his soldiers as a necessity in battle, however, and thus conflates the idea of moral blindness with courage. Even in his rousing ‘St Crispin’s Day’ speech, Henry never brings a moral element into the soldiers’ motivations for battle. He promises earthly immortality instead, in the classical sense of always being remembered, and promises honour in the sense of worldly admiration as opposed to personal virtue. It reveals that Henry knows that the cause his soldiers are about to fight and die for is not a morally sound one, but is refusing to admit this to himself, to them, or to God. In attempting to manipulate God in prayer, he is unconsciously confessing *to* God his violation of the medieval just war theory. This theory mandates that one must have just cause for going to war, and only do it as a last resort (*ius ad bellum*). It also governs conduct during war, requiring proportionality and military necessity (*ius in bello*).[32]

Henry’s prayer then focuses on his father’s sin and his own efforts to atone for it, invoking the Old Testament idea that “for I the Lord thy God am a ielous God, visiting the iniquitie of the fathers vpon the children, euen vnto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me” (Deut 5:9). Henry constructs a quasi-confession on his father’s behalf in which confession, contrition and restitution are analogically met: “Not to-day, O Lord, / O not to-day, think not

[32] See Aquinas, *ST*, II-II Q. 40. Henry has previously threatened “impious war” in this play (3.3.1-43). Indeed, he is willing to use express violation of the *ius in bello*, which explicitly forbids attacks on non-combatants, as a terror-weapon in itself:

> If I begin the battery once again,
> I will not leave the half-achieved Harfleur
> Till in her ashes she lie buried.
> The gates of mercy shall be all shut up, [*by whom*?]
> And the flesh'd soldier, rough and hard of heart,
> In liberty of bloody hand shall range
> With conscience wide as hell, mowing like grass
> Your fresh-fair virgins and your flowering infants.
> What is it then to me, if impious war,
> Array'd in flames like to the prince of fiends,
> Do, with his smirch'd complexion, all fell feats
> Enlink'd to waste and desolation?
> What is't to me, when you yourselves are cause,
> If your pure maidens fall into the hand
> Of hot and forcing violation? (3.3.7-21)

upon the fault / My father made in compassing the crown!". Through the rhetorical device of *occupatio*, Henry attempts to draw God's attention to his father's sin, presumably in order to create a distraction from his own in waging an unjust war. Negotiating on the soil of another's sin, Henry attempts to coax forgiveness from God. Like his father in the previous QSPs Henry uses euphemisms to allude to the regicide of Richard II. The verb "compassing" is morally neutral, meaning "[t]o get at, attain, obtain, win [an object]" (*OED* 11b). Interestingly, however, at the time the play was written, "to compass" also retained the older meaning, "[t]o contrive, devise, machinate (a purpose). Usually in a bad sense" (*OED* 2a).[33] This reveals the very truth about his father's "fault" that he's attempting to conceal, and thus Henry has subconsciously confessed to God the evil of the deed he is attempting to downplay.

Having confessed his father's sin, Henry informs God that he has performed contrition and satisfaction on his father's behalf: "I Richard's body have interred new, / And on it have bestowed more **contrite** tears / Than from it issued forced drops of blood." [*emphasis mine*]. Henry's language shows a subconscious suggestion of insincerity. The verb "bestowed" suggests calculation and a formality that is at odds with the spontaneous movement of the heart implied by "contrite tears". The comparison of the amount of tears with drops of blood furthermore suggests an economic treatment of the sin whereby the debt has been paid by Henry's greater amount of tears.

Henry is at great pains to demonstrate to God that the final box, namely satisfaction, has been ticked:

> Five hundred poor I have in yearly pay,
> Who twice a day their wither'd hands hold up
> Toward heaven, to pardon blood; and I have built
> Two chauntries, where the sad and solemn priests
> Sing still for Richard's soul.

Insincerity and manipulation is again suggested through the rhetoric of these lines, which are rich with hyperbole, sentimental imagery in the form of "wither'd hands", and sibilance which, in the final two lines, evokes the chanting and whispered prayers of Henry's priests. Henry's purchased penance is, however, theologically problematic. According to Frantzen, The eighth-century Council of Clovesho

> insisted that penance could not be performed vicariously, [as was being done by] those wealthy enough to hire (or force) others to undertake penances for them. Divine justice, the bishops warned, cannot be appeased by others: each man must stand alone before the tribunal of Christ. (Frantzen, 81–2).

Henry ends with a performance of humility: "...More will I do; / Though all that I can do is nothing worth" (308–9), which rings hollow in light of his ostentatious display of penance.

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[33] In fact, this term has been used in conjunction with treason prior to and since Shakespeare's lifetime, according to the *OED*: (1491: *Act 1 Hen. VII* c. 23 Pream., Richard White "traitrously ymagenedand compassed the dethe...of our seid Souvereigne Lord"; 1681: *Arraignm.,Tryal & Condemnation S. Colledge* 119: "To compasse or imagine the imprisonment of the King".)

Henry even explicitly names the final element, penance, and reminds God of what he seeks: “Though all that I can do is nothing worth, / Since that my **penitence** comes after all, / Imploring **pardon** [absolution].”

Henry’s quasi-confession shows manipulative rhetoric not only in its language, but also in its content. Henry’s choice to confess and show atonement for his father’s sin instead of his own—an unjust war which he intends to continue—is itself a tactical move. The moral self-deception implied by this is reinforced by the timing of this prayer: it is not simply before a big battle, to which Henry draws God’s attention, but it also comes immediately after Henry has been wandering through the camp, listening to his soldiers talk about how, if his cause is not just, he bears the guilt of all of their deaths on his shoulders: “The king hath a heauy reckoning to make, if his cause be not good” (4.1.134). This presents, then, a sophisticated psychological representation of Henry as having had his conscience troubled by his soldiers’ unfiltered moral feedback, and reacting with a self-deceived attempt to distract and appease God with a confession of his father’s sin.

Throughout the early history plays the QSP device has taken shape, from Shakespeare’s experimentation with Richard III’s vague and dreamlike crisis of conscience to Henry V’s clear and calculated appropriation of the structures of the Sacrament of Penance in an attempt to deceive God and himself. Shakespeare seems to be developing this device through and with his exploration of the theme of the corrupting nature of power. The fact that this pattern is, in some of these early instances, sporadic and difficult to define, makes sense in the context of a technique that will be refined later in Shakespeare’s career. A similar pattern of emergence and refinement can be seen in other techniques developed by Shakespeare, such as the syntactical disruption named ‘junctural extrametricality’ (JEM), which was coined and mapped by Peter Groves in “Unheedy Haste” (2016). In this study a similar pattern of emergence and ongoing refinement is observed.

Chapter 3:

Quasi-Sacraments of Penance in *Hamlet*

Hamlet, written around 1600, marks the next stage in Shakespeare's development of the QSP device: sin, conscience, confession, penance, and moral introspection lie at the heart of this play. In this chapter I will identify, analyse and compare secular imitations of the elements of the Sacrament of Penance, and reformed reinterpretations of these elements, in *Hamlet*. I will explore the ways in which characters use the language and structures of the Sacrament of Penance to practice moral introspection, deceive themselves, reconcile with, and manipulate others. I will show that Shakespeare uses Quasi-Sacraments of Penance as a dramaturgical device to represent psychological complexity in his characters, and argue that analysis of this device provides a new way of reading Hamlet's character and behaviour throughout the play.

While some scenes in *Hamlet* have been thoroughly explored as containing analogues to confession, such as the Closet Scene and Claudius' prayer scene,[34] there has been no comprehensive study of imitations of the elements of the Sacrament of Penance and how they function throughout the play. This chapter will perform this comprehensive study. It will identify and analyse both the well-known and the more obscure imitations of the elements of the Sacrament of Penance in the play and explore how they function together to illuminate the darker side of Hamlet's complex character.

The complex, ambiguous character of Hamlet has been a longstanding source of fascination and critical debate. Michael Davies notes that Hamlet is "notoriously difficult to pin down in terms of any clear moral or ethical identification" (9), and John Gillies identifies "pro-Hamlet" and "anti-Hamlet" schools of thought (396, 422).[35] Studies of the penitential aspects of the play have been similarly divided regarding the implications for Hamlet's character. Hamlet's imitation of the role of a confessor has traditionally been viewed as virtuous. A. C. Bradley, for example, said "No father-confessor could be more selflessly set upon his end of redeeming a fellow-creature from degradation, more stern or pitiless in denouncing the sin, or more eager to welcome the first token of repentance" (138). Similarly, Paul Stegner sees in Hamlet "a general Christian desire to bring his mother to repentance" (109), and Roland Frye reads Hamlet's behaviour towards Gertrude in the Closet Scene as a "work of charity" (33). Other, recent work such as James Groves' *Hamlet on the Couch: What Shakespeare Taught Freud* (2018) departs from the critical tradition of reading Hamlet as virtuous. Groves reads Hamlet's accusations of lustfulness against Gertrude while playing the role of her confessor as unjustified: "across the critical history of Hamlet there's remarkable blindness to Gertrude's actual words, lustful *nowhere in the play*" (154). He even goes so far as to call Hamlet's aggression towards his mother in the Closet Scene a "quasi-rape" (155). Similarly, Rhodri Lewis, in *Hamlet and the Vision of Darkness* (2017), challenges the critical tradition

[34] See, for example, Bradley, 138; Morris, 54; Frye, 27-38; Freeman, 248; Stegner, 105-132; Flaherty, 78-89; Colston, 17.
[35] For a summary of these schools of thought see Sean McEvoy's *William Shakespeare's Hamlet: A Routledge Study Guide and Sourcebook* (2006).

of viewing Hamlet as not only virtuous, but “Shakespeare’s intellectual” (238). Lewis suggests that instead, “Hamlet emerges as a thinker of unrelenting superficiality, confusion, and pious self-deceit” (238).

So, what can my comprehensive analysis of penitential aspects of the play contribute to the ongoing discussion of Hamlet’s ambiguous characterisation? Through the application of the Quasi-Sacrament of Penance hermeneutic this chapter will elucidate the darker side of Hamlet’s character—which is suggested by recent criticism such as Lewis’ and Groves’—according to Catholic and Reformed theological structures, which would have been recognizable to early modern audiences. Hamlet would not have generated such endless fascination if he were simply morally ‘good’ or ‘bad’. The genius of this character lies in its ambiguity, and in its ability to hold the qualities of the hero and anti-hero (among others) in tension. This chapter does not pretend to offer any ‘final word’ on the character of Hamlet or to reduce it to a single hermeneutical vision. Instead, my reading analyses Hamlet’s character in terms of his engagement with Catholic and Reformed penitential structures, and in doing so reveals his negative moral qualities. My reading therefore extends the ‘negative’ perspective on Hamlet’s character by drawing on theological language, concepts and practices that would have been familiar to Shakespeare’s original audiences.

This chapter will explore three different types of QSP that emerge in *Hamlet*. Firstly, quasi-examinations of conscience: this section will explore the flawed quality of Hamlet’s moral introspection in terms of Catholic and Reformed penitential theology, and in comparison to Claudius’ penitential introspection. Secondly, quasi-confessions: this section will identify and analyse the quasi-confessions that occur throughout the play, and what they reveal about Hamlet’s character and his relationship to others in his role as penitent and as confessor. The third section will explore Hamlet’s rejection of the opportunity for a final confession. It will analyse the significance of this in a play obsessed with “shriving” before death, and the implications for his character in terms of Catholic and Reformed penitential theology.

This study of QSPs in *Hamlet* offers a fresh perspective on features of the play that are otherwise puzzling (such as Hamlet’s treatment of Ophelia in the nunnery scene and the Ghost’s apparition and motivation in the Closet Scene). The QSP hermeneutical approach produces new explanations of seeming aporias in the text and in the character of Hamlet himself.

Quasi-Examinations of Conscience in *Hamlet*

This section will analyse two of Hamlet’s soliloquys as quasi-examinations of conscience and compare them to a reading of Claudius’ soliloquy as a quasi-examination of conscience in the prayer scene in 3.3.36–72. It will analyse the ways in which Hamlet uses inconsistent moral paradigms to examine himself, resulting in a lack of moral clarity, and compare this with the sharp insights produced by Claudius’ introspection, which is predicated solely on Christian penitential theology. Analysing Hamlet’s introspection in terms of contemporary religious structures will reveal the problematic nature of Hamlet’s reasoning.

Hamlet’s soliloquy in 2.2.550-605 involves Hamlet examining his failure to have avenged his father, being “unpregnant of [his] cause” (568), in what appear to be moral terms. Significantly, this self-examination is prompted by a theatrical performance, which invokes

the medieval tradition of morality plays as a prompt for the examination of conscience. Hamlet's lack of structured, external guidance leads, however, to an inconsistent form of moral introspection in which Hamlet deceives himself regarding the theological parameters of the situation.

Hamlet's soliloquy is bookended with invocations of the power of theatre to generate moral introspection in an audience, whether of the narrowly theological kind invoked by Moralities[36] or the broader kind of self-assessment aimed at by the new humanist ideal of theatre (as sketched out in Heywood's *Apologie for Actors* (1612), who speaks of the drama "by sundry instances, either animating men to noble attempts, or attaching the consciences of the spectators, finding themselues toucht in presenting the vices of others?" (n. pag) He begins with a negative comparison of his behaviour to an actor's performance of grief: "Tears in his eyes, distraction in his aspect" (555), and ends with a plan to use a play to "catch the conscience of the King" (605). Hamlet refers elsewhere to the "end" of theatre being "to hold as 'twere the mirror up to nature: to show virtue her feature, [and] scorn her own image" (3.2.21–3). The following lines point explicitly to theatre being used to stimulate the conscience and produce confession:

> … I have heard
> That guilty creatures sitting at a play
> Have by the very cunning of the scene
> Been strook so to the soul, that presently
> They have proclaim'd their malefactions. (588-92)

The repeated, metatheatrical invocation of theatre functioning as an external prompt for the conscience raises the question of which moral structure Hamlet is using to examine his conscience. How will he navigate Christian (Catholic and Reformed) morality and the promise he made to the Ghost to obey his pagan "commandment" (1.5.102) of revenge?

Like the viewer of a morality play who has had his conscience triggered, Hamlet is driven to examine his own grief and behaviour as the "son of a dear father murthered" (583). This moral introspection is, however, removed from the guidance of a penitential (confession manual), and instead performed within the paradigmatic blend of contradicting Viking and Christian moral codes, which underpin the play. This blending of paradigms increases Hamlet's moral confusion.

Hamlet's first point of confusion occurs in the following lines. Here, Hamlet fails to distinguish between real emotion and the manufactured appearance of it:

> Is it not monstrous that this player here,
> But in a fiction, in a dream of passion,
> Could force his soul so to his own conceit
> That from her working all the visage wann'd,

[36] Morality plays were not immediately banned by Queen Elizabeth, and Shakespeare, as has been said, may have seen them as a child. Shakespeare's plays are full of references to morality plays: both Feste in *Twelfth Night* (4.2.124) and *Richard III* (3.1.82) explicitly mention the Vice figure, and the Boy in *Henry V* calls him "this roaring devil i' th' old play" (4.4). Jenkins also notes that Hamlet's criticism of overacting which 'out-Herods Herod' (3.2.14) is an allusion to mystery plays (p.288, n.14).

> Tears in his eyes, distraction in his aspect,
> A broken voice, an' his whole function suiting
> With forms to his conceit? And all for nothing,
> For Hecuba! (2.2.551–58)
>
> ...
>
> What would he do
> Had he the motive and [the cue] for passion
> That I have? (560–62)
>
> …
>
> ...Yet I... / …can say nothing (566, 569).

At the outset of the play, Hamlet denigrates the external performance of grief—"suits of solemn black, … all forms, moods, shapes of grief" (1.2.77, 82)— as being merely "actions that a man might play" (84). Here, however, he conflates theatrical performance of grief with genuine experience.

This confusion between appearance and reality continues in Hamlet's anxiety around the consequences of his inaction as "the son of a dear father murthered" (583). Hamlet frames his introspection in what appear to be moral terms: "Am I a coward?" (571). However, Hamlet's anxieties centre on questions of appearance and reputation: "Who calls me villain, breaks my pate across, / Plucks off my beard and blows it in my face" (572-3). Since courage or fortitude is one of the secular virtues, his question "Am I a coward?" might look like the beginning of a moral self-examination. Instead, however, of examining his behaviour in light of cowardice, the question switches to how he is perceived by others, particularly regarding a failure to perform masculinity. This tension represents a moral self-deception which disguises a desire to avoid the *reputation* of cowardliness as a genuine desire to avoid cowardliness.

The moral parameters of Hamlet's introspection are also unclear. Hamlet claims to be "[p]rompted to [his] revenge by heaven and hell" (584). This paradox invokes the paradox of the Ghost itself, which implicitly claims to be in [Catholic] purgatory and yet seeks revenge, invoking pagan revenge morality through his injunction "If thou hast nature in thee, bear it not" (1.5.81). This contravenes the Christian doctrine of forgiveness, which requires the Christian to rise above the natural desire for revenge: "Vengeance and recompence are mine [God's]" (Deut 32:35). Is Hamlet operating within a Christian paradigm or not? Hamlet's conflation of moral paradigms signals a refusal to carefully discern and examine his moral responsibilities. This confused moral introspection foreshadows Hamlet's using, later in the play, Christian ideas to justify behaviours that contravene Christian teaching. For example, Hamlet frames his murder of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern as an act of divine providence: "even in that was heaven ordinant" (5.2.48).

Hamlet's quasi-examination of conscience shows an experimentation with the removal of guided moral introspection prescribed by the Catholic penitential tradition. While reformers removed the formal guides to self-examination such as confession manuals, they nonetheless retained a recommendation to consult the Bible, as is specified in the *Homilies*: "we must bee

diligent to reade and heare the Scriptures and the worde of GOD, which most liuely doe paint out before our eyes our naturall vncleannesse" (Griffiths, 536-7). This can still be problematic, though, as biblical passages can often be interpreted in a variety of ways. This QSP magnifies the problem, removing not only a structured guide for introspection, but even the parameters of a moral paradigm. Hamlet's introspection wavers between competing models of morality, and shows moral self-deception as a result.

Hamlet's second quasi-examination of conscience occurs in his soliloquy in 4.4.32-66, in which he attempts moral introspection regarding his failure to have killed Claudius. The attempted introspection has multiple features that evoke an examination of conscience, including self-reprimand, introspection, inspiration from the example of another, and finally a resolution to behavioural change. Rather than producing moral clarity, however, this quasi-examination of conscience, like the previous one, shows flawed reasoning, and an inconsistent moral paradigm.

This quasi-examination of conscience has a catalyst, as does Hamlet's quasi-examination of conscience in 2.2, and Claudius' soliloquy in 3.3. In the latter two scenarios there is an example that triggers the conscience, either by showing the subject what they are (the Mouse-trap), or what they should be (the 'Hecuba' speech). In this instance Hamlet's trigger is the example of Fortinbras, who represents to Hamlet his ideal self, going into battle "to gain a little patch of ground / That hath in it no profit but the name" (4.4.18–19). This leads Hamlet to meditate on the morality of his own inaction:

> How all occasions do inform against me,
> And spur my dull revenge! What is a man,
> If his chief good and market of his time
> Be but to sleep and feed? A beast, no more.
> Sure He that made us with such large discourse,
> Looking before and after, gave us not
> That capability and godlike reason
> To fust in us unus'd. Now whether it be
> Bestial oblivion, or some craven scruple
> Of thinking too precisely on th'event —
> A thought which quarter'd hath but one part wisdom
> And ever three parts coward — I do not know
> Why yet I live to say, "This thing's to do,"
> Sith I have cause, and will, and strength, and means
> To do't. (4.4.32–46)

Hamlet makes a Ciceronian argument that the key distinction between humans and animals is the ability to "reason" (38).[37] He also appeals to the Christian God, "he that made us with such large discourse" (36), arguing that failure to use "[t]hat capability and godlike reason" (38) would not only undermine our humanity, but offend the God that bestowed it. Just two lines after declaring the human centrality of reason, he denounces reason in the form of "thinking too precisely on th'event", implying (correctly) that reason inhibits unreasonable

[37] See Cicero, *De Officiis*, I.iv.II.

self-destructive actions like that of Fortinbras. "[G]reatly to find quarrel in a straw / When honour's at the stake" is precisely to abandon reason.[38]

Hamlet continues to puzzle over his inaction:

> I do not know
> Why yet I live to say, "This thing's to do,"
> Sith I have cause, and will, and strength, and means
> To do't. (4.4.43–46)

This paradoxical split between will and action invokes the proverb, "the spirit in deede is readie, but the flesh is weake" (Matt 26:41), and St Paul's "For I allowe not that which I do: for what I wolde, that do I not: but what I hate, that do I" (Romans, 7:15). This split is also illustrated through what Aquinas calls the *ratio* and *intellectus*, or logical reasoning and the apprehension of moral truths, respectively (a similar split is suggested in Macbeth's language when he ponders Duncan's murder in 1.7.1–28). Hamlet appeals to *ratio* or algorithmic reasoning: "I have cause, and will, and strength, and means", because his *intellectus* — the faculty for the apprehension of moral truths — is not functioning properly. Without a disinterested, external spiritual guide, such as a confession manual or spiritual director, Hamlet cannot understand the instinctive moral voice of his *intellectus*.

Such a lack of a moral authority to mediate and inform the voice of conscience is expressed in John Donne's Holy Sonnet 14: "Reason, your viceroy in me, me should defend, / But is captiv'd, and proves weak or untrue." The "reason" Donne refers to is the *intellectus*, or the 'unfallen spark' (God's "viceroy"). However, Donne laments, it is not strong enough to override the concupiscence and *ignorantia* which surround it, 'holding it captive', and so it needs external aid. The same could be said of Hamlet's 'right reason'. Hamlet's confusion and self-deception is also evidenced by the fact that he decides he has 'strength and means' to kill Claudius as he is being escorted out of Denmark under armed guard, making it the first time in the play when he does *not* have the means to kill his uncle. As Newell observes, "[Hamlet] seems not to appreciate the reality of his situation when he says 'I have cause, and will, and strength, and means / To do't' (45-46)" (137).

The second half of Hamlet's meditation is focused on Fortinbras' foolhardy expedition:

> Witness this army of such mass and charge,
> Led by a delicate and tender prince,
> Whose spirit with divine ambition puff'd
> Makes mouths at the invisible event,
> Exposing what is mortal and unsure
> To all that fortune, death, and danger dare,
> Even for an egg-shell (4.4.47–53)

Hamlet describes Fortinbras, who is willing to lead thousands of men to their deaths in a petty quarrel over a worthless piece of land, as a "delicate and tender prince, / Whose spirit [is] with divine ambition puff'd". The incongruity of being 'delicate and tender' and warlike

[38] Alex Newell goes so far as to say, "the passage's contradictory claims demonstrate that Hamlet is too overwrought to be thinking straight in this ambiguous 'last word' on the matter" (74).

suggests the representation of a subconscious projection of himself onto Fortinbras, who shows the violent activity Hamlet lacks. There is also incongruity produced by the oxymoron, ‘divine ambition’. Ambition (in its early modern sense) entails pride. Pride is further suggested by the term “puff’d”, which invokes 1 Corinthians 13:4: “love doth not boast itself: it is not puffed up”. As pride is antithetical to love, it cannot be divine, as we are reminded in *Henry VIII*: “Cromwell, I charge thee, fling away ambition: / By that sin fell the angels” (3.2.441–2). These contradictions represent Hamlet as being subconsciously aware of the immoral nature of Fortinbras’ behaviour, and yet presenting it as morally exemplary using a Christian framework.

The following lines show a continuation of this moral confusion and self-deception:

> Rightly to be great
> Is not to stir without great argument,
> But greatly to find quarrel in a straw
> When honor’s at stake. (4.4.53–6)

Here Hamlet, by referring to “find[ing] quarrel” — ostensibly “a cause, reason; a ground” (*OED* 2.d), but punning on 3.a (“a violent contention or altercation with another person”) — substitutes honour in the sense of reputation (specifically reputation for manhood) for honour in the sense of moral rectitude. Hamlet’s concern for reputation continues as he worries over how he will appear in light of Fortinbras’ decisive and violent action:

> How stand I then,
> That have a father kill’d, a mother stain’d,
> Excitements of my reason and my blood,
> And let all sleep, while to my shame I see
> The imminent death of twenty thousand men,
> That for a fantasy and trick of fame
> Go to their graves like beds, fight for a plot
> Whereon the numbers cannot try the cause,
> Which is not tomb enough and continent
> To hide the slain? (4.4.56–65)

Ironically, these soldiers, who have no say in the matter and are not at liberty to act in accordance with reason or conscience, resemble the ‘beasts’ described by Hamlet with scorn at the beginning of the soliloquy, as they unquestioningly “[g]o to their graves like beds” (62) for nothing more than “a fantasy and a trick of fame” (61), “oblivious” (40) and acting in accordance with “honour”.

Hamlet’s attempt at moral introspection shows confusion, as he conflates and oscillates between Christian and pagan moralities regarding honour and revenge. This ends with him renewing his vow of revenge: “O, from this time forth, / My thoughts be bloody, or be nothing worth!” (4.4.65–6). This final exclamation reinforces the depth of Hamlet’s confusion, as ‘blood’ implies passion in addition to violence, and is the opposite of the ‘godlike reason’ that he championed earlier in the soliloquy. This quasi-examination of conscience shows a corrupted imitation of Christian moral introspection in which the penitent, in the absence of guidance from an external source such as a confession manual,

twists the process and performs moral self-deception regarding the appropriate course of action.

Hamlet's problematic attempts at moral introspection in these quasi-examinations of conscience show him to fit the categorisation of a corrupt penitent, as he blends and distorts moral paradigms, and uses language that represents self-deception and flawed logic. By contrast, In Claudius' quasi-examination of conscience in 3.3.36-72 Claudius uses a consistently Christian moral paradigm to examine himself:

> O, my offence is rank, it smells to heaven,
> It hath the primal eldest curse upon't,
> A brother's murther. Pray can I not,
> Though inclination be as sharp as will,
> My stronger guilt defeats my strong intent,
> And, like a man to double business bound,
> I stand in pause where I shall first begin,
> And both neglect. What if this cursed hand
> Were thicker than itself with brother's blood,
> Is there not rain enough in the sweet heavens
> To wash it white as snow? Whereto serves mercy
> But to confront the visage of offense?
> And what's in prayer but this twofold force,
> To be forestalled ere we come to fall
> Or pardon'd being down? Then I'll look up.
> My fault is past, but, O, what form of prayer
> Can serve my turn? "Forgive me my foul murder"?
> That cannot be, since I am still possess'd
> Of those effects for which I did the murder:
> My crown, mine own ambition, and my queen.
> May one be pardon'd and retain th' offense?
> In the corrupted currents of this world
> Offense's gilded hand may shove by justice,
> And oft 'tis seen the wicked prize itself
> Buys out the law, but 'tis not so above:
> There is no shuffling, there the action lies
> In his true nature, and we ourselves compell'd
> Even to the teeth and forehead of our faults,
> To give in evidence. What then? What rests?
> Try what repentance can. What can it not?
> Yet what can it, when one can not repent?
> O wretched state! O bosom black as death!
> O limed soul, that struggling to be free
> Art more engag'd! Help, angels! Make assay,
> Bow, stubborn knees, and heart, with strings of steel,
> Be soft as sinews of the new-born babe!
> All may be well.

> …
>
> My words fly up, my thoughts remain below:
> Words without thoughts never to heaven go. (3.3.36–72, 97-8)

In this soliloquy Claudius examines his conscience according to Catholic penitential structures. In contrast to Hamlet in the previous two quasi-examinations of conscience, Claudius is honest with himself about his sin, his culpability, and the state of his soul. This demonstrates that Shakespeare knows what Christian self-examination is supposed to look like and therefore also shows that his distorted representation of it in the play is deliberate.

Claudius' introspection produces a profound and self-aware contradiction: he is horrified and driven almost to despair by what he has done and how it has cost him his soul, and yet he cannot bring himself to do what is required to save it, which would require him to relinquish the benefits he gained from his sin: "My crown, mine own ambition, and my queen" (55). Claudius confesses to his sin: "A brother's murther", and shows contrition: "my offence is rank, it smells to heaven". The third element of the Sacrament of Penance after contrition and confession is penance, which involves restitution in cases in which a sin involved something being wrongfully taken.

Joseph Sterret misunderstands the reason for Claudius' inability to pray:

> Claudius is caught not principally in his inability to imagine a bridge between the competing imperatives of power and piety, but in his isolation. He cannot find a prayer because he cannot conceive of anyone listening and can find nothing definitive, a soul within or a friend without, that can give his prayer meaning. (756)

This ignores the more obvious reason for Claudius' failed confession: he cannot perform restitution. Claudius expresses his awareness that his repentance is insincere as long as he refuses to give up what he has gained from his sin: "Try what repentance can. What can it not? / Yet what can it, when one can not repent?" (3.3.65–6). According to the Council of Trent, "Sins be not in such wise pardoned us without any satisfaction" (Trent, XIV.8), and "contrition contains not only a cessation from sin, and the purpose and the beginning of a new life, but also a hatred of the old" (XIV.4). Claudius has contrition in the form of attrition ("my offence is rank"), but it is not strong enough to bring him to relinquish his gains as is required for the Sacrament of Penance.

Rather than trying to justify or rationalize his actions, as Hamlet does, or trying to manipulate God (as Henry V does — see Chapter 2), Claudius does not deceive himself regarding the immorality of his actions. He also does not exhibit signs of reprobation, as those characters in Shakespeare who have both self-knowledge and a lack of repentance generally do: Iago, for example, says "Virtue? A fig! 'Tis in ourselves that we are thus or thus" (*Oth,* 1.3.319-20); Antonio from the *Tempest* responds to the question "But, for your conscience?" with "Ay, sir; where lies that?" (2.1.275, 276); and Richard III says "Conscience is but a word that cowards use, / Devis'd at first to keep the strong in awe" (5.5.309-10).

Claudius invokes the idea of a curse twice. Firstly, in reference to Cain and Abel: “It hath the primal eldest curse upon’t — / A brother’s murther” (37–8); and secondly, as follows:

> What if this cursed hand
> Were thicker than itself with brother’s blood,
> Is there not rain enough in the sweet heavens
> To wash it white as snow? (43–6)

which anticipates Lady Macbeth’s “damn’d spot”. According to the *OED*, the word ‘curse’ can mean either “[t]he evil inflicted by divine (or supernatural) power... in the way of retributive punishment”, or “A great evil (regarded more or less vaguely as inflicted or resting upon a person, community, etc.); a thing which blights or blasts; a blasting affliction, a bane” (*OED* 4a, 4b). If read in the first sense, Claudius is acknowledging the damnation that awaits him as a result of his sin; if read in the second sense, Claudius may be subconsciously avoiding full responsibility by seeing himself as a circumstantial victim of something like concupiscence (as my analysis will show Hamlet does in the ‘nunnery scene’), which is not technically the fault of the individual, but the inherited ‘curse’ of humanity at large.

Claudius’ lament, “Is there not rain enough in the sweet heavens / To wash it white as snow?” is a reference to Psalm 51:7: “Purge me with hyssope, and I shalbe cleane: wash me, and I shalbe whiter then snowe.”, some critics such as Hamlin noting that Claudius evokes the “iconography of the penitent David” (Hamlin, 216). The Penitential Psalm 51, so called since the sixth century, was read as an Old Testament typological prefiguring of confession (“Wash me throughly from mine iniquitie, and clense me from my sinne.” 51:2). Hyssop was a herb used medicinally, in purification rituals, and in religious rites (*OED*, “hyssop” n. 1a, 2a, 2b). Both King David (considered the writer of Psalm 51) and Claudius have kept their sins secret, and whilst David in this psalm can now rejoice at ‘coming clean’, Claudius continues to struggle under the weight of his conscience: “O heavy burthen!” (3.1.46–53).

Both the psalm (in a precursory sense), and Claudius (in an implicit sense), allude to the need for confession as a means by which one may be healed, purified and cleansed of one’s sins. This idea of confession being the exposure of a festering wound in order to remedy it is corroborated by a mid-fifteenth century English Confession Manual: “Be it neuyr so shameful, neuyr so horrible, neuyr so foule, telle yt out… knowleche of senne is the begynnyng of helthe” (DeRosa, 54). Significantly, the play is haunted by the image of sin as a festering wound: “It will but skin and film the ulcerous place, / Whiles rank corruption, mining all within, Infects unseen” (3.4.147-9); “But, like the owner of a foul disease, / To keep it from divulging, let it feed / Even on the pith of life” (4.1.21-3); “But to the quick of th’ ulcer: / Hamlet comes back” (4.7.123-4).

The final “All may be well” (72) indicates a clouding of Claudius’ spiritual insight, which up until now has been clear. The psyche cannot endure long in a state of despair, or as T.S. Eliot said, ‘humankind cannot bear very much reality’: it must produce an alteration or resort to suicide, as we see in the case of Lady Macbeth. In Hamlet’s case this alteration comes in the form of continued resolutions to action, and in the case of Claudius in this moment, denial, as when at the end, pierced by the sword he knows to be poisoned, he cries “O, yet defend me, friends, I am but hurt.” (5.2.324). The engagement in a reflective process which imitates an examination of conscience and anticipates the elements of the Sacrament of Penance has

allowed Claudius to review his spiritual condition. He acknowledges that "[in heaven] There is no shuffling"; therefore, his unfounded, auto-consolation of 'all may be well' represents a survival mechanism, and an act of self-deception. The Catholic penitential structure includes a provision for this natural self-deception in the requirement to confess verbally to a priest, whose role involves pointing out self-deception and rationalization to the penitent. If Claudius had confessed to a priest, he would not have been able to entertain the idea of 'all being well' without being contradicted.

Interestingly, Claudius' quasi-examination of conscience and Gertrude's quasi-confession in 3.4, which follows immediately after, are complementary: he needs a priest to demarcate his final "all may be well" as futile and self-deceptive; Gertrude has a quasi-confessor in Hamlet, but he corrupts the process (as will be argued) and leads her into scrupulosity instead. Claudius has the theological clarity but not the good will, while Gertrude has the good will but not the theological clarity.

At the conclusion of the scene, after Hamlet's diabolical vow to send him to hell, Claudius ends with a final couplet suggesting despair: "My words fly up, my thoughts remain below. / Words without thoughts never to heaven go." (3.3.97–8). Stegner observes that Hamlet sees Claudius' penitence as successful in Reformed terms:

> Hamlet reads his uncle's successful repentance in terms of Protestant penitential practices. In accepting Claudius's prayer as authentic, he demonstrates his assumptions regarding the efficacy of unmediated penitence, an attitude germane to his studies at Wittenberg. He believes that Claudius is able to and does receive forgiveness for the murder of King Hamlet … through metanoia or sincere conversion of the heart. (*Confession*, 123).

Claudius' final couplet demonstrates his keen awareness of the theological intricacies of his situation. He recognises that he is unable to let go of his worldly interests, which have been gained through sin, and that therefore his prayers are useless. He acknowledges the implicit self-deception inherent in an insincere prayer, as well as the futility of it.

In summary, at the start of his soliloquy Claudius fits the categorisation of a willing penitent, as he engages in moral introspection using Catholic penitential structures with self-knowledge and attrition. He subtly corrupts the process, however, through consoling and deceiving himself that "all may be well" without his having to perform restitution. This leads to Claudius avoiding the Sacrament of Penance and instead plotting to kill Hamlet, compounding his initial sin in order to protect himself and his position on the throne.

Although Claudius is structurally the villain of the play, his moral introspection is ironically better than Hamlet's according to Catholic penitential structures. Unlike in Hamlet's quasi-examination of conscience, Claudius' moral paradigm is clearly Christian, and his knowledge of sin, virtue, vice, and right action is clear. His problem is not a failure of understanding but a failure of the will in not wanting to perform restitution.

Hamlet's quasi-examinations of conscience in the absence of the external guidance prescribed by Catholic and Reformed religious authorities shows a confused introspection in which Christian and pagan moral paradigms regarding honour and revenge are conflated. This

introspection results in self-deception rather than self-knowledge, which is contrastingly shown by Claudius. This analysis of Hamlet's self-deceived examination of his conscience throws new light on the erratic and self-sabotaging trajectory of Hamlet's revenge, and anticipates Hamlet's functioning as a corrupt penitent in quasi-confessions to other characters in the play.

Quasi-Confessions in *Hamlet*

This section will analyse and compare six quasi-confession scenarios in *Hamlet*: four in which Hamlet plays the penitent (to Ophelia, Horatio, Gertrude, and Laertes), and two in which Hamlet plays the confessor (to Gertrude and Laertes). It will analyse and compare the ways in which Hamlet performs corrupted imitations of these penitential structures in order to manipulate other characters and appease his own conscience. Reading these scenes as quasi-confession scenarios will offer an explanation for Hamlet's ambiguous and seemingly inconsistent behaviour in his relationships with these characters.

Hamlet as Penitent

In Hamlet's dialogue with Ophelia in Act 3 Scene 1 (the nunnery scene) Hamlet imitates the structures of the Sacrament of Penance through confessing his sins to Ophelia. Due to the unregulated nature of the quasi-confession, however, Hamlet exploits his political status and uses a twisted imitation of the elements of the Sacrament of Penance to shift moral responsibility onto her. He also uses this imitation of the elements of the Sacrament of Penance to practice moral self-deception regarding the state of his conscience.

Eleanor Prosser notes that generations of critics have struggled to reconcile Hamlet's aggressive treatment of Ophelia in this scene with the "tender, sensitive, hesitant hero of tradition" (173). She notes that critics have "dismissed Hamlet's behaviour as irrelevant… "excused it on the grounds that Hamlet knows Ophelia has taken a new lover," or "rel[ied] on the explanation that Hamlet knows he is being overheard" (173). Prosser proposes a more cogent interpretation in which an overwrought Hamlet has "lost control" (175). She argues that Ophelia represents to Hamlet "a sense of nostalgia for the fairy-tale world of innocence" (172) he has left behind, until her "simple bit of dishonesty… suffices to trigger Hamlet's fury" (174), and causes him to "surrender… himself to instinct and to passion" (176). Similar readings of Hamlet as 'passion's slave' include that of Jacques Lacan, who reads Hamlet as "a man who has lost the way of his desire" (7) in the vein of the Freudian readings which ascribe Hamlet's behaviour in the nunnery scene to neurosis. More recently, Rhodri Lewis reads Hamlet's aggression in the dialogue as the result of his being "wounded by what looks to him like the frostily disingenuous confirmation of her earlier rejections" (124). These readings fail, however, to explain the calculated rhetoric employed by Hamlet in this scene even before Ophelia speaks. In addition to this, Hamlet is depicted as calmly philosophising immediately before encountering Ophelia, in his famous 'To be, or not to be' soliloquy. Reading this scene as a Quasi-Sacrament of Penance creates a congruence between Hamlet's behaviour here and in the rest of the play. Hamlet's insults begin before he is provoked: one

way to make sense of this is to see him as deliberately provoking Ophelia, pushing her into the role of confessor so she will rebuke him, allowing him to overrule her rebukes.

Hamlet begins the exchange by asking Ophelia to remember his sins in her prayers: “Nymph, in thy orisons / Be all my sins rememb’red” (3.1.88–89). This creates the expectation of Hamlet confessing his sins to Ophelia. It positions Hamlet as quasi-penitent and Ophelia as quasi-confessor, and suggests the possibility of her having some spiritual authority over him. This suggestion of spiritual authority is, however, undermined by the semantic ambiguity of Hamlet’s language. The use of the word ‘orisons’ instead of simply ‘prayers’ is noteworthy. ‘Pray’rs’ would have fitted better with the metre, whilst ‘orisons’ creates an irregular (Alexandrine) line. So why this word? In addition to meaning ‘prayer’, ‘orison’ also means a speech or oration (*OED* “orisons” 2). This suggests calculated rhetoric, which challenges the sincerity of Ophelia’s prayers. The term ‘nymph’ is equally ambiguous. It can mean a semi-divine mythological spirit, a beautiful young woman, or a prostitute (*OED* “nymph” 1, 2b, 2a). This conflates religious imagery (prayers, sins, semi-divine spirit) with imagery of artificiality (oration, prostitution), and sexuality (evoked not only by prostitution, but also his greeting her as “the fair Ophelia” 3.1.88). These lines (88-89) also subtly suggest that Hamlet’s ‘sins’ are shared by Ophelia. Her ‘remembrance’ of them implies a preexisting knowledge, and his language suggests an absorption of his sins which she must now carry (“Nymph, in thy orisons / Be all my sins rememb’red”). This is reinforced further on by Hamlet’s associating female sexuality with sin (“why wouldst thou be a breeder of sinners” 120-21), and the text’s intimation of a sexual relationship between the unmarried Hamlet and Ophelia (4.5.48-55, 58-66, 171-3).

These undertones of ambiguity and criticism suggest that Hamlet is not simply intending to confess his sins to Ophelia, but to use the framework and language of the Sacrament of Penance to attack her. Therefore, in addition to experimenting with the political and gendered power imbalance between Hamlet and Ophelia, this quasi-confession also experiments with another problem presented by the Reformed practice of unregulated, lay confession: what if the person you are confessing to participated in your sin? While a Catholic priest could not absolve a sin in which he took part, the Reformed confession of the ‘priesthood of all believers’ made no such stipulations, and Hamlet takes advantage of this new freedom in his quasi-confession to Ophelia.

Despite later implied accusations of sexual betrayal, (“are you honest?” 102; “wise men know well enough what monsters you make of them” 138-9), Hamlet refuses to take responsibility for his apparent deception of her. In keeping with the opening pattern of confession and accusation, Hamlet confesses said deception, but then shifts the responsibility of it onto Ophelia:

> *Ham.* I did love you once.
> *Oph.* Indeed, my lord, you made me believe so.
> *Ham.* You should not have believ’d me (3.1.114–16)

Ophelia’s “you made me believe so” suggests an accusation of a betrayal of trust. This form of indirect reproach can also be seen in response to Hamlet’s “I never gave you aught” (3.1.95): whereas F1 Ophelia says “My honor’d Lord, I know right well you did”, Q2 Ophelia says (much more assertively taking on the role of confessor), “My honor’d Lord, *you*

know right well you did" [*emphasis mine*]. In these moments Ophelia uses her position as confessor to criticize Hamlet. Hamlet does not take the opportunity for moral introspection offered by Ophelia's criticism. Instead, he places the responsibility on her: "You should not have believed me". This is nonetheless a confession of wrongdoing, as it acknowledges that he has lied, but he takes no further responsibility for it. This suggests both moral self-deception on the part of Hamlet, and an exploitation of his secular power over Ophelia, which prevents her from criticizing him more forcefully.

Hamlet appears to confess more sins:

> I am myself indifferent honest, but yet I could accuse me of such things that it were better my mother had not borne me: I am very proud, revengeful, ambitious, with more offenses at my beck than I have thoughts to put them in, imagination to give them shape, or time to act them in. What should such fellows as I do crawling between earth and heaven? (3.1.120–29).

This quasi-confession mimics auricular confession through the listing of sins: "I am proud, revengeful, ambitious". This imitation of confession shows, however, flawed moral introspection, and self-deception. Hamlet begins by claiming to be "indifferent honest", meaning 'tolerably virtuous'.[39] 'Honest', of course, also means truthful. Yet Hamlet's has just confessed dishonesty to Ophelia not five lines earlier: "You should not have believed me" (117). 'Indifferent' also means neutral or impartial (*OED*, "indifferent". Adj. 1a), which implies an ability to view oneself objectively. This introspective objectivity is undermined, however, by Hamlet's claim to be so sinful that "it were better [his] mother had not borne [him]". His objectivity is also undermined by the hyperbole regarding his virtue: Hamlet's claim to 'honesty' is given in the context of his earlier observation that "to be honest, as this world goes, is to be one man pick'd out of ten thousand" (2.2.178–9). Hamlet's claim to honest and objective moral introspection therefore shows self-deception.

At first glance, Hamlet's list of sins appears to be the result of sound introspection: "I am very proud, revengeful, ambitious". However, his language subtly negates his responsibility for these failings. By mentioning them in the context of original sin ("wouldst thou be a breeder of sinners?"; "Virtue cannot so inoculate our old stock but we shall relish of it"), Hamlet transforms his individual sins into mere concupiscence, for which we are not individually responsible: "[w]e are arrant knaves all".

Indeed, the sins Hamlet confesses to ("I am very proud, revengeful, ambitious") are general and unspecified, and while pride is a sin, being revengeful and ambitious are technically vices, which are only predispositions to sin. In doing so he exploits a vagueness in the Reformers' rejection of Catholic penitential structures and their typology of sin, as the *Homily on Repentance* classifies sin only in general terms:

> we must be earnestly sorry for our sinnes… But that this may take place in vs, we must bee diligent to reade and heare the

[39] Evans ascribes this meaning in the *Riverside* edition, p.1161, n.121.

> Scriptures and the worde of GOD, which most liuely doe paint out before our eyes our naturall vncleannesse. (Griffiths, 536–7).

The Homily focuses on a generalised sense of sin, and recommends looking at scripture in order to be reminded of the fallen nature common to all humanity, concupiscence (the soul's inherited tendency towards sin, a natural and universal consequence of original sin). This process, when corrupted, can allow for an avoidance of introspection and responsibility regarding specific, personal sin. The Catholic approach to sin, by contrast, focuses on individualised introspection and specificity of sins. The Council of Trent states that confession would be ineffective "if the said faithful should have declared their sins in general only, and not rather specifically, and one by one". It continues by instructing that "all the mortal sins, of which, after a diligent examination of themselves, they are conscious, must needs be by penitents enumerated in confession, even though those sins be most hidden". (XIV.5). Hamlet's quasi-confession to Ophelia takes advantage of the Reformed generalisation of sin in order to avoid identifying and taking responsibility for any specific sins.

Hamlet also implicitly shifts responsibility for the concupiscence which he *does* confess to onto his mother, and women in general, in the context of procreation: "I could accuse me of such things that it were better my mother had not borne me". By appealing to the culpability of women, who 'breed sinners', and cuckold their husbands ("wise men know well enough what monsters you make of them" 140-41), Hamlet further shifts the blame for his vices away from himself. This is ironic, of course, as concupiscence of the flesh was thought to be transmitted through the sperm, as derived ultimately from Adam, whose sin included the whole of humanity.[40] The intrinsic sinfulness of female sexuality is also implicit in the terms 'nymph' (as has been said), and 'nunnery', which could be slang for a brothel (*OED*, "nunnery", n. 1b). Hamlet's confession is therefore more of a criticism of women, in particular their sexuality, as being responsible for his concupiscence, of which he presents himself as a victim.

Having forced Ophelia into the role of quasi-confessor ("in thy orisons / Be all my sins rememb'red"; "I am very proud, revengeful, ambitious"; "What should such fellows as I do…?") Hamlet inverts the spiritual authority he has implicitly given her and speaks to her almost exclusively in imperatives throughout the dialogue. ("Get thee to a nunnery" x5; "believe none of us"; "Let the doors be shut upon him"; "Go to", etc.). In doing so, Hamlet exploits the secular power imbalance between them. Because of the inequality of their positions, Ophelia is not only unable to refuse to participate, but rendered unable to criticize Hamlet as a confessor would. Her inability to respond freely is emphasised by Hamlet's rhetorical question, "What should such fellows as I do crawling between earth and heaven?" which ironically invokes a penitent asking for spiritual advice from a confessor.

Hamlet therefore creates a quasi-confession scenario in which he holds all of the power, being able to define, confess, and deny responsibility for his sins. Instead of accepting criticism and correction from his quasi-confessor, dared in her covert rebuke "you made me believe so", he criticizes and shifts the blame onto her. Despite having declared his love and devotion to her and then withdrawn it, Hamlet manipulates the discourse so that he becomes

[40] See Wilhelm and Scannell, 24–25.

the supposed victim of her manipulative feminine sexuality. It is not enough to justify his actions to himself: Hamlet must force Ophelia to be a part of the justification process.

Ophelia's right of reply is symbolic only, and Hamlet's using her as a means of confessing and justifying his sins parallels Polonius' and Claudius' use of her as a mechanism for surveillance (interestingly, in the original Latin prose source for the play by Saxo-Grammaticus, Fengo, the counterpart of Claudius, uses a prostitute to attempt to elicit information from Amleth).[41] Ophelia's silence as quasi-confessor, even though it is forced upon her, gives Hamlet the validation — the quasi-absolution — that he craves.[42] There is some emotional satisfaction from a pseudo-confession, even if it is a pseudo-satisfaction. Hamlet has perverted the structure of the Sacrament of Penance and exploited the Protestant dismantling of it through laicised confession and the generalisation of sin in order to forcibly grab at absolution, or rather its psychological side-effects, namely peace of mind and a sense of being justified.

There is also a plausible reading of this scene in which Hamlet is aware of Ophelia's compromised position, and of Claudius and Polonius' spying. The chafing consonant clusters in Ophelia's tritely sententious couplet, "Take these again, for to the noble mind / Rich gifts wax poor when givers prove unkind" (3.1.99-100) sound rehearsed, and evoke Polonius' diction. They provoke Hamlet's question, "Are you honest?", and subsequently, "Where's your father?". In this case, Hamlet's manipulation of the structures of the Sacrament of Penance also functions as political rhetoric. His confession of pride, ambition, and vengefulness serve as a warning to his enemies. This reading does not, however, account for Hamlet's use of penitential language before she has spoken, when he could not know that they were being overheard.

This hermeneutical analysis, though by no means an exhaustive or exclusive way to read the play, provides a fresh perspective which reconciles Hamlet's seemingly aberrant behaviour here with his behaviour in the rest of the play. A similar imbalance of power as that between Hamlet and Ophelia exists in Hamlet's quasi-confession to Horatio in the following QSP.

In the dialogue between Hamlet and Horatio in 5.2.1-70 Hamlet confesses to Horatio his having had Rosencrantz and Guildenstern executed. Rather than using this quasi-confession as an opportunity for moral introspection, and opening himself to criticism and advice from Horatio, Hamlet uses the structures of the Sacrament of Penance to confess and justify his actions to Horatio, and ease his conscience through self-deception. Unlike Ophelia, who acted as Hamlet's quasi-confessor unwillingly, Horatio is an eager, seducible confessor, who is willing to participate in Hamlet's moral self-deception.

Hamlet initiates the conversation in which he recounts his actions to Horatio. Although he frames his narrative as a triumph in which "heaven [was] ordinant", ambiguities in Hamlet's

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[41] See Jenkins, 86.

[42] The play hints at the sexual exploitation of Ophelia, in which her father (a 'fishmonger') has pandered her to Hamlet, and Hamlet has used her for his own gratification. Her mention of Hamlet's promises to her (1.3.99-100, 110-111, 3.1.92, 156), and Hamlet's implicit accusations of her father pimping her out (2.2.174, 2.2.184-6, 2.2.404-420, 3.1.129), strongly suggests that Hamlet has had sexual relations with her, with the promise of marriage, and now rejects her. Her mention of honour when she first speaks to him in this scene, her singing about unmarried maids losing their virginity and men breaking their promises to marry them (4.5.48-55, 58-66, 171-3), and her suicide further evidence this.

language suggest a troubled conscience, and evoke a subconscious desire to confess. Hamlet begins by disclosing that he experienced sleeplessness due to an internal conflict: "Sir, in my heart there was a kind of fighting / That would not let me sleep. Methought I lay / Worse than the mutines in the bilboes." (5.2.4–6) While Hamlet does not disclose the cause of the "fighting" in his "heart", his restlessness evokes a troubled conscience, particularly given the moral significance of sleep that will feature in *Macbeth* (in which "Macbeth hath murdered sleep"). The idea of a troubled conscience is strengthened by the word "fighting", which is used in the same context in Gertrude's QSP (as will be shown), when the Ghost urges Hamlet to "step between her and her fighting soul" (3.4.113). Hamlet's comparison of himself to mutineers also suggests a subconscious guilt.

After the revelation of Claudius' attempt to have Hamlet executed in England, Hamlet confesses to Horatio that, in an act of spite, he altered Claudius' letter so that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern—the messengers—would be executed in his place "without debatement further, … / "Not shriving time allow'd" (45–7). Hamlet has little reason to suspect that his old friends had any knowledge of the contents of the sealed letter. By revealing it to them Claudius would be jeopardising his plan. Hamlet's writing a new letter to have them killed is therefore an unnecessary act of malice. This malice is increased by denying them "shriving time" before their deaths.

Being spared a sudden death and being able to make a final auricular confession is of crucial importance in the Catholic tradition. This importance is expressed in a personal testimony by Dutch Catholic theologian Erasmus in 1535. He prays "that dethe may not come upon me, and take me unprepared, and unredy / although he do come so sodeynly, y[t] he shall not graunt me laysure and space to make confession at my last ende." (Erasmus, *A lytle treatise*, image 4). This Catholic emphasis on receiving the Sacrament of Penance before death is a prominent *topos* in *Hamlet*. It is invoked by the Ghost, who grieves that he was denied the final sacraments before death (**"**Unhous'led, disappointed, unanel'd" –1.5.77), and again that he was "[c]ut off even in the blossoms of [his] sin" (1.5.76). Hamlet echoes this grievance when he remembers his father being killed "[w]ith all his crimes broad blown, as flush as May, / And how his audit stands who knows save heaven?" (3.3.81-2). The issue influences the course of Hamlet's revenge: he resists killing Claudius when Claudius is praying because to kill him in such a holy state of mind would be "hire and salary" (3.3.79). He resolves instead to wait for a time when Claudius is "dunk asleep, or in his rage, / Or in th' incestious [sic] pleasure of his bed" (3.3.90). Hamlet's denial of "shriving time" for Rosencrantz and Guildenstern therefore reads as unnecessarily brutal both in the context of the play and in the broader socio-religious context of Shakespeare's audience. Hamlet denies the diabolical implications of his decision, however, and practices moral self-deception through justifying his actions in religious terms. He claims, "There's a divinity that shapes our ends, / Rough-hew them how we may" (10–11), and that "even in [this] was heaven ordinant" (48). Hamlet's framing of his actions as providential also suggests an exploitation of Article 17 of the Thirty-Nine Articles in which "the godly consideration of Predestination, and our Election in Christ, is full of sweet, pleasant, and unspeakable comfort to godly persons, and such as feel in themselves the working of the Spirit of Christ" [*emphasis mine*] (Gibson, 459).

Horatio prompts Hamlet throughout his confession and asks clarifying questions, evoking a confessor "diligently inquiring into both the circumstances of the sinner and the sin".[43] Horatio's questions, however, significantly ignore the moral element of what Hamlet has done and instead focus on the practical. Horatio's immediate response to Hamlet's revelation of Rosencrantz's and Guildenstern's "How was this seal'd?" (47) is curiously dispassionate about what looks like Hamlet's murder of his old friends. This omission of shock or concern suggests Horatio's unwillingness to displease Hamlet with a negative response, highlighting the power imbalance between them.

The closest Horatio comes to a criticism of Hamlet's behaviour is his mild comment, "So Guildenstern and Rosencrantz go to't" (56). The grammar of the sentence is not accusatory: Guildenstern and Rosencrantz are the subject rather than the object of the sentence, and the phrasing of their deaths is euphemistic; this leaves any shock or accusation in the delivery as a performance choice. This comment could, nonetheless, be read as a covert criticism of Hamlet's behaviour, similar to Ophelia's gentle rebuke when playing the role of Hamlet's quasi-confessor herself: "you made me believe so". Indeed, this is how Hamlet receives it. Despite framing the incident as providential (10-11, 48), Hamlet responds to Horatio's comment as an accusation and defends himself: "They are not near my conscience: (58). This defensiveness and assurance of an untroubled conscience suggests moral self-deception, and a desire for Horatio to show approbation, and thus absolve him.

Hamlet attempts to defeat Horatio's supposed accusation with justifications for his behaviour:

> Why, man, they did make love to this employment,
> They are not near my conscience. Their defeat
> Does by their own insinuation grow. (57–9)

Hamlet's euphemism "their defeat", and his presenting Rosencrantz and Guildenstern as being complicit in Claudius' plan, suggest an evasion of responsibility. This is enhanced grammatically through using 'them' and 'their defeat' as the subjects of these sentences, thereby rhetorically minimising Hamlet's agency. Hamlet continues:

> 'Tis dangerous when the baser nature comes
> Between the pass and fell incensed points
> Of mighty opposites. (60–62)

While 'baser' can mean more morally despicable , it also indicates social inferiority. This reveals a subconscious awareness of their vulnerability, particularly when contrasted against the 'might' of himself and Claudius, and undermines the idea that they posed a genuine threat to Hamlet. Again, the use of euphemisms ("the baser nature"; "mighty opposites") indicates the subconscious covering of a troubled conscience.

In addition to moral self-deception, Hamlet's language shows manipulation of Horatio as his quasi-confessor. Not only does Hamlet have political authority over Horatio as his prince, but Horatio is also deeply emotionally attached to Hamlet, as his desire to join him in death shows ("I am more an antique Roman than a Dane. / Here's yet some liquor left" –5.2.341-2). This allows Hamlet to confess and justify his sin to Horatio without fear of reprimand.

[43] See Canon xxi of the IV Lateran Council in Denzinger (173-4).

Horatio provides the feeling of absolution given by a priest without the actual criticism and penance a priest would require. Horatio's inability to criticize Hamlet is also reinforced by Hamlet's confession itself, which reveals violent consequences for the perceived treachery of his friends.

Paul Stegner reads Hamlet's conscience in this dialogue as being untroubled due to a successful reconfiguration from Christian ethics to a Viking revenge ethic: "Conscience functions for Hamlet as the central point of reference for determining the sinfulness or virtue of others through the position as father confessor that in turn justifies his actions as an avenger (*Confession*, 123–4). While this does not address the self-deception that is suggested by Hamlet's defensiveness, nor Hamlet's insistence on denying Rosencrantz and Guildenstern the Sacrament of Penance, it does acknowledge the inconsistency of Hamlet's moral framework, which is evidenced in Hamlet's quasi-examinations of conscience.

As with his quasi-confession to Ophelia, Hamlet has used a secular imitation of the Sacrament of Penance as a tool for manipulation of Horatio and justification of his behaviour to himself (unlike Ophelia, however, Horatio participates in the process willingly). He has exploited loopholes created by the Reformed secularisation of confession which allow him to use his personal relationship with and political power over his quasi-confessors in order to confess and justify his sins to them.

The language and reactions of both Ophelia and Horatio in these QSPs suggest that they could make effective confessors in the spirit of the 'priesthood of all believers', as they are intelligent, perceptive, and have an intimate knowledge of Hamlet. However, the restriction of their speech due to Hamlet's corruption of the process and exploitation of the imbalance of power renders them ineffective. It is noteworthy that Hamlet does not place Osric, Polonius, or Rosencrantz and Guildenstern in the role of quasi-confessor, as he clearly does not take them seriously, and so would be unlikely to value their quasi-absolution. There is also a priest available at Elsinore, which the audience is made aware of through Ophelia's funeral, but Hamlet doesn't confess to him either. Hamlet presumably could not manipulate a priest in the same way, as the priest has a spiritual authority that overrides Hamlet's. Therefore, Ophelia and Horatio provide the perfect balance of intellect and subordination necessary for Hamlet's elaborate process of self-deception and justification.

Hamlet's pattern of playing the penitent and positioning another character as his quasi-confessor whom he then manipulates continues with his mother in the Closet Scene. Despite his playing the role of *her* confessor throughout most of the scene, there is a moment in which he reverses the roles, invoking the reciprocity implied in the *Homilies'* exhortation to "confess to one another". This brief quasi-confession occurs towards the end of the dialogue (3.4.171-9). Hamlet confesses, repents and absolves himself of Polonius' murder almost simultaneously. As with Hamlet's other quasi-confessors, Ophelia and Horatio, Gertrude is given no opportunity to respond or criticise:

> And when you are desirous to be blest,
> I'll blessing beg of you. For this same lord,
> I do repent; but heaven hath pleas'd it so
> To punish me with this, and this with me,
> That I must be their scourge and minister.

> I will bestow him, and will answer well
> The death I gave him. So again good night.
> I must be cruel only to be kind.
> This bad begins and worse remains behind. (3.4.171–79)

Hamlet's language shows an attempt to analogically satisfy the requirements of the Sacrament of Penance: contrition ("I do repent"), confession ("The death I gave him"), and penance ("I… will answer well"). Hamlet's 'repentance' proves hollow, however, as he frames himself as a victim ("heaven hath pleased it so, / To punish me"), and reclaims his position as heaven's "scourge and minister". This provides justification for the murder and shifts responsibility onto the divine. The repetition of "must" further serves to diminish his agency, and the euphemism of "the death I gave him" reinforces the suggestion of divine authority. In addition to this, Hamlet's promise to "answer well" is an amphibology, as it could mean either taking responsibility for his actions or evading it through rhetoric and rationalisation.

Hamlets' use of the structures of the Sacrament of Penance here to shift responsibility away from himself continues the pattern that has appeared in both his quasi-confessions to Ophelia and Horatio. The insincerity of his contrition is reinforced by the contempt he shows for his victim a few lines later, which includes a callous pun on the word "grave":

> This man shall set me packing;
> I'll lug the guts into the neighbour room.
> Mother, good night indeed. This counsellor
> Is now most still, most secret, and most grave,
> Who was in life a foolish prating knave. (211–15)

In this way Hamlet grants himself a quasi-absolution for the murder, perverting the elements of the Sacrament of Confession in order to deceive himself and manipulating his mother into participating in the process as a symbolic confessor. As in the cases of Ophelia and Horatio, Gertrude is not in a position to be able to respond effectively. Although the dialogue opens with her reprimanding Hamlet ("Hamlet, thou hast thy father much offended" – 3.4.8), Hamlet has brought her to such a state of distress by this point in the dialogue ("thou hast cleft my heart in twain" – 3.4.156) that she is rendered an ineffective, defeated confessor.

The final quasi-confession in which Hamlet plays the penitent takes place in 5.2.226-244. In this QSP Hamlet appears to confesses to Laertes, in a public setting, having "done [him] wrong", without actually mentioning the murder of Polonius, his driving Ophelia to suicide, and his assault on Laertes at her funeral. Through the use of rhetoric Hamlet transforms this penitential performance into a public political ritual in which he absolves himself of responsibility for his behaviour and forces Laertes, his unwilling quasi-confessor, to publicly forgive him.

> Give me your pardon, sir. I have done you wrong,
> But pardon't as you are a gentleman.
> This presence knows,
> And you must needs have heard, how I am punish'd
> With a sore distraction. What I have done

> That might your nature, honor, and exception
> Roughly awake, I here proclaim was madness.
> Was't Hamlet wrong'd Laertes? Never Hamlet!
> If Hamlet from himself be ta'en away,
> And when he's not himself does wrong Laertes,
> Then Hamlet does it not, Hamlet denies it.
> Who does it then? His madness. If't be so,
> Hamlet is of the faction that is wronged,
> His madness is poor Hamlet's enemy.
> Sir, in this audience,
> Let my disclaiming from a purpos'd evil
> Free me so far in your most generous thoughts,
> That I have shot my arrow o'er the house
> And hurt my brother. (5.2.226–244)

Hamlet reveals his lack of remorse and intention to manipulate Laertes to Horatio earlier in the scene:

> But I am very sorry, good Horatio,
> That to Laertes I forgot myself,
> For by the image of my cause I see
> The portraiture of his. I'll court his favours.
> But sure the bravery of his grief did put me
> Into a tow'ring passion. (5.2.75–80)

Hamlet's language here, as in his other quasi-confessions, shows self-deception and a desire to think well of himself. He uses the euphemism of 'forgot myself' to extenuate his competitive performance of grief at Ophelia's funeral. In noting that Laertes' quest for vengeance mirrors his own, he is on one level showing empathy, yet on another revealing that he fears for his life. His resolution to "court" Laertes' "favours" reveals his motivation for confessing to Laertes as self-preservation rather than genuine remorse.

Hamlet begins the quasi-confession saying, "Give me your pardon, sir", which could suggest contrition and an acknowledgement of wrongdoing. Although the phrasing is conventional, the use of the imperative nonetheless hints at the request also functioning as a command, which foreshadows the use of rhetorical devices to elicit Laertes' forgiveness rather than asking for it to be granted freely. Hamlet then confesses his sins, but in vague terms only: "I have done you wrong". This is followed immediately with a reminder to Laertes of their unequal positions in the socio-political hierarchy: "But pardon't as you are a gentleman"; this reinforces the reading of Hamlet's request for pardon as a command. Hamlet also reminds Laertes of their audience: "This presence knows". These two factors make it impossible for Laertes to speak freely or deny Hamlet his forgiveness. As in the case of other Quasi-Sacraments of Penance in this play Hamlet presents himself as a victim: "Hamlet is of the faction that is wronged". He also directly appeals to the authority of the crowd, rhetorically stating his argument as a known fact: "This presence knows, / And you must needs have heard". The shorter lines, "This presence knows, (228)" and "Sir, in this audience, (240)" both as metrical fragments imply a pause. Since both lines also appeal to the audience, this

further suggests an inclusive, appealing gesture, reinforcing the public-facing, rhetorical nature of the quasi-confession.

Having analogically satisfied the requirements for contrition and confession, Hamlet attempts to satisfy the requirement for penance by claiming his supposed madness as punishment: “And you must needs have heard, how I am punish’d / With a sore distraction”. Although this is not a penance voluntarily undertaken, the Council of Trent states that temporal suffering may count as penance performed for sins: “we are able… to make satisfaction… by the temporal afflictions imposed by God and borne patiently by us” (XIV, 9.60). Therefore, the “punishment” that Hamlet claims to have suffered analogically meets the requirement for satisfaction. The manipulativeness of this quasi-confession is, of course, highlighted by Hamlet’s previous reassurance that his madness is feigned (“I perchance hereafter shall think meet / To put an antic disposition on” –1.5.171-2). Hamlet’s claim to madness not only fulfills the requirement for penance, but also serves as a mitigating factor in Hamlet’s behaviour. Catholic theology teaches that in order for a person to have sinned they must have had knowledge of their sins and appropriate mental faculties.[44]

Hamlet addresses Laertes’ desire for revenge: “What I have done / That might your nature, honor, and exception / Roughly awake, I here proclaim was madness” (230–32). By establishing his supposed madness and Laertes’ knowledge of it in front of a crowd of witnesses, Hamlet protects himself against Laertes’ revenge. For Laertes to attack Hamlet now would seem immoral and possibly be opposed by the public. Hamlet’s use of the word “proclaim” is also a rhetorical device. Proclaiming is a speech act, rather than an assertion, and a speech act is in itself neither true nor false: it depends for its validity upon the authority of the speaker, in this case a prince. Hamlet is, therefore, not technically lying about his madness, but rather assigning it an official label on his own authority, like naming a ship, and relying on it being taken as an assertion. This equivocation, or “shuffling” as Claudius puts it, occurs again with the word “disclaim”, which, strictly speaking, is not a denial, but a rejection of an idea.

Having analogically fulfilled the requirements for contrition, confession, and penance, and negated his culpability through his claim of madness, Hamlet further reduces his perceived agency by speaking of himself in the third person: “Was’t Hamlet wrong’d Laertes? Never Hamlet!” (233). By doing this Hamlet grammatically splits his identity so that “Hamlet from himself [is] ta’en away”. Through semantic satiation, his name is repeated seven times in seven lines until it becomes an empty signifier:

> Was’t Hamlet wrong’d Laertes? Never Hamlet!
> If Hamlet from himself be ta’en away,
> And when he’s not himself does wrong Laertes,
> Then Hamlet does it not, Hamlet denies it.
> Who does it then? His madness. If’t be so,
> Hamlet is of the faction that is wronged,
> His madness is poor Hamlet’s enemy. (233–9)

[44] See Berkman, John. “Are the Severely Mentally Disabled Sacramental Icons of Heavenly Life? Aquinas on Impairment”. *Studies in Christian Ethics*, vol 26, 2013, 1-14.

This rhetorical deconstruction of his identity allows Hamlet to confess his sins and at the same time "den[y]" them, not unlike Richard II's smashing of the mirror or Othello's strategy in his *apologia* of splitting himself between the murderous "circumcised dog" and his virtuous slayer (see Chapter 5).

Finally, with a flourish of flattery regarding "your most generous thoughts" which evokes courtly rhetoric, Hamlet reimagines the situation. He conjures a tragic image in which one brother accidentally hurts another: "I have shot my arrow o'er the house / And hurt my brother" (243–4). This image of an accidental shooting is similar to one found in Aquinas' *Summa Theologica*. Aquinas states that if a person, after having taken appropriate precautions to avoid wrongdoing, was ignorant of circumstances which they could not have foreseen and unknowingly committed a wrongful act, then they are not morally responsible for the wrongful act. Aquinas uses the following example to illustrate his point: "[F]or instance, a man, after taking proper precaution, may not know that someone is coming along the road, so that he shoots an arrow and slays a passer–by. Such ignorance causes involuntariness simply [and is therefore morally excusable]" (*ST* I-II Q.6. Art.8. ad.3). Hamlet's analogy, therefore, acquits him in Thomistic terms. It is noteworthy that Hamlet does not say 'killed my brother', which would be proper tragedy, but merely hurt. 'Killed' would remind Hamlet's audience of the deaths of Polonius and Ophelia, while 'hurt' euphemises the crime. This analogy reinforces the pressure on Laertes to resist revenging himself upon Hamlet, and further threatens his public reputation if he does.

In light of this, Laertes completes the quasi-confession with a conditional form of absolution:

> I am satisfied in nature,
> Whose motive in this case should stir me most
> To my revenge, but in my terms of honor
> I stand aloof, and will no reconcilement
> Till by some elder masters of known honor
> I have a voice and president [sic]of peace
> To keep my name ungor'd. But till that time
> I do receive your offer'd love like love,
> And will not wrong it. (5.2.244–52)

This Quasi-Sacrament of Penance shows Hamlet playing the penitent in order to negate his responsibility for his crimes and force Laertes, through a corrupted, rhetorical imitation of the structures of the Sacrament of Penance, to forgive him publicly and refrain from seeking revenge. As in the cases of his quasi-confessions to Ophelia, Horatio and Gertrude, Hamlet has severely inhibited Laertes' ability to criticise him or to respond freely. While the private nature of Hamlet's quasi-confessions to Ophelia, Horatio and Gertrude show self-deception and a desire to appease his conscience, the premeditation and the public nature of Hamlet's quasi-confession to Laertes differentiates this as a purely political, intentional, and self-aware rhetorical performance.

Hamlet's appropriation of the structures of the Sacrament of Penance show his taking advantage of the Reformed laicisation of confession. Through an amalgamation of spiritual and political power, Hamlet uses these theological structures to appease his conscience through rhetoric, self-deception and the manipulation of his quasi-confessors.

Hamlet as Confessor

There are two instances in the play in which Hamlet plays the quasi-confessor. The first and most famous quasi-confession is that of his mother in the Closet Scene (3.4.8-217):

> Thou turn'st my eyes into my very soul,
> And there I see such black and grained spots
> As will not leave their tinct. (3.4.89–91)

In this scene Hamlet makes moral accusations against his mother and imitates the structures of the Sacrament of Penance in order to bring her to a state of remorse regarding her remarriage to Claudius. Imitating the role of the confessor, Hamlet guides Gertrude through an analogical examination of conscience, elicits implicit confession, contrition, and penance from her, and gives her spiritual advice.

The invocation of auricular confession in this scene has been noticed by critics. Paul Stegner in *Confession and Memory*, for example, argues that Hamlet "reveals in this scene a general Christian desire to bring his mother to repentance" (109). This argument for Hamlet's pure intentions continues the tradition of readings such as A. C. Bradley's: "No father-confessor could be more selflessly set upon his end of redeeming a fellow-creature from degradation, more stern or pitiless in denouncing the sin, or more eager to welcome the first token of repentance" (Bradley, 138). These readings of Hamlet as an unproblematic pseudo-confessor fail, however, to consider the ways in which Hamlet corrupts the process, including killing a man in the middle of the session, and that the nature of Gertrude's sin is never clarified.

The Church dictates that the Sacrament of Penance must be initiated by the penitent only, and without coercion. Hamlet, however, forces this quasi-confession upon his mother: "Come, come, and sit you down, you shall not boudge; / You go not till I set you up a glass / Where you may see the [inmost] part of you" (3.4.18–20). Interestingly, it is Gertrude who began the dialogue with an accusation against Hamlet — "thou hast thy father much offended" — and so Hamlet's initiation of a quasi-confession of her functions as, among other things, a counterattack against a criticism of his own behaviour.

The legitimacy of Claudius and Gertrude's marriage is subject to an accusation of incest, which is invoked by the Ghost and Hamlet throughout the play (1.2.157, 1.5.42, 1.5.83, 3.3.90, 5.2.325). This accusation rests on a theological technicality. Marrying your late husband's brother was forbidden by Leviticus 20:21: "So the man that taketh his brothers wife, committeth filthines, because he hath vncouered his brothers shame: they shalbe childles". However, Deuteronomy 25:5 says: "If brethren dwell together, and one of them dye and haue no sonne, the wife of the dead shall not marry without: that is, vnto a stranger, but his kinseman shall goe in vnto her, and take her to wife, and doe the kinsemans office to her." The question of a man marrying his brother's widow was a hot topic in Elizabethan England. Henry VIII had used Leviticus as justification for divorcing his first wife, Catherine of Aragon, as she was formerly married to his brother, and for marrying Anne Boleyn, who became the mother of Elizabeth. If Deuteronomy prevails, then Queen Elizabeth becomes

illegitimate and thus disqualified as monarch (as the Catholic Church deemed her), a striking fact of which Shakespeare's audience could not have been unaware.

At the very outset of their discourse in 3.4, Hamlet performs a linguistic mirroring of his mother, anticipating the 'mirror' he will hold up to her soul:

> *Queen.* Hamlet, thou hast thy father much offended.
> *Ham*. Mother, you have my father much offended.
> *Queen*. Come, come, you answer with an idle tongue.
> *Ham.* Go, go, you question with a wicked tongue. (3.4.8–11)

There is a referential shift in the 'father' referred to, Gertrude meaning Claudius and Hamlet meaning the late King Hamlet. This 'father' can also be taken in the divine sense, which would categorise her offence as a sin. This is what Hamlet tries to establish as the scene develops.

Hamlet's command "Come, come, and sit you down, you shall not boudge;" (3.4.18) begins with an echo of Gertrude's "Come, come" in line 10, continuing the pattern of mimicry but also indicating a shift in power and authority. Hamlet symbolically forces Gertrude to examine her conscience, saying "You go not till I set you up a glass / Where you may see the inmost part of you" (19-20). Mirror imagery is frequently found in penitential literature, proving a popular metaphor for moral introspection. Examples of this include the early sixteenth-century German confession manual entitled *Peycht Spiegel der sünder* (mirror of confession for sinners) (1510), and the fourteenth-century English instructional poem on morals for the laity entitled *Speculum Vitae* (mirror of life), with its fifteenth-century prose counterpart, *A Myrour to Lewde Men and Wymmen.* There is also a sixteenth-century English collection of cautionary tales *de casibus virorum illustrium* in the form of poems entitled *A Mirror for Magistrates*. In addition to this, Jean Gerson's medieval text *Tractatus de arte audiendi confessiones* (On the Art of Hearing Confessions) offers, according to Tentler, "a mirror for sinners in which they can examine themselves according to the seven deadly sins" (Tentler, 111). Mirror imagery is a prominent metaphor for moral introspection in *Hamlet*, Hamlet using theatre as a means to "hold a mirror up to nature", and in doing so "catch the conscience of the king". The queen's reaction, "What wilt thou do? Thou wilt not murther me? / Help ho!" (21–2), indicates a use or perceived threat of physical violence towards her, often depicted in performances,[45] and an understandable fear for her life in light of his murder of Polonius.

Once again, Hamlet's accusations against his mother are in response to an accusation against him, this time for said murder:

> *Queen*. O what a rash and bloody deed is this!
> *Ham*. A bloody deed! almost as bad, good mother,
> As kill a king and marry with his brother.
> *Queen.* As kill a king! (3.4.27-30)

Harold Jenkins, in the second Arden edition of the play, observes that Hamlet "does not distinguish the elements of killing and marrying in what he apparently regards as one

[45] See, for example, Laurence Olivier's 1948 adaptation and Kenneth Branagh's 1996 adaptation.

composite crime" (p.320, fn.29). Another plausible explanation for Hamlet's double accusation (aside from mere gaslighting) is that he wishes to test Gertrude's conscience by observing her reaction, as he did in the Mouse-trap. This testing of the conscience through a suggestion of sin imitates the Confession manual. Confession manuals contained long lists of sins specific to a person's gender, occupation, and marital status which the priest could recite to the penitent in order to facilitate their memory or trigger their conscience and thereby facilitate a full confession, addressing the issue of self-deception. According to the late-medieval theologian Jean Gerson, "[s]ome penitents hide sins … so tenaciously that it is almost impossible to extract them. It is the task of the good confessor to deal skilfully with such penitents" (Tentler, 101). Tentler adds that Gerson "wants the good confessor to … make ignorant penitents realize they have unknowingly committed serious sins" (Tentler, 101). Hamlets corrupts this practice by accusing Gertrude of a vague blend of sins and *faux pas* that stem from personal hurt rather than an external code of ethics.

Hamlet's accusations in 53–88, in which he presents portraits of Gertrude's husbands to her and condemns her for shamelessness, "O shame, where is thy blush?" (81) are unclear. Hamlet's accusations imply that Gertrude had committed adultery while his father was still alive, for which there is no evidence in the play. Her 'o'erhasty' remarriage was a sin against propriety and decorum, not moral law (unless Leviticus is invoked, which Hamlet does not do at this point). Hamlet seems to be invoking the *topos* of the 'lusty widow',[46] and to be taking seriously the folklore tradition that a widow should remain faithful to her dead husband. Hamlet's accusations focus on appearances: "See what a grace was seated on this brow: / Hyperion's curls, the front of Jove himself" (55–6). He bypasses the moral and personal qualities of his father and uncle and accuses his mother of poor aesthetic taste — "Have you eyes? / Could you on this fair mountain leave to feed, / And batten on this moor?" (65–7). He frames this accusation in moral terms: "What devil was't / That thus hath cozen'd you at hoodman-blind?" (76–7);

> Rebellious hell,
> If thou canst mutine in a matron's bones,
> To flaming youth let virtue be as wax
> And melt in her own fire.
> …
> And reason panders will. (82–5, 88)

The impressionable Gertrude is moved by Hamlet's attempt to "wring [her] heart" (3.4.35), and responds to his morally ambiguous accusations in moral terms:

> O Hamlet, speak no more.
> Thou turn'st my eyes into my very soul,
> And there I see such black and grained spots
> As will not leave their tinct. (3.4.88–91)

Gertrude's outcry uses the language of moral introspection and repentance. However, the precise nature of Gertrude's sin—either as she understands it or as Hamlet understands it—remains unclear. Hamlet's bringing Gertrude into this state of agonised remorse explores the

[46] See Groves & Hiller, p.39, n.1, and Kimura, 13–27.

potential corruption of desacramentalised confession between laypeople. It investigates the lack of objectivity when a person's interests are involved in the 'sins' that another person confesses to them. Hamlet leverages his assumed authority as Gertrude's quasi-confessor in order to induce guilt around actions that, while they have been upsetting to him and his interests, are not, by Catholic or Reformed standards, strictly sins (notwithstanding the ambiguity around Leviticus and Deuteronomy).

Hamlet torments his mother with the repeated reminder of her 'sins'. He uses images of her "Stew'd in corruption" (93) while she begs him to stop, pleading "no more" three times within fifteen lines (3.4.88, 94, 101). This shows Hamlet inverting the role of the confessor outlined by Canon 21 of the IV Lateran Council (1215–16), which instructs the priest to console the penitent: "'pour wine and oil' [Luke 10:34] on the wounds of the wounded" (Denzinger, 173).

Gertrude's torment is interrupted by the apparition of the Ghost. Hamlet, articulating the audience's expectations, assumes that the Ghost has come to remind him of his quest for vengeance:

> Do you not come your tardy son to chide,
> That, laps'd in time and passion, lets go by
> Th'important acting of your dread command?
> O, say! (3.4.106–109)

The Ghost confirms this: "Do not forget! This visitation / Is but to whet thy almost blunted purpose" (3.4.110–111).

This reason for the Ghost's coming does not, however, make sense. Moments ago, Hamlet stabbed a man in the hopes that it was Claudius, and is performing a passionate comparison of his late father and his uncle when the Ghost interrupts him. It is a bizarre time to remind Hamlet of his quest for vengeance. Stephen Greenblatt, in *Hamlet in Purgatory*, attempts to reconcile this incongruity by explaining it in terms of nuanced distinctions involved in remembering the dead: "perhaps remembrance and revenge are not as perfectly coincident as either the prince or the Ghost had thought" (224). Harold Jenkins reads the Ghost's appearance as being motivated by a desire to "[protect]" Gertrude from Hamlet's violence (p.326, n.113). Reading the scene as a Quasi-Sacrament of Penance suggests another possibility: that the Ghost is here to disrupt Gertrude's confession and repentance, and consequently her salvation.

> But look, amazement on thy mother sits,
> O, step between her and her fighting soul.
> Conceit in weakest bodies strongest works,
> Speak to her, Hamlet (3.4.112-15)

Stegner sees the Ghost's exhortation as the "most explicit association of Hamlet with a father confessor" (*Confession*, 124), and a as a commandment to "take on the part of a spiritual mediator" (*Confession*, 124). I propose an alternative motivation: "O step between her and her fighting soul" implies a desire to interrupt moral introspection and prevent self-knowledge. If the Ghost agrees with Hamlet's accusations, which it does, having called Claudius "incestuous [and] adulterate" (1.5.42), and Gertrude "seeming virtuous" (1.5.46),

then the Ghost would perceive Hamlet's quasi-confession of Gertrude as beneficial to her soul. The Ghost's interruption of it becomes an attempt to thwart Gertrude's repentance and salvation.

This obscurity in the Ghost's motives is strengthened by its use of the word "conceit" (3.4.114), which functions as a syllepsis. It may mean "imagination; fanciful thinking" (*OED* iii, 8b) which is invoked by Jenkins, (p.326, n.114). This suggests a desire to protect Gertrude from scrupulosity. It can also, however, mean "The faculty for conceiving, apprehending, or understanding something; mental capacity" (*OED* "conceit", 2a). This meaning suggests that the Ghost is attempting to prevent Gertrude from achieving moral self-awareness. The latter reading is strengthened by the Ghost's earlier instruction to Hamlet to "Leave her to heaven, / And to those thorns that in her bosom lodge" (1.5.86–7). This undermines the idea of the Ghost's desiring to protect Gertrude from scrupulosity and suggests a desire for her damnation instead. This deviousness on the Ghost's part is suggested earlier through its use of *occupatio* in feeding Hamlet vivid images of Gertrude's "damned incest" (1.5.83), and then instructing him to "[t]aint not [his] mind" (1.5.85).

After the Ghost's departure, Hamlet continues in the role of quasi-confessor. He uses penitential language to warn his mother against using his supposed madness (reinforced for her by his conversation with the Ghost) as justification for her actions:

> Mother, for love of grace,
> Lay not that flattering unction to your soul,
> That not your trespass but my madness speaks;
> It will but skin and film the ulcerous place,
> Whiles rank corruption, mining all within,
> Infects unseen. Confess yourself to heaven,
> Repent what's past, avoid what is to come,
> And do not spread the compost on the weeds
> To make them ranker (3.4.144–52)

Hamlet's metaphor for the conscience as an "ulcerous place" (previously evoked in Claudius' quasi-examination of conscience) in which self-deception "infects unseen" echoes Catholic penitential language. Aquinas talks about the 'wound of ignorance' (*vulnus ignorantiae*), and Gerson evokes the image of a concealed wound when he speaks of the 'expert confessor' being able to 'uncover' sins unknowingly committed by the 'ignorant penitent' (Tentler, 101). This imagery also occurs elsewhere in Shakespeare, such as in *Measure for Measure*:

> *Angelo.* Why do you put these sayings upon me?
> *Isabella.* Because authority, though it err like others,
> Hath yet a kind of medicine in itself,
> That skins the vice o' th' top. (2.2.133–6)

And in Antonio's musing: "If 't [*my conscience*] were a kibe" (*Tempest* 2.1.276).

After forcing Gertrude through a corrupted examination of conscience in an attempt to make her feel remorse (contrition), Hamlet demands confession: "Confess yourself to heaven" and penance in the form of sexual abstinence: "Refrain to-night, / And that shall lend a kind of

easiness / To the next abstinence, the next more easy" (3.4.165–7). This imitates advice that would be expected from a confessor if Gertrude's relationship with Claudius were indeed sinful.

Hamlet ends the quasi-confession with a conditional imitation of absolution: "Once more good night, / And when you are desirous to be blest, / I'll blessing beg of you" (170–2). Stegner observes that this "suggests not only a deferral of the rite of absolution, but also an indeterminacy regarding the agency of who will bless (that is, absolve) Gertrude... The question of whether he means himself, God, or even a minister remains unclear." (*Confession*, 124).

This dialogue shows Hamlet appropriating the structures of the Sacrament of Penance and playing the quasi-confessor ("I must be their scourge and minister", l.175) in order to force his mother to repent of her remarriage and distract from his own sins, which now include the murder of Polonius. In contrast with Claudius' quasi-examination of conscience, Gertrude's quasi-confession is filled with ambiguity about what her sins actually are. Despite this ambiguity, the dialogue culminates in intense guilt: "thou hast cleft my heart in twain" (156). Claudius, on the other hand, has sharp clarity as to the exact nature of his sins, but his examination of conscience ends with a suppression of repentance. Hamlet has appropriated the structures of the Sacrament of Penance in this scene in order to punish his mother for her remarriage, manipulate her conscience, and distract both her and himself from the state of his own in the wake of his murdering Polonius.

The other quasi-confession in which Hamlet plays the confessor is his reconciliation with Laertes in 5.2.313-331. This constitutes an exception to the pattern of Hamlet's corruption of penitential language and structures. In this brief quasi-confession, Laertes imitates the structures of the Sacrament of Penance in confessing to Hamlet as they are dying, and Hamlet responds with forgiveness. Laertes confesses to killing Hamlet with a poisoned sword: "It is here, Hamlet. Hamlet, thou art slain… The treacherous instrument is in thy hand" (313, 316). He shows contrition and penance: "I am justly kill'd with mine own treachery" (5.2.307); "The foul practice / Hath turn'd itself on me" (5.2.317–18); "Exchange forgiveness with me, noble Hamlet. / Mine and my father's death come not upon thee, / Nor thine on me!" (5.2.329–331). He also performs a kind of restitution through exposing Claudius' plot to Hamlet: "the King, the King's to blame" (320) (this could be read as an attempt to evade responsibility, but his acknowledgement of his participation in the "foul practice" and that he is 'justly killed with his own treachery' obviate this). He receives absolution from Hamlet, who functions as his quasi-confessor: "Heaven make thee free of it!" (332). It is worth noting that in QSPs in which one party is corrupt, the corrupt party always initiates the QSP. Since neither party here seeks to corrupt the process, the willing penitent—Laertes—initiates it, and Hamlet, who functions as an effective confessor, unhesitatingly absolves him. Hamlet's participation in this QSP without manipulation or self-deception speaks to the rich ambiguity of a character which, even within a specific hermeneutic, defies reductive categorisation.

Rejection of Final Confession

Confession, absolution, and reconciliation are evoked at the deaths of Laertes and Hamlet when Laertes invites Hamlet to "exchange forgiveness". Critics have speculated over the play's representation of the state of Hamlet's soul at the moment of his death. The state of one's soul at this crucial moment is, of course, a subject with which the play is preoccupied. Critics have also speculated over what the text suggests waits for Hamlet in that "undiscovered country" which Hamlet contemplates throughout the play.

Prosser argues that "[i]n Shakespeare's eyes, Hamlet's soul is ultimately saved" (237). Hamlet, however, while he forgives Laertes, makes no confession of his own, and shows no remorse. He ambiguously says, "I follow thee" (5.2.332), which could simply mean that he is dying too, but could also mean that he believes he will follow Laertes to heaven. Roy Battenhouse and Colin Jory argue, however, that Hamlet commits the 'unforgivable' sin of presumption (Battenhouse, *Shakespearean* 251, Jory, 6) in believing himself to have achieved eternal life without God's assistance, suggested by Hamlet's lack of final repentance and confession.

Hamlet's lack of repentance for his crimes in the play is demonstrated by his charging Horatio with the chronicling of his great deeds as his dying wish: "Report me and my cause aright / To the unsatisfied". This suggests a continuation of his preoccupation with how he is perceived. This is proven when Horatio, overcome with devotion, leaps for the poisoned chalice so that he may die with Hamlet, (341–2), Hamlet uses the last of his strength to wrestle it from his hands — "Give me the cup. Let go! By heaven, I'll ha't!" (343) — not in order to save Horatio's life out of reciprocal love, but because otherwise Hamlet must suffer a damaged reputation: "what a wounded name, / Things standing thus unknown, shall I leave behind me!" (344–5). Hamlet's repeated request, "Report me and my cause aright / To the unsatisfied"; "And in this harsh world draw thy breath in pain / To tell my story" (339–40, 348–49) evokes a pagan eschatology, in which life after death is constituted by fame on earth (this also evokes Othello's death, which will be discussed in Chapter 5). This comprises a notable rejection of Christian attitudes towards death. Laertes' final confession creates the expectation for Hamlet's, but Hamlet dies without taking the opportunity for final repentance and confession. This is significant in a play of missed death-bed confessions ("[no] shriving time allow'd"; "Unhousel'd, disappointed, unanel'd") and quasi-confessions. Hamlet's final words, "the rest is silence", instead anticipate those of the unrepentant Iago: "From this time forth I never will speak word" (*Oth* 5.2.304).

It is also significant that Hamlet prevents Claudius from making any kind of final confession. Hamlet fatally wounds him with the "envenom'd" (321) foil, and Claudius calls for help even though he knows he is beyond help, having fallen into a state of denial: "I am but hurt" (324). This denial of his physical death echoes (as has been said) his previous denial of his spiritual death in 3.3.72: "All may be well". Before Claudius can utter another word, Hamlet fills his mouth with the poisoned wine, at once choking and drowning him: "Here, thou incestious [sic], murd'rous, damned Dane, / Drink off this potion! Is thy union here? / Follow my mother!" [*King dies*.] (325–27). Hamlet's vengeance is thus perfected, as he 'cuts him off in the blossom of his sin' as Claudius did Hamlet's father. His taunt, 'Is thy union here?' is rich with semantic possibilities. "Union" refers to the pearl (*OED*, "union", n.1) with which Gertrude was poisoned. This suggests vengeance for her death, which was albeit unintended. It also refers to heaven, represented scripturally as the "pearl of great price" (Matt 13:46)

which is ironic, as Hamlet intends to send Claudius to hell (this is made explicit when he refuses to kill Claudius while he is praying). It also refers to marital union, and what Hamlet believes is the poisoned state of Claudius' "incestuous" marriage, or the fact that Claudius will now be reunited with Gertrude in death. Furthermore, it means a union with the devil, to whom Claudius has, according to Catholic and Reformed theology, given his soul. There is even a pun on 'communion', particularly as Claudius is drinking wine from a chalice, in which case Hamlet has inverted the sacrament, using it to destroy Claudius' soul instead of save it. The semantic multiplicity of Hamlet's final words to his uncle highlights the spiritual implications of his silent death, and foregrounds the state of Claudius' soul. Through denying his uncle any last words, Hamlet has symbolically created a smothered confession.

This study of QSPs in *Hamlet* and their relationships to one another allows us to explore the ways in which Shakespeare experiments with the structures of the Catholic penitential tradition, and their modification in the Reformation, in order to portray psychological complexity in his characters. The analysis of quasi-examinations of conscience in *Hamlet* reveals Hamlet's moral introspection as flawed and predicated on inconsistent moral paradigms, thereby contradicting the traditional view of Hamlet as a profound introspector. The analysis of quasi-confessions reveals a pattern of Hamlet using imitations of the structures of the Sacrament of Penance in order to manipulate those around him and deceive himself. While characters such as Claudius, Laertes, and Gertrude engage in the penitential processes sincerely (with varying levels of efficacy), Hamlet uses Catholic penitential structures and the Reformed laicisation of confession as a currency that may be appropriated for personal gain. This study of Hamlet's appropriation and corruption of the structures of the Sacrament of Penance contributes a new perspective to the discussion of Hamlet's complicated and enigmatic character, and extends the argument for its darker side.

Chapter 4

Quasi-Sacraments of Penance in *Measure for Measure*

The concept of confession, both public and private, sacramental and secular, lies at the heart of *Measure for Measure*. This is underscored by the play's very title being taken from a biblical reference to justice and mercy: "Iudge not, that ye be not iudged. For with what iudgement ye iudge, ye shal be iudged, and with what measure ye mette, it shal be measured to you againe" (Matt 7:2). The term 'confession' is used eighteen times in this play including its derived forms ('confession', 'confessor', etc.). The action of the play is kicked off by the Duke, who, in an effort to reaffirm his secular authority, constructs a plan that involves him subsuming spiritual authority through the guise of a friar-confessor. This raises questions about the balance of power between the state and the church, and the problem of state surveillance into the interior lives of subjects. The theme of confession is also a vehicle for the key theme of self-awareness (including self-examination, self-deception and hypocrisy), which is embodied in the major characters: Duke Vincentio, Angelo and Isabella. Each of these characters struggles with self-knowledge ("pattern in himself to know" –3.2.263; "Oh what may man within him hide, / though angel on the outward side" –3.2.271-2).[47]

The Jacobean context of this play lends a particular significance to its exploration of confession, as the secularisation and desacramentalisation of confession was still a hot topic, the audience being very familiar with the Anglican 'confession of sins' and, in many cases, the underground, illegal Catholic Sacrament of Penance.[48] Rumours of James I sneaking around in disguise would also have held a particular piquancy for Jacobean audiences watching the figure of the Duke.[49] The final display of the Duke's combined secular and spiritual power at the climax of the play, in which, unmasked but still dressed as a friar, he administers legal justice using evidence he has gained through his usurpation of the friar's privilege of hearing confessions ("I have confessed her and I know her worth"), is also pertinent to the Reformation's reworking of the relationship between church and state, with the monarch now as 'Head of the Church', and perhaps indicative of anxieties surrounding the limits of said power.

In this chapter I will analyse eight quasi-Sacraments of Penance: four in which the Duke imitates the structures of the Sacrament of Penance, and four in which Angelo does. I will argue that the Duke and Angelo use corrupt imitations of the structures of the Sacrament of Penance in order to deceive themselves and manipulate others, and that the Duke's self-deception is more subtle than, but just as sinister as, Angelo's.

[47] See Brown's excellent article on this, "Erotic Religious Flagellation", which argues that the three main characters "harbour a subterranean sexuality" (121); see Fn. 3 for extensive criticism on the subject.
[48] Catholic recusancy (the existence of which serves as evidence of the underground administration of the Catholic sacraments including auricular confession), not only persisted at the turn of the seventeenth century, but grew at the time of James' accession. Catholics even hoped for tolerance from the new king, and petitioned him for it in 1603 (Dures, 40).
[49] For the ripple-effects of this in contemporary theatre see Beckwith, 73.

The Duke's impersonation of a friar-confessor has been viewed both positively and negatively in critical discourse, as will be shown below. In my analysis of his QSPs I will argue that the Duke's imitation of the structures of the Sacrament of Penance involve both self-deception and manipulation of others, and represent a corrupt, rather than salvific, sovereign.

While Angelo's corruption is already explicit, the extent to which his self-deception and corrupt behaviour is predicated on the language and structures of the Sacrament of Penance has not been explored. My analysis of his two quasi-examinations of conscience and two quasi-confessions will demonstrate that Shakespeare uses Catholic and Reformed penitential language and structures, which would have been recognisable to the play's original audiences, to represent Angelo's introspection and his and relations towards Isabella, the Duke, and the citizens of Vienna. I will offer a new reading of Angelo's and Isabella's language and behaviour in Act 2 Scene 4, arguing that Angelo functions as a corrupt confessor and Isabella as an unwilling *and* corrupt penitent. I will argue that self-deception and manipulation is employed by both in erotic-penitential terms.

The Duke's QSPs

Critics have understood the Duke's appropriation of a friar's habit and authority, particularly regarding hearing counterfeit confessions, in a number of ways. There was a tendency in the 1940s and 50s to read the Duke as a Christ-analogue who is the unambiguous saviour and hero of the play.[50] This reading of the Duke's appropriation of the office of friar-confessor as salutary and providential persists into the twenty-first century, as can be seen in Claire Griffiths-Osborne's 2009 article, "The Terms for Common Justice: Performing and Reforming Confession in *Measure for Measure*":

The benign exercising of the Duke's power encourages an image of him as a confessor that might be perceived more fittingly as a re-presentation of some kind of Providence, a reincarnation of the ghostly Father as divinely omniscient and powerful, ''working all things to the good'' (40).

Other critics have argued for the problematic nature of the Duke's usurpation of spiritual power in order to, as head of state, have access to the internal lives of his subjects. The Duke's 'surveillance state' has been compared to Foucault's Panopticon, the purpose of which is "to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power" (Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 201). Greenblatt notes that "Through the use of his disguise, the Duke bridges the gap between knowledge and power" (Greenblatt, *The Norton Shakespeare*, 2027). Richard Wilson writes that "[t]he state over which Vincentio presides has long ago begun the experiment of abandoning its public violence in return for private discipline of its citizens, and it knows its legitimacy depends upon its incitement of transgression" (126). Similarly, Ensieh claims that "Shakespeare's delineation of the complex relationships among power, sexuality, and discipline in the Vienna of *Measure for Measure* provides a striking dramatization of Foucault's ideas in these areas"

[50] See, for example, Knight, Coghill, and Battenhouse.

(27).[51] Ryan Kiernan in "*Measure for Measure*: Marxism before Marx" (2001) argues that "the most cogent critiques of the play to date contend… that *Measure for Measure* is a perfect dramatization of the grim tale told by Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*" (231); interestingly, Kiernan sees Shakespeare as endorsing, or participating in, the Duke's "charade": "By placing his formidable dramatic skill and rhetorical ingenuity at the service of the Duke's charade of 'apt remission' (5. 1. 491), Shakespeare duplicates in the theatre, it is alleged, the Duke's duping of his subjects" (231).

Stephen Greenblatt, in *Shakespearean Negotiations* (1988), recognises the powerplay involved in the Duke's fraudulent hearing of confessions but, like Griffiths-Osborne and her mid-twentieth century predecessors, retains a positive view of the appropriation of the structures of the Sacrament of Penance. Greenblatt compares Duke Vincentio's use of Catholic penitential language and inquiry on Juliet in prison in 3.2 with that of Bishop Hugh Latimer, the Protestant martyr. Latimer gained a pardon for a pregnant woman imprisoned under false charges of murder, but kept it hidden from her for the term of her pregnancy in order to create a "salutary anxiety" (*Shakespearean Negotiations* 138; 129-138). Greenblatt argues that the Duke interrogates Juliet in a similar manner in 2.3, using penitential language in order to "awaken an instructive anxiety" (140). My analysis of this scene as a QSP will argue that the language and circumstances of the dialogue show the Duke's interrogation of Juliet to be gratuitous and cruel rather than "salutary" and "instructive". It will also shed new light on the sophisticated nature of Juliet's responses to the Duke and the extent of the ingenuity of her character.

Like Griffiths-Osborne and Greenblatt, Debora Kuller Shuger, in her book *Political Theologies in Shakespeare's England: The Sacred and the State in Measure for Measure* (2001), reads the Duke's appropriation of spiritual authority as salutary: "The concern for the moral and spiritual good of individuals that characterizes the penitential justice of the church courts also shapes the Duke's risky scheme to make justice happen" (103). Shuger contends that the Duke "meddles with corrupt consciences, administers equity, hears confessions, and cares intensely about his subjects' salvation" (117).

There is, however, criticism that reads the Duke's appropriation of spiritual power as an anti-Christian abuse of power. In her study of penitential language in *Measure for Measure*, Sarah Beckwith, in *Shakespeare and the Grammar of Forgiveness* (2011), reads the Duke's appropriation of the powers of a confessor as neither Christlike nor salutary. She reads them as a gross abuse of trust: "Here the secrets of the confessional are… used as part of the state apparatus. And it is confession itself that has collapsed entirely into the coercive external apparatus of the state" (75). Beckwith does not read this "betrayal" (74) in Marxist terms, but situates it in terms of Reformation theatrical polemics:

> the figure of the Duke-friar is now directed not at 'the theatricality of the church' but at the theatricality of the crown/dukedom/monarchy; it is precisely an inversion of anti-Catholic theatre using its own techniques. The wolf in sheep's clothing is not friar but Duke. For here confession (transitive) has become utterly theatricalized and fake. The contrition and

[51] See also Dollimore's "Transgression and Surveillance in *Measure for Measure*" (1985).

> confession of subjects are deployed in an epiphany of dual/monarchical power enacting a fantasy of itself as ‘grace divine’ (76).

My analysis of QSPs in *Measure for Measure* will join Beckwith in arguing that the Duke’s appropriation of the role of a confessor represents a corrupt intrusion of the state into the realm of individual conscience. Rather than reading it in terms of Catholic and Reformed theatrical polemics, however, I will read it in terms of the Duke’s characterisation. In addition to exploring how the Duke appropriates the role of confessor, as Beckwith does, I will also explore how the Duke performs a corrupt imitation of the role of the penitent, both in a quasi-confession with an actual friar and in a quasi-examination of conscience. I will identify and analyse four QSPs in which the Duke participates: three quasi-confessions (two in which he plays the corrupt penitent and one in which he plays the corrupt confessor), and one quasi-examination of conscience. I will argue that the Duke’s language and behaviour in them represents his character as self-deceived regarding his efficacy as a ruler, as manipulative of others, and to have a problematic approach to sexuality.

The Duke’s first quasi-confession takes place in Act 1 Scene 3. Duke Vincentio seeks out a friar in order to confide in him his plans to restore civil order in Vienna and involve the friar in said plans. The Duke confesses to having failed in his duty to uphold the law:

> We have strict statutes and most biting laws
> (The needful bits and curbs to headstrong weeds,)
> Which for this fourteen years we have let slip (1.3.19-21)

The setting of this dialogue (the friar’s cell), the confidential nature of the interchange, and the moral nature of its substance (failure as an effective ruler and deceit as its remedy) make this a quasi-confession in which the Duke functions as a corrupt penitent. I will argue that in this role the Duke seeks absolution for his past failures as a ruler and for his future schemes, and uses his secular power as monarch to pressure the friar, as an unwilling confessor, into granting this quasi-absolution through participation in and implicit endorsement of his plans.

The dialogue begins with the Duke responding to a question or comment of the friar’s:

> No; Holy father, throw away that thought;
> Believe not that the dribbling dart of love
> Can pierce a complete bosom. Why I desire thee
> To give me secret harbour, hath a purpose
> More grave and wrinkled than the aims and ends
> Of burning youth. (1.3.1–6)

While on the surface the interchange seems cooperative—the Duke’s opening address of “Holy father” (1.3.1) and direct response to a question posed by the friar suggesting a deference to spiritual authority—there is a tension in the language that shows an undercurrent of powerplay on the part of the Duke. The grammar of the Duke’s speech indicates a reversal of the traditional power structure of the Sacrament of Penance, as he addresses the friar primarily through imperatives (“throw away that thought”, “Believe not”, “supply me”, “instruct me”), as Hamlet does with Ophelia in the Nunnery scene. This reversal of power is emphasised by the scene’s opening with the Duke directly contradicting the friar. The Duke’s

denial of the friar's suggestion that he has come to use his cell for a tryst[52] contains a proleptic irony, as it is in the guise of a friar that the Duke will meet and desire Isabella. On one level, then, the friar's implicit inquiry into the state of the Duke's "bosom" regarding sexuality is pertinent and provides an opportunity for introspection. The Duke's over-emphatic denial of sexual desire ("Believe not that the dribbling dart of love / Can pierce a complete bosom") signals a refusal of the opportunity, and instead an intention to exploit the friar's authority for other purposes.

The Duke uses two imperatives regarding the friar's state of mind: "throw away that thought", and "[b]elieve not". These colloquialisms are, technically, forms of stative verbs (*know* and *believe*) which cannot be literally used in the imperative because they cannot be performed by an act of will. The regulation of such internal states was seen as the exclusive purview of religious rather than state authority (consider the avowal popularly attributed to Elizabeth, "I would not open windows into men's souls").[53] This again suggests a reversal of roles between the quasi-confessor and penitent, the stylistic insistence on imperatives and performatives suggesting a habit of command.

The friar now invites the Duke to make a disclosure: "May your Grace speak of it?" (1.3.6). The formal mode of address—a reminder of the Duke's power—and the hesitant phrasing of the question reinforce the retention of secular power structures in this quasi-penitential exchange. The Duke responds:

> My holy sir, none better knows than you
> How I have ever lov'd the life removed,
> And held in idle price to haunt assemblies,
> Where youth, and cost, witless bravery keeps. (1.3.7-10)

This admission functions both as a confession and justification of a failure as a ruler. The "old fantastical Duke of dark corners" (4.3.156–7) presents a monastic inclination, claiming to desire isolation and contemplation over public life. While this may appear virtuous, it evokes Evagrius' warning about vices disguised as virtues (REF): for a ruler to shrink from public life is neglectful, as Shakespeare shows in his portrayals of Prospero and Henry VI. The Duke's exaggerated description of the vanity of public engagement suggests an attempt to justify the neglect of his office to the friar and to himself. Furthermore, the exordium "none better knows than you" constitutes a rhetorical manipulation: to demur at this point would represent an awkward snub to the Duke's overture of familiarity.

In line 11 the Duke begins to explain his plan to the friar. Aside from functioning as an exposition of the plot, this apparently otiose explanation hints at a desire to have the ethically questionable scheme approved, at least implicitly, by a religious figure. The Duke confesses to having temporarily abdicated his throne, and deceived the populace regarding his supposed absence:

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[52] The friar's assumption invokes the familiar *topos* of a ruler's romantic attachment to and testing of a subject, such as in *The Two Gentlement of Verona* 3.1.81, and that of the friar's cell and the Sacrament of Penance being used as a space for romantic rendezvous, such as in *Romeo and Juliet* (2.4.179-182).

[53] "Elizabeth I." *Oxford Essential Quotations*. Ed. Ratcliffe, Susan: Oxford University Press, 2016. Oxford Reference. Date Accessed, 28 May. 2023 <https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780191826719.001.0001/q-oro-ed4-00004114>.

…he [Angelo] supposes me travell'd to Poland
(For so I have strew'd it in the common ear,
And so it is receiv'd). (1.3.14-16)

The structure of the Sacrament of Penance is again invoked with the Duke's saying "Now, pious sir, / You will demand of me, why I do this" (1.3.16-17). This statement is amphibological, as it can be received as both a prediction and a command: or a command masked, in illocutionary terms, as a prediction. As a prediction, it suggests the confessor's probing into the penitent's motives. As a command, however, it reinforces the Duke's secular authority and control of the dialogue. The verb 'demand' appears to concede the friar's spiritual authority. However, as the *OED* points out, it was "formerly often weakened into a simple equivalent of 'to ask'".[54] The friar understands the amphibology in the latter sense, and the meaning of 'demand' in the 'weaker' sense, and responds as to a command: "Gladly, my lord" (18).

The Duke then confesses to laxity in law-enforcement. The amelioratory imagery he uses, however, describing the laws as "strict... and most biting" (19), and likening himself to a "fond [father]" (23) and "nurse" (30) once again suggest a self-approving rationalisation of his behaviour[55]. His use of the word "we": "*We* have strict statutes and most biting laws… Which for this fourteen years *we* have let slip" (1.3.19-21) similarly serve to reduce his apparent responsibility, as the pronoun perches ambiguously between the sovereign's 'we' and the citizens of Vienna.

The shared line that follows (31) shows the friar attempting to criticise the Duke, again invoking the role of the confessor, and the shared line in (34) represents the Duke's rejection of the criticism and justification of his behaviour:

Duke. The baby beats the nurse, and quite athwart
Goes all decorum.
Fri. T. It rested in your Grace
To unloose this tied-up justice when you pleas'd:
And it in you more dreadful would have seem'd
Than in Lord Angelo.
Duke. I do fear—too dreadful (3.1.30-34)

The intensity of this interchange is heightened by the fact that in both cases there are overlaps,[56] in which the meter necessitates that the new speaker begins his first syllable at the same time as the previous speaker's last syllable. This means that the second speaker is not merely cutting the first off but, much more urgently or aggressively, speaking over him:

Duke. The baby beats the nurse, and quite athwart
Goes all| deco|**{rum}**.
Fri. T. **{It}** res|ted in| your Grace|
To unloose this tied-up justice when you pleas'd:

[54] An example given by the *OED* from 1600 makes this clear: E. Blount tr. G. F. di Conestaggio *Hist. Uniting Portugall to Castill* 273: "By his letter, hee had demaunded pardon of the Catholique King". ("demand", v. 3a).
[55] Interestingly Prospero, another neglectful ruler, also represents himself as fond 'parent' to Antonio (1.2.94).
[56] See Groves, "Unheedy Haste" 1-10.

And it in you more dreadful would have seem'd
Than in| Lord An|ge**{lo}**|.
Duke. **{I}**| do fear|—too dread|(ful (3.1.30-34)

There is also a slippage in the meaning of 'dreadful': the friar uses it in the sense of *OED* 2a: "Inspiring… reverence; awe-inspiring", but the Duke changes the meaning to the more modern sense of invoking terror ("dread" *OED* adj.2.1: "feared greatly… terrible"), implying a kind of tyranny. The Duke contradicts the friar again, explaining that "'Twould be my tyranny to strike and gall them / For what I bid them do" (36–7). This appears to mean something like 'I would be tyrannical to punish them for what I have permitted them to do', but since this is exactly what he intends to do (through an agent, Angelo) it must mean something else: it takes on the form of free indirect speech: "'Twould be [called] 'my tyranny' (that is, people would call it tyranny if I were seen to be carrying out this policy in person). This indicates less of a concern for moral obliquity, and more for the appearance of it.

This concern with the appearance of morality is developed as the Duke continues to confess the actions he has taken to remedy the situation, which are morally dubious in nature:

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

The image here is not one of justice restored but rather of entrapment: the Duke seems to hope that Angelo, instead of issuing fair warnings and announcing a change of régime, will instead, acting in the 'name' of the harmless Duke, catch unsuspecting wrongdoers in a violent ambush.

As others have noted, Duke Vincentio's plan resembles an episode from Machiavelli's *The Prince*:[57]

> When the duke [Cesare Borgia] occupied the Romagna, he found it under the rule of weak masters, who rather plundered their subjects than ruled them, and gave them more cause for disunion than for union, so that the country was full of robbery, quarrels, and every kind of violence; and so, wishing to bring back peace and obedience to authority, he considered it necessary to give it a good governor. Thereupon he promoted Messer Ramiro d'Orco, a swift and cruel man, to whom he gave the fullest power. This man, in a short time, restored peace and unity with the greatest success. Afterward the duke considered that it was not advisable to confer such excessive authority, for he had no doubt but that he [*Borgia*] would become odious, so he set up a court of judgment in the country, under a most excellent president, wherein all cities had their advocates. And because he knew that the past severity had caused some hatred against

[57] This has been recognised by Norman N. Holand, "*Measure for Measure*: The Duke and the Prince". *Comparative Literature* Vol. 11 No. 1, (Winter 1959), 16-20, Magedanz, "Public Justice and Private Mercy in *Measure for Measure*" 328-9, and Braunmuller and Watson, 109.

> himself, so, to clear himself in the minds of the people and gain them entirely to himself, he desired to show that, if any cruelty had been practised, it had not originated with him, but in the natural sternness of the minister. Under this pretence, he took Ramiro, and one morning caused him to be executed and left on the piazza at Cesena with the block and a bloody knife at his side. The barbarity of this spectacle caused the people to be at once satisfied and dismayed. (Machiavelli, 48–9)

The Duke is not merely using Angelo to ambush his subjects in an attempt to frighten them into submission through brutal enforcement of the law (Mistress Overdone bluntly announces that Claudio will have "within these three days his head to be chopped off' 1.2.69), but he is also laying a trap *for* Angelo. In Act Five, Angelo, the symbol of authoritarian oppression, will be destroyed by the Duke in a public act of restoration and salvation, causing both 'satisfaction' and a newfound respect for the Duke's authority, as in the case of Cesare Borgia.

Throughout this dialogue there has been a tension between secular and religious power, as represented in the persons of the duke and the friar. As it draws to a close, the Duke moves to penetrate the sphere of religious authority, revealing his intentions to impersonate a friar himself:

> …therefore I prithee
> Supply me with the habit, and instruct me
> How I may formally in person bear
> Like a true friar. (45-8)

The Duke confounds secular and spiritual authority here, by commanding, as ruler, the friar to become complicit in an appropriation of the sacrament of ordination that for the Catholics of Vienna would be blasphemous. This over-reach would be highly visible to contemporary audiences, for whom the question of secular and sacred authority — namely, who should head the Church of England, monarch or pope, was a burning issue, sometimes literally so.

In this scenario the Duke has played the part of a corrupt penitent, half-confessing his failings as a ruler and seeking absolution, while refusing to fully admit guilt or accept criticism. The Friar, balked of his spiritual authority by the technically secular nature of the exchange, is forced into the role of unwilling 'confessor'. The Friar has provided subtle opportunities for introspection to the Duke through his understated questioning and criticism which the Duke has refused. Ironically the Duke, as would-be false friar, uses false imitations of the Sacraments of Penance and Ordination to rob a true friar of his spiritual authority.

The second QSP in which the Duke partakes is a quasi-confession in Act 2 Scene 3.[58] This scene contains a series of theological exchanges between the Duke and Juliet which allude in a detailed way to the key elements of the Sacrament of Penance: confession, contrition, penance or restitution, and absolution. The character of Juliet, impregnated by her common-law husband and imprisoned for it through a legal technicality, finds herself at the mercy of the disguised Duke. Although she is unaware of the Duke's usurpation of priestly authority,

[58] Much of the material in this section appears in my and Peter Groves' article: "As it is an Evil" (*English Studies*, 2021).

his behaviour is, from the outset, problematic. His use of penitential language evokes an imitation of a confessor initiating the Sacrament of Penance, and yet this unsolicited initiation of a process that must begin from the penitent's free will undermines the appearance of legitimacy his friar's habit conveys.[59] Cornered by an ecclesiastical authority who does not appear entirely trustworthy, Juliet uses equivocation to defend herself against his attempts to educe private information from her through the imitation of the Sacrament of Penance.[60]

This scene's imitation of the Sacrament of Penance has been noticed by some critics, although the extent of the Duke's violation of the sacrament and Juliet's resistance has not been thoroughly examined. Elizabeth Hansen identifies the confessional nature of the scene, and Juliet's tendency towards resistance: "the Duke 'confesses' Juliet … [and] the 'penitent' resists formation as a confessional subject" (67). While her focus is on irony in the Duke's language (66–7) and the emblematic nature of Juliet's pregnant body, which will "permit no secrets" (68), Hansen notes that Juliet "may show a deft equivocation" (68) but that "it hardly seems to matter what she intends" (68). Jennifer Flaherty dismisses Hansen's speculation regarding Juliet's subversive equivocation, stating that "[o]n the contrary, [Juliet] eagerly confesses, repents, or gives favourable responses in each of her seven lines in the scene: she is the perfect confessional subject" (85). Laura Knoppers also briefly mentions the scene, and in doing so identifies its mimicry of the Sacrament of Penance and use of semantic ambiguity (462), but offers no further analysis. None of these discussions fully explore the implications of the Duke's imitation of the sacrament and the extent to which he uses it as a tool to probe and manipulate Juliet, or the extent to which she uses equivocation to defend herself. Juliet has frequently been overlooked as a character whose only significance lies in her value to the plot; Arden 2 editor J.W. Lever, for example, categorises her as one of the "shadowy or redundant characters" of the play ("Introduction", xvii). A close reading of this scene as a QSP, however, reveals a depth of insight and intellectual prowess on her side, in addition to highlighting the problematic nature of the Duke's obsession with confession.

The Duke's reason for coming to the prison disguised as a friar in the first place seems insufficiently motivated in terms of the plot:

> Bound by my charity and my blest order,
> I come to visit the afflicted spirits
> Here in the prison. Do me the common right
> To let me see them, and to make me know
> The nature of their crimes, that I may minister
> To them accordingly. (2.3.3–8)

The Duke's larger scheme does not require this visit. It instead hints at a voyeuristic desire to pry into the secrets of his subjects' hearts, minds, and souls. Duke Vincentio has been hailed by critics as recently as the mid-twentieth century as not only the hero of the play, but a Christ-figure, Richard Hillman pointing to the "God-like status accorded Duke Vincentio, not merely by a good many critics but, more to the point, by Angelo: 'your Grace, like pow'r

[59] The friar's legitimacy as a confessor is thin anyway, as the council of Trent had forbidden members of mendicant orders from hearing confession from laypeople except with the explicit permission of the bishop of the diocese (sess. xxiii, cap. xv).
[60] Equivocation, also explored in *Macbeth*, was particularly topical in this period due to the trials of Jesuits emerging from the Gunpowder Plot. See Tutino, "Nothing but the Truth".

divine, / Hath look'd upon my passes' (5.1.369–70)".[61] Hillman, along with more recent scholarship, has elucidated the more problematic undertones of his actions.[62] Kwan, for example, remarks that "the images he constructs of himself intimate that the Duke believes he functions as an unambiguous divine analogue",[63] and Beckwith observes that

> As friar, the Duke can procure the secrets of the soul so that they become fully available to the sovereign state. The Duke and the state (which claimed it did not want to make windows into the souls of its subjects) now have access to the interior forum and are privy to the secrets of the confessional. (73)

Beckwith concludes that through Vincentio's machinations, "it is confession itself that has collapsed entirely into the coercive external apparatus of the state".[64]

No sooner is the Duke's appropriated spiritual power established than Juliet's extreme vulnerability is exposed. Juliet is introduced by the Provost as

> … a gentlewoman …
> Who, falling in the flaws of her own youth,
> Hath blister'd her report. She is with child,
> And he that got it, sentenc'd; a young man
> More fit to do another such offense
> Than die for this. (2.3.10–15)

The Provost's obvious disapproval of the harsh treatment of the young couple, highlighted by his ironic use of the word "offense", are a criticism of the Duke's newly-enforced draconian laws surrounding fornication, and their puritanical refusal to acknowledge marriages by troth-plight (*sponsalia per verba de praesenti*), by virtue of which Juliet is "fast [a] wife, / Save that [they] do the denunciation lack / Of outward order" (1.2.147–9).[65]

Upon encountering Juliet, the Duke opens with a question which (coming as it does from a supposed friar to an acknowledged sinner) might seem innocuous – even predictable – to a modern audience: "Repent you, fair one, of the sin you carry?" (2.3.19). To Juliet, however, who is represented as quick-witted and theologically sophisticated, and to the more

[61] Hillman, 94. Scholars reading the Duke as a Christ-analogue include Knight, Coghill, and Battenhouse. See Lever, lvii.

[62] As the Arden 3 puts it, "Duke Vincentio, once widely viewed as a wise, resourceful leader of his city, has slumped badly in the opinion polls over the past half-century" (57). Hillman notes the "'problem' presented by the Duke's abruptly revealed desire to possess the near-nun to whom his friar's role has given him privileged access" (94).

[63] Kwan, *Hypocrites,* 238.

[64] Beckwith, 75. See pp 73–77 for a discussion of the Duke's usurpation and abuse of the sacrament of penance.

[65] It is worth noting that Shakespeare's first child was conceived while he and Anne Hathaway were in a previously-witnessed troth-plighting or *sponsalia per verba de praesenti*, which is the same contract that binds Claudio and Juliet in the play. This union was considered valid for the legitimization of issue in Elizabethan England. For background on the complex Marriage plot in *Measure for Measure*, see Lever, "Introduction" liii-lv; Schanzer, "The Marriage Contracts in *Measure for Measure*" (1960); Hayne, "Performing Social Practice: The Example of *Measure for Measure*" (1993); Nagarajan, "*Measure for Measure* and Elizabethan Betrothals" (1963); and Braunmuller and Watson "Introduction", pp 25–9 (2020). For background on Reformation perspectives on marriage, see Cressy: *Birth, Marriage, and Death: Ritual, Religion and the Life-Cycle in Tudor and Stuart England* (1997); and Carlson *Marriage and the English Reformation* (1994).

theologically sophisticated members of a Jacobean audience, the unprompted query would ring alarm bells: either it represents a mechanism of the Sacrament of Penance — the confessor's legitimate attempt to probe the depth of the penitent's contrition — or it derives from mere curiosity. But it cannot be the former, because the Sacrament of Penance must be initiated by the penitent, since (like most of the sacraments, except infant baptism) to be valid it must spring from a motion of the will.[66] As Beckwith observes, this "works concertedly to violate the very principle of consent in the confessional … where the voluntary [movement] of the heart [was] historically regarded as completely central" (60). Logically, the question must then derive from curiosity, which is problematic in and of itself.

Turning initiation into coercion is the fact that Juliet is not only a prisoner but has been instructed by the Provost to "stay a while" (2.3.17) as he converses with the visiting 'friar'. Moreover, the Duke begins his mock-confession in the presence of the Provost, violating the penitent's right to absolute secrecy under the seal of confession.[67] The Duke's calling Juliet "fair one" also suggests an attraction to her, which correlates with his preoccupation with female sexuality elsewhere in this and other scenes.[68] A more appropriate term for a friar to use to address his penitent would have been "my child". It may show a slight slippage on the part of the Duke, as we see in his initial line, "Hail to you, Provost! so I think you are" (2.3.1). The marked caesura before "so" indicates that he has realized his mistake in revealing that he knows his own Provost, and attempts to pass off the recognition as a guess.

Juliet's response to the Duke's question ("Repent you, fair one, of the sin you carry?"), "I do; and bear the shame most patiently" (2.3.20), at first appears to be unambiguous. It is, however, an act of equivocation, as it contains multiple possible meanings: Juliet's "shame" may denote embarrassment, or it may refer directly to her unborn child (which she "bear[s]"), being the symbol of public shame as she is not yet technically married. "Shame", as has been previously discussed, was not used in the sense of internal guilt until the mid-seventeenth century, and therefore, in admitting shame Juliet is *not* admitting guilt. This ambiguity exploits an ambiguity in the Duke's question, as "the sin you carry" may refer to the moral stain of a supposed sin on her soul, or to her unborn child, which she is literally carrying.

"Patiently" can also have multiple meanings in this context. If Juliet is referring to "shame" as public embarrassment, her meaning could simply be that she bears it patiently because she

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[66] This is part of the essential theological machinery — the delicate dance of responsiveness — through which Catholic thought reconciled the ideas of divine omnipotence and human free will: God invites the sinner with prevenient grace, the sinner then either accepts or rejects prevenient grace through an act of the will, and (in the former case) is rewarded with sufficient or saving grace.

[67] For more on the public humiliation of sinners in *Measure for Measure* see Beckwith 68-9.

[68] See, for example, the disturbing claim regarding the Duke's regular, disguised visitations to Mariana, who calls him "a man of comfort, whose advice / Hath *often* still'd my brawling discontent" (4.1.8-9, *emphasis mine*). He boasts "I have confessed her and I know her virtue" (5.1.527). While on one level this language is penitential, on another level, "to know" means to be sexually intimate with (*OED*, "know", v. 8), and "virtue" is a euphemism for a woman's virginity (*OED* n. 2c); although there is no suggestion that the Duke has had sexual relations with Mariana, the sexual nature of his language regarding her is significant. Hansen notes this statement's "insinuating intimacy and hint of prior possession" (57). Furthermore, Mariana's walled garden evokes the *hortus conclusus* trope from the *Song of Solomon* 4:12 which lies behind the allegorical Garden of Love in the Romance of the Rose, to be penetrated by the lover: "My sister my spouse is as a garden inclosed [*hortus conclusus*], as a spring shut vp, and a fountaine sealed vp".

knows that her punishment is just and deserved (which seems to be the meaning the Duke is angling for). However, it is noteworthy that Shakespeare uses “patiently” and not “rightfully” or “fittingly” (both of which would scan), which would more clearly indicate her acceptance of her punishment as just. Patience suggests, in addition to acceptance, anticipation: in this sense, Juliet could mean that because she anticipates the arrival of her child with joy, she will patiently endure the unjust persecution that leads up to it. The patience she boasts of could be the result of a clear conscience, which is in direct opposition to the original interpretation of her line as a confession of guilt. “Shame” in this period can also mean the loss of a woman’s virginity outside of marriage (*OED*, 3c). When the line is read with this sense of “shame”, it takes on a new, subversive meaning – strengthened by her declaration in line 36 that “I take the shame with joy” – in which Juliet rejoices in having lost her virginity to Claudio. This produces the antithesis of the repentance required for a sacramental confession.

The repetition of the initial statement in lines 35–36 (“I do repent me, as it is an evil, / And take the shame with joy”) is another instance of a complex equivocation. An “evil” can mean both a sin, in the theological sense, and an inconvenience in the amoral sense, such as an illness. If Juliet’s intentions were to be represented as unambiguous, she could have said something like, “I do repent that I’ve offended God”. On the level of syntax, the ambiguous subordinate clause can be read both as penitent acceptance of the Duke’s accusation (“since it is an evil”) and a rebellious questioning of it (“insofar as it is an evil”) (see *OED* “as”, 24, 15c). In fact, if “shame” is read as meaning Juliet’s child, or her loss of virginity, as discussed above, then the statement “I do repent me as it is an evil, / And take the shame with joy” is simultaneously a perfect confession and a defiant declaration of innocence: it contains, on the one level, acknowledgment (confession) of the sin, contrition, and a demonstration of penance.[69] At the same time, however, it reads ‘I will only repent of my action if it is evil, which it is not, and therefore I accept my loss of virginity and my unborn child with the joy of a clear conscience’.

Juliet’s clipped responses also suggest an impatience with the Duke-friar’s line of questioning. Her satisfaction of the requirements of the Sacrament of Penance in a single line of iambic pentameter in (2.3.20), which constitutes her first words in the play, suggests that she has anticipated his possibly prurient intention of eliciting a detailed account of her sexual activities and is attempting to head him off at the pass.[70] The Duke seems to sense Juliet’s sceptical impatience, and seeks to prolong the interrogation. In imitation of a good confessor, he attempts to morally instruct her:

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[69] According to the Council of Trent, Juliet’s public humiliation and imprisonment are valid forms of penance:

> [T]he liberality of the divine munificence is so great that we are able through Jesus Christ to make *satisfaction* to God the Father not only by *punishments* voluntarily undertaken by ourselves to atone for sins, or by those imposed by the judgment of the priest according to the measure of our offense, but also, and this is the greatest proof of love, by the *temporal afflictions imposed by God and borne patiently by us*. [italics mine] (9.60).

[70] Juliet’s suspicions of the “friar”s’ intentions may be exacerbated by awareness of the common late medieval *topos* of the “wantown and […] merye” friar who abuses the power of confession to seduce “faire wyves” (see *The Canterbury Tales*, A.208–224).

Duke: I'll teach you how you shall arraign your conscience,
And try your penitence, if it be sound,
Or hollowly put on.
Juliet: I'll gladly learn. (2.3.21–23)

What ensues is a theological battle of wits. Juliet's unhesitating "I'll gladly learn", which completes the Duke's line (and is not in itself equivocal), could be read as eagerness for instruction, but also (in the light of her surrounding equivocations) as sarcasm, a desire to speed up the process, or even a challenge. Interestingly, both David Thacker's televised 1994 BBC production and Gregory Doran's 2019 RSC production have Juliet groaning in labour during this scene. The RSC's Juliet (Amy Trigg) delivers the line with grim sarcasm, her barely concealed outrage at being interrogated during labour apparent throughout. The BBC's Sally George presents a more grateful Juliet, reaching out for the 'friar's' hand, and modelling the "perfect confessional subject" suggested by Flaherty (85). While such performance choices make explicit Juliet's discomfort in this scene, they distract from a more nuanced reading of her discomfort arising from the Duke's language and behaviour rather than birth pangs.

Juliet's covert linguistic resistance is demonstrated in her response to the Duke's question:

Duke: Love you the man that wrong'd you?
Juliet: Yes, as I love the woman that wrong'd him. (2.3.24–25)

With this antithetical epistrophe Juliet neatly delivers the theologically correct answers of loving your enemy (Matt 5:44, Luke 6:27), and loving your neighbour as yourself (Matt 22:39). She also (in just nine words) corrects the Duke's assumption that she sees herself as Claudio's victim, claiming agency and syntactically repositioning herself as equal subject with Claudio, rather than object.

The Duke then seeks confirmation that the intercourse was "mutually committed" (27). This imitates the questioning of a confessor, who would seek to clarify whether Juliet was morally culpable through voluntary engagement. However, since Juliet has implicitly confirmed this in the previous line, the redundant question suggests an extraneous — even salacious — interest: it represents one of a number of discreet hints in the play that imply in Duke Vincentio a voyeuristic fascination with women's interior lives and sexuality.[71] This entire line of questioning within the dialogue drives towards a punch-line at line 28: "Then was your sin of heavier kind than his". This, of course, has a double meaning, namely that Juliet's sin of fornication was of a graver nature than Claudio's, and that it has caused her to be literally heavier through her pregnancy. The first meaning is theologically incorrect, as men and women were held by the Church as equally responsible for their actions. While there could be a range of mitigating circumstances involved in culpability for a sin (age, intelligence, premeditation, knowledge of circumstances or consequences, knowledge of theology, etc.), one's sex alone was not such a mitigating factor. Aside from faulty theology, and a casual endorsement of a hypocritical gendered double standard on sexual

[71] Braunmuller and Watson pick up on this when they observe that while the Duke supposedly cares for individual souls, "he cares mostly about procreative bodies" (67).

transgression,[72] the other possible meaning indicates that this entire interrogation has been leading up to a joke.

The Duke continues to mimic a confessor by instructing his penitent on the distinction between contrition and attrition.

> *Duke*:'Tis meet so, daughter, but lest you do repent
> As that the sin hath brought you to this shame,
> Which sorrow is always toward ourselves, not heaven,
> Showing we would not spare heaven as we love it,
> But as we stand in fear —
> *Juliet*: I do repent me as it is an evil,
> And take the shame with joy. (2.3.30–36)

As the Duke has not yet reached his main clause, it becomes clear that Juliet has cut him off mid-sentence, boldly interrupting him. With a demonstration of theological subtlety that challenges the Duke's pretensions, Juliet performs contrition rather than attrition in saying "I do repent me as it is an evil" (as opposed to repenting for fear of eternal punishment) and thus fulfils his challenge before it has even been fully articulated. This statement, as has been said, re-establishes Juliet's initial equivocation, due to the amphibological nature of the conjunction "as", which can mean both "because" (thereby indicating an admission of guilt and perfect contrition), and "if" (indicating that her repentance is conditional upon her act having been immoral, which she implicitly denies). Once again, the second meaning is strengthened by her bold declaration that she takes the "shame" — whether it be her pregnancy or the scandal caused by it — with joy.[73]

By the end of the passage Juliet has outwitted the Duke and established her intellectual (and moral) superiority. She has performed equivocation to defend herself against his corrupt parody of the Sacrament of Penance. The Duke ends the interrogation, having seemingly exhausted his means of trying to extract lubricious details from her. Juliet's covert linguistic resistance does not, however, go unpunished. In a Parthian shot, the Duke finishes Juliet's line by cruelly announcing that her lover will be executed in the morning:

> There rest.
> Your partner, as I hear, must die tomorrow,
> And I am going with instruction to him.
> Grace go with you, *Benedicite*! *Exit.* (2.3.36–39)

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[72] Ophelia gently rebukes Laertes for this double standard when she warns him about showing her the

> …the steep and thorny way to heaven,
> Whiles, [like] a puff'd and reckless libertine,
> Himself the primrose path of dalliance treads,
> And reaks not his own rede. (*Ham* 1.3.48-51)

[73] The Arden 3 editors observe that in line 35 "Juliet's *as* is slightly ambiguous," and point out that one of its possible meanings "hints at her resistance to the Duke-Friar's interpretation of her intercourse and pregnancy as an unqualified or unquestionable *evil*." (Braunmuller and Watson, p.237, Fn. 35).

Since he intends to prevent the occurrence, and Juliet, unlike Isabella, can have no influence on the outcome of events, this announcement suggests spite or callousness on his part.[74] This is compounded by telling her to "rest" whilst delivering such an emotionally devastating message. The use of the word "partner" also suggests a dig at Juliet's technically-unmarried status, which has brought her to prison and her lover to the brink of death;[75] the Duke never once acknowledges that she is "fast [a] wife, / Save … the denunciation … / Of outward order" (1.2.136–8). As van Dijkhuizen notes, the Duke "deploys Juliet's despair as an instrument in his successful attempt to reclaim and consolidate the power which, as he explains to Friar Thomas in Act 1, Scene 3, had slipped away from him: 'our decrees, / Dead to infliction, to themselves are dead' (1.3.27–28)" (*A Literary History,* 52).

The Duke ends with a blessing, parodying absolution, and retreats, subverting the end of sacramental confession by leaving his penitent in torment rather than peace. Greenblatt's discussion of this scene mitigates the Duke's cruel behaviour. He describes the Duke's performance as "an attempt to awaken an instructive anxiety" (*Shakespearean Negotiations*, 140). Flaherty shares in this trend, identifying the Duke in this scene as merely "awkward" (84), as "[he] finds that Juliet's responses come more readily than his own questions" (85). These readings of the Duke's language in this scene overlook the darker implications of a ruler appropriating spiritual authority for his own discursive rhetorical purposes. Analysing this scene as a QSP shows the extent of the cruelty of the Duke's wielding borrowed spiritual authority.

The Duke's third QSP occurs in the form of a corrupt quasi-examination of conscience. In his soliloquy in 3.2.261-282 the Duke, after having enquired into the nature of his character from Escalus ("I pray you, sir, of what disposition was the Duke?" 3.2.230-1) and defended it from Lucio ("Either this is envy in you, folly, or mistaking" 3.2.141-2), meditates upon the introspection and self-awareness required to be a just judge. The Duke's meditation seems to be a reaffirmation of his own virtue—"Pattern in himself to know" (263) echoing Escalus' assertion that the Duke "contended especially to know himself" (232-3)—and a condemnation of Angelo's hypocrisy. However, ambiguities in his language suggest a subconscious confession of his own hypocrisy, forming a failed attempt at moral introspection in the form of a corrupt quasi-examination of conscience. Strikingly, this soliloquy is in thumping heptasyllabic couplets, a form frequently associated with morally dubious figures such as witches (*Mac*. "Fair is foul, and foul is fair, / Hover through the fog and filthy air" –1.1.11-12), fairies (*MND* "Now the hungry lion roars, / And the wolf behowls the moon –5.1.371-2) and magicians (*Tp*. "Now my charms are all o'erthrown, / And what strength I have's mine own" –Ep. 1-2).

The Duke's claim that a judge "Should be as holy as severe" recalls his initial (correct) intuition about Angelo's hypocrisy: "hence shall we see / If power change purpose: what our seemers be" (1.3.53-4). It also, however, calls into question his own behaviour. The Duke's literal Machiavellian use of Angelo to tyrannize the state into order, his appropriation of a friar's habit and violation of the interior forum of the confessional, in addition to the

[74] For a discussion of Vincentio's similarly sadistic treatment of Isabella, see Beckwith, 73–4.
[75] See *OED* 5.a, "a member of a couple who live together or are habitual companions; a lover". The word could also mean "spouse", but the Duke's use of it here clearly draws the legitimacy of their relationship into question, and permits him to pun on sense 2a ("accomplice").

emotional manipulation of Juliet, Isabella and Mariana, preclude personal holiness, his very costume on stage a tangible symbol of sacrilege. This lends an irony to the next stipulation, “pattern in himself to know”, as the previous line suggests a self-deceived belief in his own holiness.

The Duke compares himself to Angelo, saying “Twice treble shame on Angelo, / To weed my vice, and let his grow!” (269-70). “[M]y vice” is ambiguous. While it ostensibly refers to the rampant lechery in Vienna which the Duke has allowed—Mistress Overdone having just been paraded before him as a “bawd of eleven years’ continuance” (196)—the phrase suggests personal vice, particularly in light of the “self-offences” brought up in line 266. The verb “to weed” is also ambiguous. The overt meaning is to pluck a vice from his character like a weed from a garden; however, it is not a weed that is ‘weeded’, but a garden: to weed something is to remove parasitic plants from it so that it may grow stronger. Weeding a vice, therefore, makes the vice the garden, and the process of weeding it one of strengthening rather than destroying it.

The suggestion in the Duke’s language of a subconscious awareness of personal vice is strengthened by a textual irony: while he condemns Angelo’s sexually predatory manipulation of Isabella, his own behaviour towards her later in the play regarding marriage (and therefore sexual relations) is also manipulative. The Duke only reveals his feelings for Isabella once she is triply indebted to him: for her brother’s life, for the preservation of her chastity from Angelo, and for the granting of her plea to spare Angelo’s life. Immediately before his official proposal to her in the final lines of the play, he publicly demonstrates his power by ordering Lucio and Angelo to be married and killed (5.1.507–13; 5.1.377, 414–15), displaying his quasi-divine power over life, death, and marriage. The manner in which he first hints at a marriage between himself and Isabella hints at an underlying suggestion that her brother’s safety is conditional upon her answer:

> If he be like your brother, for his sake
> Is he pardon’d, and for your lovely sake,
> Give me your hand, and say you will be mine,
> He is my brother too. But fitter time for that. (5.1.490–93)

If the first two lines are read together, it appears that the Duke is pardoning Isabella’s brother not only for the brother’s sake, but also for her “lovely sake”. It would therefore be unwise for her to refuse the request that directly follows, as it seems that Claudio’s safety is still dependent upon her. If “and for your lovely sake” is attached to the third line, “Give me your hand, and say you will be mine” (l. 491 has no line-final punctuation in F1), it still carries not merely the (manipulative) implication that she is indebted to him for saving her brother, but also a subtle implication that it would be in her best interests to accept his offer, and potentially dangerous to reject it. The manipulativeness of this language is heightened when considered in light of the Duke’s deceiving Isabella (arguably unnecessarily) into believing her brother dead. Finally, depending upon performance, Isabella is not afforded a reply to the pseudo-proposal. No sooner has the Duke proposed the idea than he hastily adds, “But fitter time for that” (5.1.493). On an alternative reading, Isabella fails to “say” anything at all here, and “But fitter time for that” is a face-saving effort to cover the embarrassing silence.[76] When

[76] This, of course, leaves it open for performers to decide whether Isabella’s silence here, as at the end of the

he ‘proposes’ to her for the second time he says “I have a motion much imports your good” (5.1.535), which reinforces the sense that refusal of the marriage might have harmful consequences. He then immediately invites everyone back to the palace (5.1.538–9), still giving her no chance to refuse him privately.

Lines 275-6 (“To draw with idle spiders’ strings / Most ponderous and substantial things!”), while widely recognized by editors as lacking a grammatical and logical consistency with the preceding couplet (Lever suggesting a missing couplet after 274), nonetheless evoke a metaphor of irresponsibility which the Duke presumably aims at Angelo. Ironically, however, Angelo does not treat his power or his sinful designs upon Isabella lightly. He is fully aware of their grave spiritual import and struggles with the temptation: “Most dangerous / Is that temptation that doth goad us on” (2.2.180–81). The Duke, however, is guilty of taking his responsibilities, and the violation of the trust inherent in the Sacrament of Penance, lightly.

The final three couplets articulate the Duke’s plan to combat Angelo’s “vice” (277) using “[c]raft” (277). Once again, the polysemy of the Duke’s diction suggests a subconscious confession of vice in himself. “Craft”, meaning skilfulness and ingenuity (*OED* II.2), can also mean “deception, guile, trickery” (7b), and even “witchcraft” or “sorcery” (8a), which is interesting given the use of eldritch heptasyllabics. This strengthens the representation of the Duke as practicing self-deception regarding his personal vices. The language and structure of this quasi-examination of conscience suggest a complex rejection of moral introspection in favour of a condemnation of the Duke’s representative (Angelo), which, through semantic ambiguity, nonetheless yields a subconscious confession of vice in the Duke himself.

The Duke’s final QSP, comes in the form of a revelation of his having conducted a mock-Sacrament of Penance with the unwitting Mariana:

> Joy to you, Mariana! love her, Angelo!
> I have confess’d her, and I know her virtue. (5.1.526–7)

These lines, which contribute to the fulfilment of marriages and communal satisfaction expected at the completion of a comedy, also perpetuate the sinister undertone which makes this play a ‘problem comedy’.

The Duke’s declaration, “I have confess’d her”, comes after an intensive demonstration of his power. It is at the culmination of this display of “pow’r divine” that he confesses publicly to having sacrilegiously administered the Sacrament of Penance while impersonating a friar. The Duke’s proclaimed “know[ledge]” of Mariana’s “virtue” highlights the sense of invasiveness created by his having tricked her into confessing her sins to him. It indicates not only a mental and spiritual invasiveness, but also a sexual one: Mariana’s ‘virtue’ likely refers to her chastity or virginity (*OED* 2c), which the Duke reassures Angelo of in order to refute Angelo’s original accusations made to end their engagement, “pretending in her discoveries of dishonour” (3.1.227). More uncomfortably, we are told in Act 4 that the Duke’s visit to Mariana as a friar was not an isolated incident conducted to ascertain the truth of Angelo’s accusation, but a regular occurrence: “Here comes a man of comfort, whose advice / Hath often still’d my brawling discontent” (4.1.8–9). This, considered in light of the Duke-as-friar’s interrogation of Juliet regarding her love for Claudio (2.3.24) and whether her

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play, conveys delight, horror, or anything in between.

intercourse with him was “mutually committed” (2.3.27), and his manipulative proposal to Isabella, reveals a self-deceived irony in the Duke’s claim to Friar Thomas to possess a “complete bosom” immune to sexual desire and “the dribbling dart of love” (1.3.3, 2). It also invokes the anti-fraternal tradition of friars as lecherous, such as Chaucer’s Friar Hubert from the *Canterbury Tales*.[77]

Duke Vincentio’s triumphant confession of blasphemy to the citizens of Vienna signifies a complete breakdown of the balance between secular and spiritual authority, and of the structure and function of the Sacrament of Penance. In contrast to Angelo, who at least feels intense humiliation regarding his sins, Vincentio indicates no shame or remorse, nor fear of any kind of retribution. No character is able to challenge him, and even the bold, articulate Isabella is rendered speechless. Throughout the scene the Duke explicitly pardons Isabella, the Provost, Lucio, Angelo, and Escalus, and finishes with a final flourish: he confesses his own sin without fear of reproach, as an ultimate display of power and moral self-deception. As van Dijkhuizen observes,

> The duke pardons his subjects only after he has succeeded in moulding their emotional lives: after they have become convinced that they themselves or their loved ones are condemned to die, or after they have experienced profound remorse and have become convinced that both their crimes and their inner lives are utterly exposed to his gaze. (*A Literary History,* 53)

Clare Griffiths-Osbourne argues that the Duke’s machinations around gathering “privileged information gained in confession” are benign in motive and consequence; they bring Claudio and Juliet to a sense of repentance, thus restoring them to grace; right the wrong done to Mariana; and prevent an unjust death sentence and expose Angelo. The benign exercising of the Duke’s power encourages an image of him as a confessor that might be perceived more fittingly as a re-presentation of some kind of Providence, a reincarnation of the ghostly Father as divinely omniscient and powerful, ‘‘working all things to the good (40).

My analysis of the polysemic language and Catholic theology invoked in the Duke’s QSPs show, on the contrary, the Duke’s appropriation of the language, structures and clothing of the confessional to reveal moral self-deception and a corrupt abuse of power. In conjunction with his other QSPs, this quasi-confession shows how the Duke, like Hamlet, uses his secular authority to corrupt the language and processes of the Sacrament of Penance in order to deceive himself and manipulate others. It contributes new insights into the discussion of the darker side of this character and extends the critical arguments (outlined above) for the

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[77] Of Friar Hubert:

> In alle the ordres foure is noon that can
> So muche of daliaunce and fair langage.
> He hadde maad ful many a mariage
> Of yonge wommen, at his owne cost. (A.210–13)

In addition to conversation, “dalliance” can mean “[s]port, play (with a companion or companions); esp. amorous toying or caressing, flirtation; often, in bad sense, wanton toying.” (*OED*, 2, first recorded elsewhere in Chaucer). This suggests that the marriages Friar Hubert made for young women at his own cost were necessary in order to conceal pregnancies caused by himself. This is reinforced by the connotations here: “Ful swetely herde he confessioun, / And plesaunt was his absolucioun.” (221–2).

sinister nature of his behaviour.

Angelo's QSPs

While Angelo's public confession in the final scene of the play has been widely recognised, and its problematic nature discussed,[78] more subtle penitential language and structures in his temptation soliloquies and in his blackmailing of Isabella have not. In this section I will analyse four QSPs involving Angelo: two quasi-examinations of conscience and two quasi-confessions. Analysis of these QSPs will provide a new reading of both Angelo and Isabella as practising self-deception and manipulating one another from within a Catholic and Reformed penitential framework.

Angelo's first QSP takes the form of a quasi-examination of conscience in 2.2.161-86:

> *Isab.* 'Save your honor!
> *Ang.* From thee: even from thy virtue.
> What's this? what's this? Is this her fault, or mine?
> The tempter, or the tempted, who sins most, ha?
> Not she; nor doth she tempt; but it is I
> That, lying by the violet in the sun,
> Do as the carrion does, not as the flow'r,
> Corrupt with virtuous season. Can it be
> That modesty may more betray our sense
> Than woman's lightness? Having waste ground enough,
> Shall we desire to raze the sanctuary
> And pitch our evils there? O fie, fie, fie!
> What dost thou, or what art thou, Angelo?
> Dost thou desire her foully for those things
> That make her good? O, let her brother live!
> Thieves for their robbery have authority
> When judges steal themselves. What, do I love her,
> That I desire to hear her speak again?
> And feast upon her eyes? What is't I dream on?
> O cunning enemy, that to catch a saint,
> With saints dost bait thy hook! Most dangerous
> Is that temptation that doth goad us on
> To sin in loving virtue. Never could the strumpet,
> With all her double vigour, art and nature,
> Once stir my temper; but this virtuous maid
> Subdues me quite. Ever till now,

[78] See, for example, W. W. Lawrence, "Measure for Measure and Lucio", Shakespeare Quarterly 9 (1958): 154-55, and Martha Widmayer's " 'To Sin in Loving Virtue': Angelo of Measure for Measure." *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, vol. 49, no. 2, 2007, pp. 155–180. For a defence of Angelo under the law, see Craig A. Bernthal, "Staging Justice: James I and the Trial Scenes of Measure for Measure," SEL 32 (1992): 247-69.

When men were fond, I smil'd, and wond'red how.
(2.2.161-86)

In this soliloquy Angelo attempts moral introspection, examining the nature of his unprecedented sexual attraction to Isabella in theological and hamartiological terms. Angelo uses the language of a sinner becoming aware of his sinfulness; he examines the origin and nature of his sin, and his degree of responsibility. While his language seems to show an attainment of self-awareness, humility, and attrition ("who sins most… it is I"; "Thieves for their robbery have authority / When judges steal themselves"; "O fie, fie, fie!"), I will argue that this suggestion of self-knowledge and reform is undermined by a reduction of personal responsibility through polysemic language, an invocation of Calvinistic theological ideas regarding predestination, and a view of damnation as ineluctable rather than a result of free will.

Angelo's soliloquy erupts on the heels of his public interview with Isabella, so much so that it begins with a shared line. In actuality, the soliloquy begins before the dialogue has ended, bursting forth in uncontainable jolts of alarm:

Isab. Heaven keep your honor safe!
Ang. [*aside*] Amen!
For I am that way going to temptation,
Where prayers cross. (2.2.157–9)

The shared line which initiates Angelo's soliloquy,

Isab. Save your honor.
Ang. From thee: even from thy virtue! (2.2.161)

foreshadows the wordplay and parapraxes that will characterize his dialogue with Isabella in Scene Four. It also creates ambiguity around who is responsible for Angelo's self-perceived sin of sexual attraction. Contextually, Isabella's 'your honour' primarily refers to Angelo himself; however, it can also refer to his political position, his reputation, or his moral uprightness (*OED* "honour" 3b, 3a, 1a, 2a). Angelo plays on this amphibology, responding to the term as indicating his moral uprightness, which is endangered by Isabella and her 'virtue'. "Virtue" is also an ambiguous term, its meanings including the following: moral excellence, sexual purity or virginity, an armed force or power, a flourishing condition, "superiority or excellence in a particular sphere; ability, merit, or distinction", or "an advantageous or desirable quality; an ability, a proficiency" (*OED* "virtue" 1a, 2c, 5b, 5c, 6a, 6b). The most obvious meaning of 'virtue' here is moral excellence: Angelo claims that he is not aroused by "the strumpet['s]… double vigor, art and nature" (182-3), but rather "those things / That make [Isabella] good" (173-4). The polysemic nature of the line allows for a rich variety of readings which oscillate between Angelo and Isabella being imagined as attacker and victim respectively. This ambivalence reflects Angelo's struggle to comprehend what he understands to be 'sin' in his attraction to Isabella, and his degree of responsibility.

Etymologically, the word 'virtue' comes from the Latin *vir*, meaning 'man' (this would have been apparent to the upper reaches of Shakespeare's audience, grammar schools functioning entirely in Latin). Isabella's actions in 2.2 invoke the meaning of virtue as "an armed force or power" (*OED*, 5b) as she has sought out Angelo, taken him by surprise and publicly accosted

him. What is more, she has attacked his honour in multiple ways: in the sense of his moral excellence and his reputation as being above sexual desire ("Go to your bosom; knock there, / And ask your heart what it doth know / That's like my brother's fault" 136–8; "How would you be, / If He, which is the top of judgement, should / But judge you as you are?" 75–7), and in terms of his position of power ("O, it is excellent / To have a giant's strength, but it is tyrannous / To use it like a giant" 107–9; "every pelting, petty officer / Would use his heaven for thunder" 112– 13). The word 'virtue', then, signals the way in which Isabella's intellectual rigour, in conjunction with her sexuality (her "prone and speechless dialect, / Such as move men" 1.2.183-4) and the sexual undertones of her discourse ("Go to your bosom… If it confess / A natural guiltiness such as is his" 2.2.136, 138-9; "Hark how I'll bribe you" 2.2.144) has assailed Angelo like an army attacking a fortress, placing Angelo in the passive role.

The metre of 149-161 reinforce the image of Isabella as the aggressor and Angelo as defensive. Angelo's overlap here suggests an anxiety to be rid of the disturbing presence of Isabella (at least for the moment):

> *Isab*. From fasting maids whose minds are dedicate
> To nothing temp{*'ral*}.
>
> *Ang*. {*Well*}; come to me to-morrow. (2.2.149-55)

Isabella's responding line begins with an emphatic initial jolt or catalexis (^), signalling an aggressive dominance:[79]

> *Isab.* ^ Hea|ven keep| your ho|nor safe|.
>
> *Ang.* Amen|. (157)

The unusual reversal in Isabella's response in line 160 (*ho-ür*) makes it almost hectoring, and Angelo again overlaps her, metrically suggesting another desperate attempt to escape:

> *Isab.* At what**| hóür|** to-morrow
> Shall I attend your lord{*ship*}?
>
> *Ang.* {*At*} any time 'fore noon. (159-60)

The pattern is repeated, as there is yet another dominating initial jolt from Isabella followed by an anxious overlap from Angelo:

> *Isab.* ^ Save| your ho|{*nor*}.
>
> *Ang.* {*From*} thee|: even from| thy vir|{tue!

Angelo is metrically and syntactically positioned as victim, then, and Isabella as attacker. "Honour", as has been said, can refer to a woman's chastity or virginity, and so with Angelo in the feminine role and Isabella in the masculine, "Save your honour" – "from thee; and

[79] See Groves, *Rhythm*, 85–6.

from thy virtue" becomes "Save your virginity" – "from thee; and from thy [military, attacking] force". This ironically foreshadows his upcoming sexual blackmail of her.

Angelo explicitly grapples with who is responsible for his 'fall': "What's this? What's this? Is this her fault, or mine? / The tempter, or the tempted, who sins most, ha?" (162–163). In calling Isabella "the tempter" instead of the object of temptation, which he then retracts ("nor doth she tempt"), he experiments with explicitly assigning her moral agency. It is clear that the tempter, if they are actively trying to tempt, is more morally culpable than the person being tempted, particularly as undergoing temptation is not a sin in Christian teaching (Christ was tempted in the desert in Matthew 4), and tempting is a hallmark of Satan (Matthew 4:3 names him as "the tempter").

Angelo's next question, "who sins most[?]" is significant, as it is not clear that either of them has sinned, especially if Isabella's seduction of him is read as being unconscious. Angelo's guilt rests on the Gospel verse: "But I say vnto you, that whosoeuer looketh on a woman to lust after her, hath committed adulterie with her already in his heart." (Matt 5:28). This injunction is predicated on intentionality: the adulterer is the one who looks at a woman *in order to* lust after her (*Omnis qui videret mulierem **ad concupiscendum** eam*). This distinguishes a sinful lust from a mere passive attraction. This would then clear Angelo of fault, as he repeatedly tries (as has been said) to remove temptation and have her leave. However, his instruction "come again tomorrow", while a final bid to end the interaction, suggests an intention to recreate the situation, and therefore 'to lust after her' actively (*ad concupiscendam eam*). This, if anything, marks the point at which he has sinned. The culpability of his intentions at this point is reinforced by the implication that he postpones the execution (despite saying elsewhere that he is a slave to the law: "Be you content, fair maid; / It is the law, not I condemn your brother" –2.2.80): Claudio's execution is supposed to be at 9am (2.1.34), but he says "come any time 'fore noon".

As Angelo continues to examine his soul, his hamartiological approach changes. He shifts from his previously intention-centred hamartiology ("'Tis one thing to be tempted, Escalus, / Another thing to fall" 2.1.17–18), which reflects a pre-Reformation focus on free will, to invoking a Calvinistic or Lutheran hamartiology in which damnation is ineluctable (for the non-elect) rather than chosen.[80] This is expressed in the image of him as a "carrion" (166). This tension between action and identity—between a hamartiology of free will or of predestination—is expressed again in the question "What dost thou? or what art thou, Angelo?" (172). According to Hillman, Angelo "*subjects* himself, however reluctantly, to the reinscription of his identity by circumstance, in accordance with the arbitrary nature of moral signifiers: 'Let's write 'good angel' on the devil's horn, / 'Tis not the devil's crest' [2.4.16-17]" (114). Angelo surrenders himself to his sin as an identity, rather than wrestling with it as one who can be redeemed.[81]

Throughout the passage Angelo imagines himself and Isabella as sinners (who sins most — the tempter or the tempted?), neutral objects, suggesting a predestination to either heaven or hell (the violet and the carrion), and saints: "What is't I dream on? / O cunning enemy, that,

[80] See Erasmus' *On the Freedom of the Will (De Libero Arbitrio)* 1524, and Luther's *On the Bondage of the Will (De Servo Arbitrio)* 1525, for the Catholic and Reformed positions on this matter respectively.
[81] This surrender to sin as an identity is echoed in Beatrice's final despair in Middleton's *The Changeling*: "I am that of your blood was taken from you / For your better health" (5.3.130–1).

to catch a saint, / With saints dost bait thy hook!" (2.2.178–80). Whilst "saint" can refer simply to a Christian in this period, particularly in Puritanical sects (*OED* 3a)[82], J. W. Lever points out that Angelo is invoking the trope of male saints being tempted by the devil in dreams with seductive visions of female saints or holy women (Lever, fn. 179–81, p.50). Bosch's triptych of the temptations of St Anthony, for example, depicts what appears to be an attempted seduction by a figure wearing a nun's habit.

In this soliloquy a sense of confusion and defeatism reigns as Angelo examines the concupiscence he had previously thought he was immune to, attempts to apportion responsibility for his sin, and reconstructs his identity in light of it. He fumbles between hamartiological and eschatological possibilities, which in turn create psychological complexity through a portrait of a fractured sense of self. Very early on in the play, the statement "Lord Angelo is precise" (1.3.50) provides a hint that Angelo is in part a representation of a Puritan (see *OED*, "precise" 3b: "Strict or scrupulous in religious observance. *Obsolete*. In 16th and 17th centuries chiefly used of Puritans"), which is supported by his fastidious behaviour ("[his] blood / Is very snow-broth"—1.4.57-8). This quasi-examination of conscience shows an experimentation with the psychological devastation caused by a realisation of a lack of perfection to an identity predicated upon it.

In his panic Angelo seems to have forgotten his earlier, more reasonable view on temptation: "'Tis one thing to be tempted, Escalus, / Another thing to fall" (2.1.17–18). However, if, as a puritanical or strict Calvinist figure, he believes in the Perseverance of the Saints, his meaning to Escalus is that 'saints' like him are impervious to temptation; his desire for Isabella alarmingly shows him that he never was of the elect, because you cannot fall if you are (according to the Calvinist — but not Lutheran — doctrine of 'perseverance of the saints'.

Angelo resists the urge to use Isabella as a scapegoat, and retracts his positioning of her as an active 'tempter':

> Not she; nor doth she tempt; but it is I
> That, lying by the violet in the sun,
> Do as the carrion does, not as the flow'r,
> Corrupt with virtuous season.

Angelo has now transformed them both from sinners to amoral objects. He clears Isabella of the accusation of being a 'tempter' and appears to take the blame upon himself. However, his likening of himself to a rotting corpse once again undermines his agency (which suggests a Calvinist theology in which fallen man is rotten to the core and has no power to change this without God's grace[83]). The verb 'corrupt' may be read intransitively, which suggests that he

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[82] "Saint" – *OED* 3.a:

> In biblical use, one of God's chosen people; in the New Testament, one of the elect under the New Covenant; a member of the Christian church; a Christian. Hence used by some religious bodies as their own designation, e.g. by some puritanical sects in the 16–17th centuries:

[83] As the 39 Articles state,

sees himself as both powerless and inherently evil, a Calvinist reprobate without a choice. It can also be read transitively, as though he were unconsciously entertaining the idea that he might corrupt her into complying with his desire.

> Can it be
> That modesty may more betray our sense
> Than woman's lightness? Having waste ground enough,
> Shall we desire to raze the sanctuary
> And pitch our evils there? O fie, fie, fie!

Angelo continues to be distracted from the moral problem at hand, and instead obsesses over technical details of the situation, such as why this particular woman has tempted him, and how.[84]

Angelo's unfocused introspection has yielded visions of himself as predator, victim, rotting corpse, and saint. Like Claudius, he faces the reality of his sinfulness and then pulls back and distracts himself, unable either to bear the thought of damnation or relinquish the temptation that brings it. Like Hamlet, Angelo shifts between moral paradigms in order to evade moral responsibility (in this case Catholic and Calvinist ideas surrounding free will). From the position of predestination, he is doomed but cannot help it — it is a question of ontology. In a Catholic sense he is not necessarily doomed, but he *is* fully responsible for his actions and so if he does sin his damnation is purely his own fault. In either case, Christian moral teaching is clear regarding how he should resist harming Isabella, and yet his confused examination-of conscience shows the ways in which he will practice moral self-deception and ultimately succumb to temptation.

Angelo's second quasi-examination of conscience takes place in 2.4.1-17. In this soliloquy Angelo attempts moral introspection, meditating on his temptation to prey on Isabella and his perceived inability to pray. Like the previous quasi- examination of conscience in 2.2, however, this attempt at moral introspection also fails. It ends, like Claudius' (*Ham* 3.3.97–98), with a recognition of his sinfulness, but a failure to relinquish it.

> Works done before the grace of Christ, and the Inspiration of his Spirit, are not pleasant to God, forasmuch as they spring not of faith in Jesus Christ, neither do they make men meet to receive grace, or (as the School-authors say) deserve grace of congruity: yea, rather, for that they are not done as God hath willed and commanded them to be done, we doubt not but they have the nature of sin. (Article XIII).

[84] This is also similar to Eve's reaction to a talking snake in Milton's *Paradise Lost*, in which she preoccupies herself with the novelty rather than the moral danger of the situation:

> So gloz'd the Tempter, and his Proem tun'd;
> Into the Heart of Eve his words made way,
> Though at the voice much marveling; at length
> Not unamaz'd she thus in answer spake.
> What may this mean? Language of Man pronounc't
> By Tongue of Brute, and human sense exprest? (9.549-554)

When I would pray and think, I think and pray
To several subjects: Heaven hath my empty words,
Whilst my invention, hearing not my tongue,
Anchors on Isabel: heaven in my mouth,
As if I did but only chew his name,
And in my heart the strong and swelling evil
Of my conception. The state, whereon I studied
Is like a good thing, being often read,
Grown [sere] and tedious; yea, in my gravity,
Wherein (let no man hear me) I take pride,
Could I, with boot, change for an idle plume
Which the air beats for vain. O place, O form,
How often dost thou with thy case, thy habit,
Wrench awe from fools, and tie the wiser souls
To thy false seeming! Blood, thou art blood.
Let's write "good angel" on the devil's horn,
'Tis not the devil's crest. (2.4.1-17)

Angelo's soliloquy begins with the same despair and blockage to prayer found in Claudius': "My words fly up, my thoughts remain below. / Words without thoughts never to heaven go (*Ham* 3.3.97–98):

Pray can I not,
Though inclination be as sharp as will.
My stronger guilt defeats my strong intent,
And, like a man to double business bound,
I stand in pause where I shall first begin,
And both neglect. (*Ham* 3.3.38–43)

Here Angelo's language represents a psychological split, which manifests the biblical problem, "the spirit in deede is readie, but the flesh is weake" (Matt 26:41). Both Angelo and Claudius express the horror of recognising themselves as headed for damnation but being unwilling to make the necessary restitution of what Claudius calls "the wicked prize itself".

The following lines anticipate fragments of *Macbeth*, wherein a similar exploration of damnation through blocked repentance takes place. Compare Angelo's "Heaven in my mouth, / As if I did but only chew his name" with the following lines from Macbeth, regarding Duncan's sleeping guards:

Macbeth. One cried "God bless us!" and "Amen!" the other,
As they had seen me with these hangman's hands.
List'ning their fear, I could not say "Amen,"
When they did say "God bless us!"
Lady M. Consider it not so deeply.
Macbeth. But wherefore could not I pronounce "Amen"?
I had most need of blessing, and "Amen"
Stuck in my throat. (2.2.29–36)

The idea of chewing on holy words, swallowing them and having them stuck in your throat, may have evoked, especially for theologically-aware members of Shakespeare's audience, the controversial question of the nature of the Eucharist, the doctrine that not only split Catholics from Reformers, but divided all the reforming sects from each other.[85] Angelo's reference to 'Heaven's' name is euphemistic for God. 'Heaven' does not make sense as an antecedent for 'his name' and would most likely have been changed due to the "Act to Restrain Abuses of Players" (1606), which imposed fines for actors who "jestingly or profanely" spoke the name of God.[86] Furthermore, both Catholic and Reformed theologies view the Eucharist as Christ, the incarnate Word — literally, symbolically, or in some other way. In Macbeth's case, his being in a state of mortal sin would prevent him from being able to receive communion according to Catholic theology, or if he did receive it whilst in that state, it would do him no good, like feeding a dead body.[87] Similarly, the prayers of both Angelo and Claudius are rendered ineffective because they are not sincere. Therefore, they do not nourish: they cannot be swallowed and they cannot be spat out (evoking the God's visceral response to the lukewarm, "I shall spewe thee out of my mouth" — Revelation 3:16). If something is stuck in the throat it can kill; nourishing foods taken incorrectly can kill (if a person is allergic, if an infant is too young to consume it, if a person is sick, if the amount or preparation is wrong); and receiving communion in a state of mortal sin is a sin in and of itself. This idea of spiritual blockage, of an abortive prayer or an abortive act of repentance, which are apparent in Macbeth, Lady Macbeth and Claudius (Macbeth and Lady Macbeth's 'aborted' confessions will be explored in the following chapter), manifests here in Angelo's soliloquy.

Angelo's lines, "And in my heart the strong and swelling evil / Of my conception (*MM* 2.4.6–7) also anticipate the image of the "swelling act" from *Macbeth* (1.3.128). Both are suggestive of the process of reproduction (both tumescence and parturition): while prayer is being aborted, sin is taking root, growing and developing in the womb (see the following chapter for an analysis of 'moral insemination' in *Macbeth*). Meanwhile the hollowness of Angelo's prayer, "Heaven hath my empty words", anticipates Claudius' lament, "words without thoughts never to heaven go" (*Ham* 3.3.98).

Angelo engages in a meta-confession of his hypocrisy, in which he confesses his refusal to confess:

> yea, in my gravity,
> Wherein — let no man hear me — I take pride,
> Could I with boot change for an idle plume
> Which the air beats for vain.

Angelo's determination to 'let no man hear me', suggests an avoidance of confession, either sacramental or laicised. This is reflected at the end of the play in his preference for

[85] Matthew Smith also observes Angelo's image as being "both eucharistic and blasphemous" in "'At War 'Twixt Will and Will Not': On Shakespeare's Idea of Religious Experience in *Measure for Measure*." *Religions,* vol. 9, no. 12, 2018, pp. 419-37. p.433.

[86] "Act to Restrain Abuses of Players". *Oxford Reference*. Accessed 27th Jun. 2023, <https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110810104316930>

[87] See the Council of Trent, XIII.7: "He that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh judgment to himself… [N]o one, conscious to himself of mortal sin, how contrite soever he may seem to himself, ought to approach to the sacred Eucharist without previous sacramental confession".

“[i]mmediate … death” (5.1.373) over the shame of public confession: “let my trial be mine own confession” (5.1.372). There is, of course, a metatheatrical irony in the soliloquy, in that Angelo is confessing his sins (including his refusal to confess them) to the audience. *We* become his confessors.

Angelo’s statement, “Blood, thou art blood” has multiple semantic possibilities in the context of his quasi-examination of conscience. On the one hand, it suggests an avoidance of responsibility through an exploitation of Calvinistic determinism; on the other, a humble recognition of his concupiscence, in sharp relief to his former spiritual pride. Since he follows with the resolution to “write good angel on the devil’s horn” (2.4.16), the former interpretation is the more viable. The language of this quasi-examination of conscience nonetheless conveys a sense of honesty, similarly to Claudius’ in 3.3. In both cases, though, the speaker is aware that they are not willing to relinquish the object of their sin, paradoxically understanding that they are relinquishing “Heaven”, and will, as Macbeth puts it, “jump [*risk*] the life to come” as a result.

As Isabella’s arrival is announced, Angelo wonders at the physically startling and incapacitating effect of his temptation:

> Why does my blood thus muster to my heart,
> Making both it unable for itself
> And dispossessing all my other parts
> Of necessary fitness? (20-23)

This is similar to Macbeth’s physical reaction to his temptation to murder Duncan:

> why do I yield to that suggestion
> Whose horrid image doth unfix my hair,
> And make my seated heart knock at my ribs
> Against the use of nature? (1.4.137-40)

Both instances suggest a mingling of moral temptation and sexual arousal. Both show the lack of a vocabulary and framework through which to interpret this psycho-somatic reaction to a moral temptation.

This analysis of Angelo’s quasi-examination of conscience shows the ways in which he corrupts his moral introspection in terms of late medieval and early modern theology and penitential practices, which would have been apparent to Shakespeare’s original audiences. It also shows the similarities between his psychologically complex moral introspection and that of other villains, namely Claudius and Macbeth.

Angelo’s first quasi-confession occurs in Act 2 Scene 4. Through the hypothetical moral problems he sets for Isabella, and through the use of language regarding morality, penance, and self-knowledge, this dialogue produces a Quasi-Sacrament of Penance in which Angelo parodies a confessor attempting to assist his penitent (Isabella) with moral introspection and confession. I will show that Shakespeare uses imitations of the structures of the Sacrament of Penance in this dialogue to create psychological complexity in Angelo and Isabella. While Angelo tries to make Isabella understand his ultimatum (sex in exchange for Claudio’s life) through moral hypotheticals, he also unconsciously forces her to face a truth about herself:

that she has been subconsciously[88] using sexual language to seduce him. While Isabella is a victimised heroine attempting to protect her chastity, the language of the interchange also positions her, as I shall argue, as a penitent suppressing her sexuality: "Th' impression of keen whips I'ld wear as rubies" (2.4.101). And while Angelo is a corrupt power figure attempting to extort her, he also functions analogically as a confessor attempting to make his penitent aware of her concupiscence: "Either you are ignorant, / Or seem so (craftily); and that's not good" (2.4.74-5).

While Isabella's latent sexuality is well established critically, I will be focussing on the imitation of penitential structures as a means for exposing and developing it. For an overview of Freudian readings of this scene and of Isabella, I refer to Carolyn E. Brown's fn. 6, p.140, in "Erotic Religious Flagellation and Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*":

> The following critics claim that the leading characters all harbor a latent sexuality, although none of these critics views the subliminal passions as darkly as I do: Ralph Berry, "Language and Structure in *Measure for Measure*, " *University of Toronto Quarterly* 46 (1976/77), 150 and 156; Richard A. Levin, 257-70; Marvin Rosenberg, "Shakespeare's Fantastic Trick *Measure for Measure*, " *The Sewanee Review* 80 (1972), 51, 57. Isabella's sexuality has received the most critical attention, with critics noting the suggestiveness of much of her pleading with Angelo and citing the erotic undercurrent in such words as "bribe" (2.2.145), "know," and "pleasure" (2.4.31): Rupin W. Desai, "Freudian Undertones in the Isabella-Angelo Relationship of *Measure for Measure*, " *Psychoanalytic Review* 64 (1977), 488; Robin Grove, "Shakespeare's Measure for Magistrates," *The Critical Review* 19 (1977), 16; Rosalind Miles, *The Problem of "Measure for Measure*" (London, 1976), p. 225; Marvin Rosenberg, 56; David Lloyd Stevenson, *The Achievement of "Measure for Measure"* (lthaca, N.Y. 1966), p. 45; David K. Weiser, "The Ironic Hierarchy in *Measure for Measure*," *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 19 (1977), 333

To this list I add Vogel and Schwartz's "Is this Her Fault or Mine?" (2014), which reads Isabella as "an early prototype of Freud's hysterics" (1). Brown's article proposes a convincing reading of Angelo, Duke Vincentio and Isabella as representations of sexualised asceticism, their language evoking the tradition of penitential flagellation as a vehicle for erotic pleasure: "The Duke subliminally enjoys observing brutal acts, Angelo inflicting them, Isabella receiving them" (165). In my analysis of this dialogue I will elucidate the penitential structures which underpin Angelo's attempts to manipulate Isabella and her self-deception, which have not yet been recognised.

While Angelo's self-deception regarding his own sexuality is one of the key themes of the play (Ever till now, / When men were fond, I smil'd and wond'red how"), the complexity of Isabella's character is more subtle. Isabella's language suggests that, like Angelo prior to their

[88] I am not suggesting that fictional characters *have* a subconscious mind, or that terms such as 'unconscious' and 'subconscious' existed in Shakespeare's time, but rather that through the use of dramatic techniques such as polysemy, amphibology and parapraxes these characters are represented as having complex minds, parts of which are hidden from themselves.

meeting, she sees herself as above sexual temptation, claiming that fornication is “a vice that most I do abhor” (2.2.29). Her entry into the extremely ascetic order of the Poor Clares also suggests a belief in her readiness to relinquish all sensory pleasures.[89] Her first lines in the play, however, reveal a tendency towards self-deception in this regard. Upon entering the convent, she asks the nun:

> *Isab.* And have you nuns no farther privileges?
> *Nun*. Are not these large enough?
> *Isab*. Yes, truly; I speak not as desiring more,
> But rather wishing a more strict restraint
> Upon the sisterhood, the votarists of Saint Clare. (1.4.1–5)

Isabella’s initial question suggests shock at the strict lifestyle of the Poor Clares. Upon being challenged, however, Isabella does not acknowledge her disappointment to the nun, and instead disguises her misgivings as zeal, claiming (unconvincingly) that her shock was due to a lack of restrictions on the part of the highly restrictive order. The syntax of her initial question betrays her: if she were genuinely concerned by a lack of restriction, she would have asked, ‘And have you nuns so many privileges?’ or ‘have you nuns no farther restrictions?’.[90]

The language of the play suggests that Isabella is not only self-deceived about her unfitness for the ascetic lifestyle of the convent, but also about her sexuality. Isabella is, as her name suggests, very beautiful, and has a strong sexual magnetism that gives her power over men. Her brother Claudio alludes to this — and to her naivety regarding it — when he says “in her youth / There is a prone and speechless dialect, / Such as move men (1.2.182–4). Lucio invokes it when he says:

> *Lucio*. Assay the pow’r you have.
> *Isab*. My power? Alas, I doubt —
> …
> *Lucio*. when maidens sue,
> Men give like gods (1.4.76–77, 80–81).

Isabella’s claim to “doubt” suggests an unawareness of—or an unwillingness to acknowledge—her sexual attractiveness. Isabella nonetheless draws upon this attractiveness in 2.2 in pleading with Angelo for her brother’s life. This representation of a psychological split, or self-deception, is created through a series of parapraxes in her speech.

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[89] An oversimplified view of Isabella as unproblematically ‘pure’ and ascetic is taken by critics such as A.W. Schlegel, who says that “the heavenly purity of her mind is not even stained with one unholy thought: in the humble robes of the novice she is a very angel of light” (64), and Stacey Magedanz, who views Isabella as simply “[ascetic]” (320).

[90] See R. Huddleston, *Introduction to the Grammar of English* (Cambridge UP, 1988) on interrogative clause-types: “The negative [“Isn’t it genuine?”] indicates my previous expectation that it was genuine, and that present evidence suggests to me that it isn’t, …; the positive [“Is it genuine?”], by contrast, is neutral: it encodes no such information about my expectations or attitudes.” (366–7). Magedanz, in her observation that Isabella “protests that she would wish a more ‘strict restraint’” (324) fails to notice the irony; Brown observes the “denial” inherent in Isabella’s hasty retraction, but ascribes it to a “fear… that Francisca detects her pleasure-in-pain… [therefore] her insecurities cause her to indict herself in her own denial” (“Erotic Religious Flagellation”, 153).

During her impassioned discourse at their first meeting, Isabella argues that if Angelo imagines himself as being on trial, "mercy will then breathe within your lips, / Like man new made" (2.2.78–9). Whilst at a conscious level 'man new made' refers to the baptised Christian who has been saved from sin, it is also a reference to procreation, made more tangible by the sensually evocative imagery of mercy 'breathing within your lips'. The image also contains an auditory pun, as 'man new made' is homophonic with 'man knew maid', which, in the biblical sense of the verb, again signals intercourse.[91] In pleading for empathy for her brother, Isabella appeals to the "natural guiltiness" (2.2.139) within Angelo's heart: "Go to your bosom; / Knock there, and ask your heart what it doth know /That's like my brother's fault" (2.2.140–42). On the surface this invokes the universal condition of concupiscence. Her language also suggests, however, a subconscious intuition that Angelo is attracted to her, and addresses the "natural guiltiness" that he is experiencing at that very moment. In this manner she succeeds in making a personal observation that will touch a nerve, while ostensibly speaking of nothing beyond theological generalities.

That Isabella has had a physical effect on Angelo is evidenced by his turning his body away from her ("Gentle my Lord, turn back" 2.2.143). Her desperate plea, "Hark how I'll bribe you. Good my Lord, turn back" (2.2.145), further suggests subconscious seduction. When Angelo challenges her on this, "How? bribe me?" (146) she clarifies, with "prayers from preserved souls" (2.2.153). Two such theologically erudite characters would be well aware that a prayer cannot in the proper sense be used as a bribe as it is not fungible,[92] and so the text indicates a gap between Isabella's conscious meaning: that she will have her convent pray for Angelo, and her subconscious meaning: that she is aware of her sexual power over him (the habit of the Poor Clares showing that she has no fiscal currency) and is suggesting using it as leverage for her brother's freedom. The abruptness of this theologically strained declaration implies that it has been said in the heat of the moment in order to grab at Angelo's attention. Isabella's clarification then implies an attempt to explain her startling declaration in a way that is acceptable not only socially, but to herself. This mimics the pattern of her exchange with the nun, Francisca, in 1.4.1-5. Isabella's use of language that is both religious and sexual is beautifully represented by the costuming in the BBC's 1979 televised production of *Measure for Measure* in which Isabella, played by Kate Nelligan, wears the knotted cincture (one of the knots representing the vow of chastity), in a way that accentuates the curves of her body.

The dialogue in Act 2 Scene 4 constitutes a linguistic dance between Angelo and Isabella in which her language implies self-deception, which Angelo exposes. Angelo hints at his intentions of sexual blackmail, laying verbal traps for Isabella in an attempt to make her understand his desires, while she evades his snares through misconstruing his meaning, and through continued *doubles entendres*. Functioning analogously as a corrupt confessor, his casuistry brings her, who functions analogously as an unwilling penitent, face-to-face with her sexuality, which she has hitherto denied.

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[91] Hillman observes that "Lucio's whispered urgings of Isabella to make a case for her sinful brother… resound with sexual overtones that suggest the bawd's function: 'You are too cold' (2.5.56)… 'He's coming; I perceive't' (2.2.125)" (100).

[92] This may be a reference to the infamous selling of indulgences within the Catholic Church, heavily criticised by Reformers.

Angelo poses his first sophistical problem:

> Which had you rather, that the most just law
> Now took your brother's life, or, to redeem him,
> Give up your body to such sweet uncleanness
> As she that he hath stain'd? (2.4.52–55)

This ultimatum, presented as hypothetical, hints at Angelo's intentions, and suggests an attempt at seduction through the use of the word "sweet". It also confronts Isabella with the sexual connotations of her language in their previous encounter in 2.2. Isabella's response, "Sir, believe this, / I had rather give my body than my soul" (2.4.55–6), plays on the ambiguity of "[g]ive up your body", reimagining the surrender as being to death (martyrdom) rather than intercourse. Since Angelo's question was, however, unambiguous—the "sweet uncleanness" of Juliet's behaviour unmistakeable—Isabella's response suggests a tactical misunderstanding, caused by a subconscious comprehension of his true intentions. Her affirmation, however, that she would 'rather give her body', fails to deny Angelo or reject the hypothetical, and so suggests a repressed sexual curiosity which grows more pronounced as the dialogue continues.

It is an interesting question as to why Isabella's language persists in generating *doubles entendres* in this scene. At their last meeting Angelo appeared unmoveable, and so Isabella employed her most powerful weaponry against him: consciously, her intellect, and subconsciously, her sexual attractiveness, the combination of which gained her this second meeting. However, Angelo is now being more explicit about his intentions towards her, and even though her responses suggest a lack of conscious understanding, they indicate a subconscious comprehension. This represents her as having an instinctive sense of the danger she is in, and yet she continues to produce ever-increasingly vivid sexual imagery as the scene progresses: "Th' impression of keen whips I'ld wear as rubies" (101). Shakespeare seems to be representing in this wordplay a character subconsciously seeking expression for her own repressed sexuality, which simmers in her "prone and speechless dialect" — speechless meaning not only non-verbal, but that it does not speak to *her* — and in the tantalizing play of ambiguity in her speech.[93]

Isabella's "believe this" introduces doubt about the idea that she would give her life for her brother. The idea that her claim to the mettle of a martyr is self-deceived is supported by her brother's incredulity when she makes the claim in 3.1:

> *Isab.* O, were it but my life,
> I'ld throw it down for your deliverance
> As frank|ly as| a pin|.
> *Claud.* ^ Thanks|, dear Is|(abel. (3.1.103ff.)

[93] Carolyn E. Brown takes this a step further and argues in "Erotic Religious Flagellation" (1986) and "Isabella's Beating Fantasies" (1986) that Isabella is masochistic.

The silent offbeat (^) that begins his response registers a (sceptical) hesitation (Groves, *Rhythm* 99).

Isabella's claim, "I had rather give my body than my soul", hints at the splitting of the self that occurs through self-deception, and through parapraxes and polysemic language. This unconscious confession of self-deception becomes more explicit in Isabella's next response. Angelo now reframes the moral dilemma in a parody of a question one might find in a scholastic text such as the *Summa Theologica*:

> Answer to this:
> I (now the voice of the recorded law)
> Pronounce a sentence on your brother's life;
> Might there not be a charity in sin
> To save this brother's life? (2.4.60–64)[94]

Instead of formation, however, Angelo's goal is rationalisation. Isabella again misunderstands him, interpreting the 'sin' of charity to be breaking an unjust law in sparing her brother (which would indeed be "no sin at all") rather than fornication:

> *Isab*. Please you to do't,
> I'll take it as a peril to my soul,
> It is no sin at all, but charity.
> …
> That I do beg his life, if it be sin,
> Heaven let me bear it! You granting of my suit,
> If that be sin, I'll make it my morn-prayer
> To have it added to the faults of mine,
> And nothing of your answer. (2.4.64–6, 69-73)

Again, her misunderstanding of his question is predicated by a titillating amphibology that seems at first to embrace Angelo's proposition.

The moment is forced to its crisis when Angelo accuses Isabella of wilfully pretending to misunderstand him, and she must, for a brief moment, face the subconscious, seductive self which she denies:

> *Ang*. Nay, but hear me,
> Your sense pursues not mine. Either you are ignorant,
> Or seem so (craftily); and that's not good.
> *Isab*. Let [me] be ignorant, and in nothing good,
> But graciously to know I am no better. (2.4.60–77)

Angelo again parodies a confessor, identifying self-deception in his penitent and attempting to bring it to her attention.[95] Catholic penitential literature warns against the dangers of not

[94] This question invokes Aquinas' dictum that "an erring conscience binds", as "every will at variance with reason, whether right or erring, is aways evil" (*ST* I-II, Q. 19, Art. 5).

[95] For a discussion of the role of the confessor in uncovering hidden sins see Jean Gerson's *On the Art of Hearing Confessions* (*Tractatus de arte audiendi confessiones* Du Pin, II, 446B-453A), translated in Tentler: "some penitents hide sins of the flesh so tenaciously that it is almost impossible to extract them. It is the task of

examining one's conscience diligently enough, indulging in ignorance, and allowing 'secret sins' to fester, as the *vulnus ignorantiae* (wound of ignorance) causes one to hide truths about oneself from oneself.[96] Angelo even includes the caveat "and that's not good", mirroring the morally instructive style of a confessor. For a fleeting moment, the underlying structure of confession bursts forth, as Angelo appears troubled not so much by Isabella's resistance to his scheme, but by his sudden awareness of her lack of perfection. His "that's not good" carries a sense of disappointment, creating a tension within his compound identity as predator and confessor.

Despite the horrific nature of the situation, Isabella is being offered an opportunity for self-knowledge. Like a confessor, Angelo, after his examination and testing of her, suspects that her ignorance is voluntary, or affected,[97] and that at some level she is aware of his true meaning. In accusing her of merely 'seeming' ignorant, he is inviting her to acknowledge her self-deception, and (unconsciously) facilitating the confrontation of parts of herself that are hidden from her conscious mind.

Isabella's response, rather than engaging in introspection, is to turn away from self-knowledge. Her response is complex, being evasive in claiming both an ignorance of Angelo's intentions, and yet at the same time unconsciously confessing her understanding of said intentions: "Let [me] be ignorant, and in nothing good, / But graciously to know I am no better" (2.4.76–7). Isabella's intended meaning here is something like 'Say, then, that I am ignorant, and bad in every way, except for the one redeeming quality of knowing myself to be thus [having humility]'. To achieve this logic, Isabella has had to misconstrue Angelo's accusation. He is accusing her of *feigning* ignorance; she responds as though he has accused her of *being* ignorant. Isabella tries to have her cake and eat it, claiming both ignorance of her sexual *doubles entendres* ("Let me be ignorant") *and* self-knowledge, which is humility ("to know I am no better"). Self-knowledge, however, would necessitate an awareness of the sexual undertones of her earlier speech. The two are therefore mutually exclusive, and so her claim in 76-77 collapses in upon itself.

The clause "[l]et me be ignorant" can also be read as a request: *allow me* to be ignorant. It is odd for one to desire ignorance unless one already has an idea of the thing which they do not wish to know; for example, one may be reluctant to receive a message if they suspect it contains bad news. Isabella is therefore subconsciously confessing her self-deception— her wilful ignorance of her seductive language. This invokes Aquinas' doctrine of ignorance regarding sin:

> the act of the will is brought to bear on the ignorance: as when a man wishes not to know, that he may have an excuse for sin, or that he may not be withheld from sin; according to Job 21:14: "We desire not the

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the good confessor to deal skillfully with such penitents… He will ask leading questions and move gradually to the most serious sins." (101)

[96] "[F]or it is known that in the Church nothing else is required of penitents than that each one, after he has diligently examined himself and searched all the folds and corners of his conscience, confess those sins by which he remembers to have mortally offended his Lord and God… From my secret sins cleanse me, O Lord" (Council of Trent, 1551, Session XIV, 5.29).

[97] See Aquinas on affected ignorance, *ST* I-II Q. 6. Art. 8.

> knowledge of Thy ways." And this is called "affected ignorance." (*ST* I–II Q. 6. Art. 8).

Isabella's declaration manifests this "affected ignorance".

Angelo refuses to accept Isabella's plea of ignorance and draws instead the conclusion that she is consciously feigning it. As Lever puts it, "Isabella's claim to be ignorant, says Angelo, is mock-modest, intended to emphasize her wisdom" (fn 79, p.58).

> *Ang*. Thus wisdom wishes to appear most bright
> When it doth tax itself; as these black masks
> Proclaim an enshield beauty ten times louder
> Than beauty could, displayed. But mark me:
> To be received plain, I'll speak more gross:
> Your brother is to die. (2.4.78–83)

Angelo has demonstrated a perspicacity here in recognising that Isabella wants to appear wise and virtuous by downplaying her wisdom and virtue. He then likens this false modesty to a rule of seduction in which a partial revelation of the body is more enticing than simple nudity. By linking the two ideas, Angelo is exposing Isabella's subconscious seduction and false humility, while admitting his own lust for her.

He now forces her to acknowledge his true meaning, laying out a logical map for her to follow in the vein of a scholastic teacher, and articulating his proposition clearly (although still hypothetically).

> *Ang*. Your brother is to die
> *Isab*. So.
> *Ang*. And his offense is so, as it appears,
> Accountant to the law upon that pain.
> *Isab*. True.
> *Ang*. Admit no other way to save his life
> (As I subscribe not that, nor any other,
> But in the loss of question), that you, his sister,
> Finding yourself desir'd of such a person,
> Whose credit with the judge, or own great place,
> Could fetch your brother from the manacles
> Of the all-[binding] law; and that there were
> No earthly mean to save him, but that either
> You must lay down the treasures of your body
> To this supposed, or else to let him suffer —
> What would you do? (2.4.83–98)

Angelo's question is answered by Isabella:

> *Isab*. As much for my poor brother as myself:
> That is, were I under the terms of death,
> Th' impression of keen whips I'ld wear as rubies,

And strip myself to death, as to a bed
That longing have been sick for, ere I'ld yield
My body up to shame. (2.4.99–104)

Isabella once again replies with ambiguous language which both denies sex and yet is seductive. This spectacular eruption of the subconscious into the dialogue through its vividly erotic imagery has caught the attention of many. Lever, on the one hand, sees it as an aberration from her character: “The image is more obviously suited to an Antony or Claudio than to the chaste Isabella” (fn.101–4, p.60), while others recognize it as consistent with her psychologically complex character.[98]

Through these parapraxes Isabella is, while on the surface professing a chaste martyrdom and perhaps signalling virtue through a reference to Proverbs 31:10,[99] again subconsciously confessing her repressed sexual appetite. This language of sexual violence (“keen whips”) also flags a sadistic and masochistic undertone in Isabella's approach to Angelo and his response, which is established by his implied arousal at her attacks in 2.2.[100] Strangely, Angelo does not respond to the sexually charged nature of her language here, and simply takes her claim at face value: “Then must your brother die” (2.4.104).

In the ensuing sequence (2.4.105–116), Angelo uses sophistry in an attempt to convince Isabella that she is a hypocrite for defending her brother from the punishment of a crime she refuses to commit herself. Despite his faulty reasoning and predatorial motives, Angelo, as quasi-confessor, unwittingly elicits from Isabella another subconscious confession of her self-deception and equivocation: “O, pardon me, my lord, it oft falls out, / To have that we would have, we speak not what we mean” (117–18). It is noteworthy that Isabella uses a penitential expression (“O, pardon me”) in admitting that language is often shaped by desire (in this case her subconscious desire for both sexual expression and to be seen as impervious to sexual temptation). While on the surface she is trying to explain her apparent inconsistency in both condemning and defending her brother's actions (“I something do excuse the thing I hate, / For his advantage that I dearly love” 119–20), she is also confessing to a doubleness in her language. A mere twenty lines later, Isabella denies this doubleness: “I have no tongue but one” (139), reinforcing her self-deception regarding it.[101] As Angelo's ultimatum becomes undeniably clear, he rapidly degenerates into total moral collapse, even going so far as to threaten Isabella with her brother's “ling'ring sufferance” (167) should she deny him her virginity. Isabella's wordplay is not enough to save her brother, or herself.

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[98] See, for example, Harriet Hawkins, “‘The Devil's Party': Virtues and Vices in *Measure for Measure*” *Shakespeare Survey* 31 (1978), 107-8, Brown “Erotic Religious Flagellation” 164-5, and Sara Morrison, “Embodying the Blazon: Performing and Transforming Pain in *Measure for Measure* and *The Duchess of Malfi*” in *Staging the Blazon in Early Modern English Theater,* eds. Sara Morrison and Deborah Uman, Routledge, 2013, 71-3.

[99] The KJV reads “Who shall find a virtuous woman? For her price is far above rubies”, but it was not published until 1611. The Hebrew word translated here as ‘rubies' is *penniyim* (coral, red pearls, gems); the Coverdale, Geneva and Bishops' Bibles have “pearles”, which weakens the likelihood of this passage being invoked here.

[100] It is immediately after the impassioned denunciation in which she implicitly abuses Angelo as a “pelting, petty officer” and “an angry ape” (112, 120) that Lucio observes “O, to him, to him, wench! He will relent; / He's coming; I perceive 't.” The meaning of ‘coming' as “experiencing sexual orgasm” was first recorded in 1604 (*OED* “come” v. 22).

[101] Her primary meaning is, of course, “I don't understand you”; her speech here uses doubleness to deny doubleness of speech.

While Angelo could have saved a lot of time by simply stating his ultimatum clearly at the beginning of the dialogue, his use of casuistry, moral hypotheticals, theological language, and his probing into the sincerity of Isabella's ignorance in a perverted imitation of a confessor suggest a desire to obscure the depravity of his intentions. This imitation of the probing of a confessor also has, as has been shown, the unintended effect of revealing to Isabella, the quasi-penitent, a repressed sexuality and self-deceived seduction, showing the use of penitential language and ideas to create a psychological richness in both characters in this QSP.

Angelo's last quasi-confession occurs in the final scene of the play in 5.1.366-374 and 474-7 and shows Angelo playing the corrupt penitent. Angelo's reaction to the Duke's public exposure of his crimes blends legal and spiritual penitential language in a public confession of guilt. While Angelo's language seems to suggest sincere repentance, a close examination of it shows a corruption of the penitential structure, in which Angelo chooses despair and damnation over confession, contrition, penance and reconciliation.

> O my dread lord,
> I should be guiltier than my guiltiness,
> To think I can be undiscernible,
> When I perceive your Grace, like pow'r divine,
> Hath look'd upon my passes. Then, good Prince,
> No longer session hold upon my shame,
> But let my trial be mine own confession.
> Immediate sentence, then, and sequent death,
> Is all the grace I beg. (5.1.366-374)
> …
> I am sorry that such a sorrow I procure,
> And so deep sticks it in my penitent heart
> That I crave death more willingly than mercy:
> 'Tis my deserving, and I do entreat it. (5.1.474–7)

According to A D Nuttall, Angelo's speech represents "a full confession from the guilty party…. The word 'deserving' is not mere rhetoric. Angelo is pleading for justice (247)". In a legal sense, Angelo's trial and anticipated death sentence will constitute an adequate exposition of the nature of his crimes, and just punishment. There is also justice in Angelo's refusal to plead for mercy, as he showed none as a judge.

There is, however, also a religious component indicated in the language of this public trial in which Angelo speaks of the Duke's insight being "like pow'r divine", of "grace", and of his "penitent heart". In fact, Angelo's language analogously satisfies the requirements of the Sacrament of Penance: confession ("I should be guiltier than my guiltiness"; "let my trial be mine own confession"), contrition ("my shame"; "I am sorry that such a sorrow I procure"; "my penitent heart"; "'tis my deserving"), and penance ("immediate sentence, then, and sequent death"; "I crave death").

While Angelo appears to analogously fulfill these requirements, each imitation of an element of the Sacrament of Penance suggests a corruption or inversion of the process. Angelo's requests, "let my trial be mine own confession" and "Immediate sentence, then, and sequent

death / Is all the grace I beg" (5.1.373–4), indicate, in light of the Catholic framework of the play, a rejection of a final auricular confession and the spiritual "grace" promised by it. The importance of confession before death is highlighted by the emphasis in *Hamlet* on damning one's enemies by killing them with "no shriving time allowed", and in this play through Isabella's protestation that "Even for our kitchens / We kill the fowl of season" (2.2.84-5). Angelo's professed "penitent heart", which would constitute contrition, is also undermined by his speech. "I should be guiltier than my guiltiness" suggests a paradoxical exceptionalism, and a hyperbole that undermines sincerity. When Angelo pleads, "No longer session hold upon my shame", shame denotes public embarrassment (*OED* 3a); as has been said, 'shame' was not used to mean internal guilt until the mid-seventeenth century (*OED* 4). Finally, "I am sorry that such a sorrow I procure" tastes insincere given Angelo's lack of remorse prior to exposure. The phrasing further suggests insincerity, as the object of Angelo's sorrow is Escalus' disappointment—"I am sorry, one so learned and so wise… Should slip so grossly" (470, 472)—rather than his sins themselves, or his victims' suffering.

Instead of submission to imprisonment and religious penance, Angelo's requests indicate an embracement of damnation. This evokes Macbeth's paradoxical embracement of it, being "in blood / Stepp'd in so far that, should I wade no more, / Returning were as tedious as go o'er" (*Mac* 3.4.138–40). Angelo's request for death as "all the grace I beg" constitutes, in terms of Catholic hamartiology, the "unforgivable" sin of despair.[102] It also suggests a Calvinist hamartiology that is hinted at elsewhere in the text ("blood, thou art blood"), which would hold penance as pointless for a person predestined to hell.

While the Duke's role a confessor has been thoroughly discussed in critical literature, the extent of the imitations of the structures of the Sacrament of Penance in the play has not. This study of the Duke's appropriation of the structures of confession not only as a confessor but also as a penitent has shown the extent of the corruption of his character, not only through his manipulation of his subjects but through his deception of himself. This study of Shakespeare's use of the QSP device in *Measure for Measure* has also shown the ways in which Angelo's hypocrisy and corruption is predicated on penitential structures, and has revealed new facets of his character, and that of Isabella and Juliet.

[102] Despair is classed as one of the six sins against the Holy Spirit, which are understood by the Church, depending on the circumstances of the sin, as unforgivable. See Matthew 12:31-32: "Wherefore I say vnto you, euery sinne and blasphemie shalbe forgiuen vnto men: but the blasphemie against the holy Ghost shall not be forgiuen vnto men. And whosoeuer shall speake a word against the Sonne of man, it shall be forgiuen him: but whosoeuer shall speake against the holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiuen him, neither in this worlde, nor in the worlde to come." See also Aquinas, *Summa* (2.2. qu.14): "Augustine [*Fulgentius] (*De Fide ad Petrum* iii) says that "**those who despair of pardon for their sins**, or who without merits presume on God's mercy, **sin against the Holy Ghost**," [*emphasis mine*] and (*Enchiridion* lxxxiii) that "he who dies in a state of obstinacy is guilty of the sin against the Holy Ghost". For more information on sins against the Holy Spirit and unforgivable sins, see Forget.

Chapter 5

Developments in the QSP Device: *Othello* and *Macbeth*

Othello and *Macbeth* were written not long after *Hamlet* and *Measure for Measure*, and contain the next instances of Shakespeare's experimentation with QSPs. Unlike in *Hamlet* and *Measure for Measure* confession does not hold a primary place in either play. The QSP device is used only twice in *Othello*, for example, towards the end of the play. In this chapter I will analyse these quasi-confessions and argue that Othello uses them as attempts to rationalise and justify Desdemona's murder, and to suggest that his conversion to Christianity is represented as being shallow. I will then argue that *Macbeth* marks a new stage in Shakespeare's development of and experimentation with QSPs through a radical representation of the absence of confession and redemption, which is continuously 'aborted' in the play. While both of these plays present QSPs in different ways, there are significant overlaps regarding the concept of 'moral insemination'.

QSPs in *Othello*: Othello as Corrupt Confessor and Penitent

This section will analyse two quasi-confession scenarios that occur in the final scene of *Othello*, in which Othello plays the confessor and the penitent respectively. It will analyse the ways in which Othello performs corrupted imitations of these penitential structures in order to justify his murder of Desdemona to other characters and to himself.

In 5.2.25-125 Othello murders Desdemona and deceives himself regarding his culpability by using penitential language to represent himself as her confessor rather than her jealous, murderous husband. Like Hamlet, Othello moves between moral and eschatological paradigms in order to condemn others and justify his own behaviour. Othello invokes Christian eschatology through his use of the language and structures of the Sacrament of Penance to condemn and kill her. Once he realises her innocence, however, he shifts to a pagan eschatology devoid of any afterlife save an earthly reputation in order to exonerate himself.

Othello contemplates the murder using various forms of rationalisation, deciding that "I'll not shed her blood, / Nor scar that whiter skin of hers than snow" (3–4), as though this expiates the violence that is to come. It suggests a form of ritualistic sacrifice, and also diminishes the perceived humanity of Desdemona through hyperbolic simile. His reference to Desdemona's skin being 'whiter than snow' also invokes, in a dramatic irony, the penitential Psalm 51:7. This suggests a subconscious awareness of the possibility of her innocence. It also serves as a reminder of the end of Christian penitential practices, which is mercy, which Othello rejects. Othello refers to his wife at the start of this scene in dehumanising terms: "monumental alabaster" (5), "the light" (7), "rose" (13), "tree" (15). This shows the cognitive dissonance and self-deception he is practising in order to commit and justify the murder, which he also refers to euphemistically: "put out the light" (7); "plucked the rose" (13).

When Desdemona wakes, Othello speaks to her as a confessor to a penitent, urging her to confess her supposed sins:

> *Oth:* Have you pray'd to-night, Desdemon?
> *Des:* Ay, my lord.
> *Oth:* If you bethink yourself of any crime
> Unreconcil'd as yet to heaven and grace,
> Solicit for it straight.
> …
> No, heaven forfend! I would not kill thy soul.
> …
> *Des:* …Then heaven
> Have mercy on me!
> *Oth:* Amen, with all my heart!
> …
> Think on thy sins.
> …
> Sweet soul, take heed,
> Take heed of perjury, thou art on thy death-bed.
> …
> Therefore confess thee freely of thy sin;
> For to deny each article with oath
> Cannot remove nor choke the strong conception
> That I do groan withal. (5.2.25–56)

Significantly, Othello's declaration of his certainty of Desdemona's guilt contains language that undermines that very certainty. Othello's use of the word 'conception' suggests insemination, which is supported by his description of his 'groaning', which can refer to childbirth and sex.[103] This, then, suggests a subconscious awareness that Iago has 'impregnated' him with his destructive suspicion of Desdemona.

The *topos* of aural, moral insemination is found in medieval and early modern representations of the Fall in which Satan impregnates Eve through either the mouth or the ear, sin takes root within her, and she gives birth to it from her mouth in offering the apple to Adam.[104] In symmetry with this, there are medieval representations of the *Annunciation* in which the Angel Gabriel's words, or the Holy Spirit represented as a dove, enter Mary's ear in a similar fashion, and she is impregnated with and gives birth to the Word of God Incarnate, undoing the sin of Eve.[105]

Shakespeare draws on this *topos* prior to *Othello*. It is evoked in the language of Angelo during his temptation and fall in *Measure for Measure*. Isabella charges Angelo to imagine himself in her brother's place, saying "O, think on that, / And mercy then will breathe within

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[103] Ophelia says to Hamlet "You are keen, my lord, you are keen" which means, among other possibilities, sexually eager. Hamlet picks up on this meaning and responds "It would cost you a groaning to take off mine edge" (3.2.249-50).
[104] See Lehnhof.
[105] See, for example, Simone Martini and Lippo Memmi's *Annunciation with St. Margaret and St. Ansanus*(1333, Uffizi, Florence). See also Lehnhof, 39-40.

your lips, / Like man new made" (2.2.77–9). This invokes a rebirth in the form of confession (which makes man new), and initiates a string of images in which the propagation of moral ideas is represented through sexual reproduction. Angelo speaks of "future evils, / Either new, or by remissness new conceiv'd, / And so in progress to be hatch'd and born" (2.2.96–8). He also says in an aside, "She speaks, and 'tis such sense / That my sense breeds with it" (2.2.142–3). This works on two levels, as Isabella is both 'impregnating' him with a sense of justice and mercy, and is also 'impregnating' him with the seed of temptation, as she is subconsciously seducing him. Angelo later reinforces this by observing "in my heart the strong and swelling evil / Of my conception" (2.4.6–7). Isabella's conscious intention, to create a new life of repentance within him — which she will speak into his ear and which will be born from his lips — is sabotaged by her subconscious 'insemination' of him with temptation and sin instead.[106]

In parallel with Angelo, Othello's paranoid suspicion has been nurtured within him by jealousy and will come to fruition in the form of the murder. The concept of moral insemination also reveals an ironic, metaphorical adultery on the part of Othello, in allowing Iago to 'plant his seed' (in the form of an idea) within him instead of remaining faithful to (and having faith in) Desdemona. This idea of Iago's auricular impregnation of Othello is established in Act 1 Scene 3, in which Iago determines to "abuse Othello's [ear]" (1.3.395), and states "It is engend'red. Hell and night / Must bring this monstrous birth to the world's light" (1.3.403-4).[107]

Othello's assurance to Desdemona that "to deny each article with oath / Cannot remove nor choke the strong conception" (5.2.54-5) undermines itself in a second way. While both the Folio and Q2 have 'conception', Q1 has 'conceit'. This means, among other possibilities, a fanciful whim (*OED*, 8.a, b), which thereby constitutes a subconscious admission of the dubious nature of Othello's accusation.

Othello, like Hamlet, in appropriating the role of the confessor presents himself as 'heaven's scourge and minister', dualistically proposing to save her soul whilst destroying her body. In doing so, Othello attempts to imitate the structures of the Sacrament of Penance. He explicitly encourages Desdemona to confess her "sin" (53), prompting her by citing the evidence of Cassio's possession of the handkerchief (48–9). He is, however, a corrupt confessor: he instructs her to confess her sin "freely" (53), and yet shows that even if she did deny it he would not believe her (54-5). This (and the fact that he is threatening to kill her) undermines the notion of a 'free' confession, which requires the confessor to seek and invite truth rather than cling to prior, personal judgements. Othello prompts and encourages signs of contrition or attrition from his wife:

> *Des:* Then heaven
> Have mercy on me!
> *Oth:* Amen, with all my heart!
> …

[106] See Lehnhof, 40, 47-8, for more references to aural/oral impregnation in Shakespeare.
[107] For more on aural impregnation in *Othello* see Michal Long's *The Unnatural Scene: A Study in Shakespearean Tragedy* (Methuen, 1976), and John N. Wall's "Shakespeare's Aural Art: The Metaphor of the Ear in Othello" *Shakespeare Quarterly* 30.3, 1979.

Des: Then Lord have mercy on me!
Oth: I say, amen. (33–34, 57).

He categorises his murder of her as the ‘penance’ for her ‘sins’:

Oth: Think on thy sins.
Des: They are the loves I bear to you.
Oth: And for that thou diest. (40–41).

Whilst having therefore attempted to force his wife to analogically fulfil the requirements of the Sacrament of Penance (confession, contrition, penance), he interestingly does not complete the QSP by administering absolution. He does not offer forgiveness on behalf of God, as a priest would, or on behalf of himself, as the ‘wronged’ party. He does, however, imitate the confessor in cautioning the penitent against further sins: “Sweet soul, take heed, / Take heed of perjury, thou art on thy death-bed” (50–51), leaving her as an unabsolved sinner to the last.

Despite Othello’s attempts to justify his uxoricide by couching it in sacramental terms, he nonetheless acknowledges that it is, at the same time, a murder spurred by jealousy and revenge:

O perjur’d woman, thou dost stone thy heart,
And makest me call what I intend to do
A murder, which I thought a sacrifice (64–66)

Interestingly, Q1 has “thy heart”, and F1 has “my heart”. Both possibilities are pertinent in this context: a hardness of Desdemona’s heart fits with Othello’s accusation of her being unable to repent. A hardness of his own heart, on the other hand, while on the surface suggesting grief or conviction of her guilt caused by her behaviour, also suggests a subconscious recognition of his own merciless obduracy. The word ‘sacrifice’ (which is hinted at in his prior resolution to “not shed her blood” 5.2.3) connotes religious practices, not only pagan but also Christian. It invokes the ‘sacrifice’ of the Mass, and the Old Testament story of Abraham’s near-sacrifice of his beloved son to God (Gen 22), which foreshadows God’s sacrifice of his own son in the person of Christ (John 3:16). Othello’s shift in the perception of himself from divine, priestly sacrificer to murderer does not cause him to hesitate. Instead, his language blames this shift on Desdemona (“thou… makest me”). It represents him as having a subconscious awareness of the fact that his imitation of the structures of the Sacrament of Penance is merely semantic, and that in truth he is simply a vengeful husband murdering his supposedly unfaithful wife.

The scene also plays with the idea of the impermanence of Othello’s conversion to Christianity. This idea is signposted by Iago’s sardonic remark that for Desdemona Othello would “renounce his baptism, / All seals and symbols of redeemed sin” (2.3.323-4). He continues to describe Othello’s love for Desdemona as making him as spiritually weak, and idolatrous:

His soul is so enfetter’d to her love,
That she may make, unmake, do what she list,

Even as her appetite shall play the god
With his weak function. (2.3.345-8)

The efficacy of conversions from Islam and Judaism was a source of anxiety for medieval and early modern Christians. One of the major concerns of the early Spanish Inquisition was the rooting out of 'insincere' converts to Christianity (*conversos*) among the Jews and Muslims of Spain. Othello represents this anxiety. Although he justifies his murder of Desdemona using Christian penitential language, he is in fact enacting Sharia law.[108]

Othello's final monologue before his suicide (5.2.338-356) constitutes his second quasi-confession, in which this time he plays the penitent. In this quasi-confession Othello uses rhetorical devices such as euphemisms and sentimental imagery to downplay his responsibility for killing Desdemona and present himself as a victim. He also invokes a classical/pagan/atheistic eschatological model in which he shows concern for his reputation rather than his soul.

Othello's quasi-confession begins with the use of *occupatio* in reminding those present of his laudable military career while appearing to dismiss it: "I have done the state some service, and they know't — / No more of that" (339–40). He continues by asking that "When you shall these unlucky deeds relate, / Speak of me as I am; nothing extenuate, / Nor set down aught in malice." (341–3). By euphemising the murder of his wife as an 'unlucky deed' he attempts to morally neutralise it. By asking them to 'speak of me as I *am*', as opposed to how he *was*, he implies that his soul has not been altered by the uxoricide, showing a rejection of Christian hamartiology. He confesses to the sins of having loved "not wisely but too well" (344), and of *not* being the jealous type, but "being wrought", meaning worked upon. Like Hamlet, who conducts a QSP at Ophelia's expense and confesses to being "honest", Othello confesses implied virtue in loving "too well", and victimhood in having had his good nature taken advantage of.

Othello attempts to represent the murder as an accident: he "Like the base Indian threw a pearl away / Richer than all his tribe" (347–8). This passing mention of 'a pearl' is the only time the dead Desdemona is mentioned in this monologue, Othello's focus being on himself, and once again, as in Othello's quasi-confession of her, he refers to her in dehumanised, euphemistic terms. Some editors, instead of reading 'Indian', "prefer to read *Judean*, after F1; this is taken as an allusion to Judas, or to Herod the Great, who in a fit of jealousy had his beloved wife Mariamne killed" (Riverside fn. 347). If 'Judean', it becomes a subconscious acknowledgement of Othello's sinful state in the form of a metaphor (the eruption of subconscious knowledge into simile or metaphor being common in Shakespeare). There is a similarity here to Hamlet, who refers to his murder of Polonius as having "shot my arrow o'er the house / And hurt my brother" (5.2.243–4). In each case they euphemistically downplay the act of murder, frame it as a morally neutral accident, and position themselves as victims of bad luck, negating their own responsibility. The "pearl" also evokes the "pearl of great price" as a metaphor for the kingdom of heaven (Matt 13:46), of which Shakespeare's contemporary audiences, who attended church weekly, would have been well aware. In this sense Othello subconsciously acknowledges the loss of his soul. Even though he portrays

[108] For more on this see Johanyak, Debra. "Shifting Religious Identities and Sharia in Othello." *Religions (Basel, Switzerland)*, vol. 10, no. 10, 2019, p. 587.

himself as a victim (of bad luck and of potential reputation destruction), this shows a subconscious confession of his sin and awareness of damnation.

Othello continues to use hypnotic language. “[T]he melting mood” (349) suggests sentimentality rather than genuine remorse, and suggests transience. Othello next refers, in secular terms, to the idea of penitential redemption: “Drops tears as fast as the Arabian trees / Their medicinable gum” (350–51). This links tears with healing, which again evokes an image from the penitential psalms: “My teares haue bin my meate day and night” (Ps 42:3–5). Othello’s monologue analogically fulfills the elements of the Sacrament of Penance through euphemisms: he has confessed to throwing away the pearl (confession); he has been “Perplexed in the extreme” (346) and cried “tears” (350) (contrition); and performed a type of restitution (albeit prior to the sin) through having “done the state some service” (339). The final requirement, penance, is performed through his suicide, as he assumes the identity of the “malignant and … turban’d Turk” (353) and kills himself as penance for his sin. Absolution is suggested by the “medicinable gum” produced by his penitential tears.

Seeming to be unable to bear the loss of his reputation (more so than that of his wife or his soul), Othello plays the stoic and kills himself (thereby damning himself in the Christian eschatology), but not without first doing everything he can to redeem himself in people’s eyes. By invoking in his suicide the memory of his slaying a “malignant and a turban’d Turk / [who] Beat a Venetian and traduc’d the state” (353–4), he rhetorically repositions himself not merely as the heretical enemy, who assaults Venetians, but also as the Christian hero who saves them from said enemy. Othello now slays that enemy again, and in vanquishing himself becomes, paradoxically, the hero once more. Othello almost seems to be invoking a kind of baptism, in which the old self must die for the new self to be born again in Christ; here Othello tries to kill the old, sinful Othello and become (or resurrect) the heroic, virtuous, Christian Othello: his language seems to present it not as a suicide but as a Christian rebirth.

Othello portrays himself as victim, villain, and hero, showing a stoic disregard for the afterlife and a pagan preoccupation with how he will be remembered, invoking the classical eschatology in which the afterlife consists in how we are remembered on earth. He also uses the structures of the Sacrament of Penance to appease his conscience and manipulate others into thinking and speaking well of him. In some respects he resembles Hamlet, who also oscillates between stoic, pagan, and Christian paradigms in his self-deception and manipulation of others, particularly through the use of QSPs. Othello’s death also mimics Hamlet’s, as both have the opportunity for final repentance and yet reject it in favour of curating their reputation. Othello’s use of a Christian paradigm to judge Desdemona, but a pagan one for himself, suggests that for him (as for Hamlet and Duke Vincentio) Christianity is merely a kind of performance.

Baptism, according to Christians, cannot be renounced, however, as it is believed to leave an indelible mark on the soul. However, for Iago and Othello (and Hamlet and Vincentio) Christianity seems to be more of an outward appearance. This is reflected in Othello’s final monologue, which shows a performance rather than true contrition (T S Eliot has described him as “cheering himself up” – 130): his image of Arabian trees weeping is beautiful, whereas real, contrite tears are often not.

The Aborted Confession in *Macbeth*

Macbeth, usually dated around 1606, marks a turning point in Shakespeare's use and development of the QSP device. Having developed its use as a vehicle for creating psychological complexity in his characters through subconscious manipulation and self-deception, and having experimented with it in a variety of forms (as in *Othello*), Shakespeare dismantles this structure in *Macbeth* and creates new approaches to experimenting with confession and psychological complexity. In this play Shakespeare abandons the QSP, and instead the play explores what a world would look like with no penitence or redemption. Sin and its spiritual, psychological and material ramifications lie at the heart of *Macbeth*. Where a largely Christian audience might expect, therefore, to find penitential structures, there is instead a conspicuous vacuum. The Sacrament of Penance, with a particular focus on its nature as a vehicle for grace and redemption as well as for self-awareness, is to this play what oxygen is to a play about drowning: its significance lies in its absence.

In this section I will explore five experimental approaches that Shakespeare takes towards confession and the representation of its absence in *Macbeth*:

1. Confession and Reproduction: The Aborted Confession
2. The Good Confession: Cawdor as Foil
3. Lady Macbeth as Diabolical Confessor to Macbeth
4. Inverted Examinations of Conscience: Invoking darkness and self-deception
5. The Repurposed Confession: Malcolm and MacDuff

I will argue that these representations of the missing or distorted elements of the Sacrament of Penance drive the protagonists' behaviours and point towards their damnation.

Confession and Reproduction: The Aborted Confession

While the idea of the 'aborted confession' may initially appear unlikely, when considered in light of the pervasiveness of the theme of infertility on the one hand ("He has no children" 4.3.216; "a fruitless crown /… a barren sceptre"3.1.60-61) and the theme of failed repentance on the other ("I am in blood / Stepp'd in so far that, should I wade no more, / Returning were as tedious as go o'er" – 3.5.135-7), a relationship emerges. The play emphasises the significance of both themes in representing an inability to bring forth new life (life of the body and renewed life of the soul). This relationship is apparent in Macbeth's representation of his conscience as Pity, the "naked new-born babe" (1.7.21), which he then goes on to slaughter. The imagery of a helpless baby "Striding the blast" (1.7.22) encapsulates the paradoxical power of 'pity', or compassion, as it is the baby's very weakness that ignites in us an intensely powerful urge to protect it, making it therefore both weak and strong.[109] By the end of the play, Macbeth has destroyed this capacity for pity within himself, killing

[109] For other interpretations of this symbol see Cleanth Brooks' "The Naked Babe and the Cloak of Manliness".

indiscriminately, and observing “Direness, familiar to my slaughterous thoughts, / Cannot once start me” (5.5.14–15).

The Catholic Church teaches that the Sacrament of Penance echoes the rebirth of the soul performed by baptism, as it brings the soul from the spiritual death of mortal sin back to life.[110] Macbeth and Lady Macbeth are barren, physically and spiritually. They are ‘conscience clogged’, to borrow an image from *Richard II*, and while they feel some contrition and attrition, and unwillingly and unwittingly confess at times (through Lady Macbeth’s somnambulism and Macbeth’s encounter with Banquo’s ghost), they are unable to bring forth new life in the form of a proper confession, which requires the confessor to act as midwife to the soul. This is reinforced through the repeated conflation of babies and violence throughout the play: the play opens with a bloody battle, which signals the violent birth of Macbeth as the new Thane of Cawdor; Macbeth imagines “Pity, like a naked newborn babe / Striding the blast” (1.7.21); Lady Macbeth uses infanticidal hyperbole, “I have given suck… dash’d the brains out” (1.7.54-59); When confronted by Banquo’s ghost and imagining it challenging him to a fight, Macbeth says, “If trembling I inhabit then, protest me / The baby of a girl” (3.4.107-8); the witches’ brew-ingredient, “Finger of birth-strangled babe” (4.1.31); the witches’ apparition of the *bloody child* (4.1.76sd); the witches’ proclamation, “none of woman born / Shall harm Macbeth” (4.1.81); Macbeth’s resolution to “give to th’edge o’th’sword / [Macduff’s] wife, his babes, and all unfortunate souls / That trace him in his line” (4.1.151-3); the murder of Macduff’s young son: “What, you egg!” (4.2.78-81); the boy’s lament, “He has killed me, mother!” (4.2.80); the message, “your wife and babes / Savagely slaughtered” (4.3.205-6); and Macduff’s revelation: “Macduff was from his mother’s womb / Untimely ripped” (5.8.15-16).

This conflation of infantile and violent imagery suggests, among other things, the death of the innocence of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth. This death of innocence can also be read as a birth of guilt (paradoxically a birth of spiritual death), which evokes the medieval *topos* of moral insemination Shakespeare uses in this and other plays.

Like Angelo and Othello, when Macbeth is tempted by the idea of regicide in Act 1 Scene 3 he responds to it with language suggestive of sexual arousal. His response includes the following: “the swelling act” (128) “soliciting” (see *OED* “solicit”, v. 4c, 4d, 5b); “yield” (134); “make my seated heart knock at my ribs” (136). He is in a sense, then, like Angelo, also being metaphorically impregnated with evil—in this case by the witches—and so will give birth to death rather than life.

Throughout the course of the play the latent confessions of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth, which would signal the rebirth of the soul, are continually ‘aborted’: they begin to form beneath the surface but are stifled and “strangled” (4.1.31) before they have a chance to come to term through being spoken. Both Macbeth and Lady Macbeth express implicit contrition and attrition, which constitute the first requirement for confession. The following instances demonstrate this: “Wake Duncan with thy knocking. I would thou couldst!” (2.2.71); “Nought’s had, all’s spent” (3.2.4); “The thane of Fife had a wife. Where is she now? What,

[110] “[C]onfession is necessary for the salvation of a man who has fallen into a mortal or actual sin”. (*ST* III. Q6. A.1).

will these hands ne'er be clean?" (5.1.42–3); "mine eternal jewel / Given to the common enemy of man" (3.1.67–8).

In desperation, Macbeth asks the doctor if he can cure Lady Macbeth, and by implication himself, of their guilt. This dialogue has a spiritual significance, as priests were seen in the Catholic tradition as spiritual doctors.[111]

> Canst thou not minister to a mind diseas'd,
> Pluck from the memory a rooted sorrow,
> Raze out the written troubles of the brain,
> And with some sweet oblivious antidote
> Cleanse the stuff'd bosom of that perilous stuff
> Which weighs upon the heart? (5.3.40–5)

Macbeth's request makes it clear that his ailment is spiritual, moral and psychological rather than physical, which would suggest, particularly to a Christian audience, the need for confession. Confession, whether sacramental or performed among the 'priesthood of all believers', does not seem to be available in the world of the play. The doctor's response confirms this, saying that "Therein the patient / Must minister to himself" (5.3.45– 6). This leaves Macbeth unsatisfied, his search for healing dying in its gestation: "Throw physic to the dogs! I'll none of it" (5.3.47).

The inadequacy of the patient trying to 'minister to himself' in this circumstance is explored two scenes earlier in Lady Macbeth's somnambulism in 5.1, which constitutes a stifled confession. In this scene Lady Macbeth attempts to clean the stain of Duncan's blood from her hands ("Out, damn'd spot" – 5.1.31), symbolising her unsuccessful attempt to free herself from her guilt unaided. The representation of sin as a stain is common in Christian hamartiology (cf. Aquinas, *ST* I–II. Q.86, Art. 1., and Psalm 51:6–7). It is also expressed in contemporary literary motifs such as the "black and damned spots" Gertrude sees on her soul in *Hamlet*, or the name of Ruddymane (*Faerie Queene*, Bk 2, canto 1). Contrary to the critical tradition of seeing Lady Macbeth as lacking a conscience,[112] this scene vividly represents the tyranny of her conscience and her failure to appease it.

In this scene (5.1) the stifled elements of confession are present. Lady Macbeth feels horror at what she has done, which constitutes attrition: "What, will these hands ne'er be clean?" (43). She unconsciously makes a verbal confession before the Doctor (an analogue of a priest), who observes "[t]he heart is sorely charg'd" (53-4). Finally, she suffers as a result of her sin ("Hell is murky" – 36), analogically meeting the requirement for penance. Rather than performing actual auricular or reformed confession, however, and undergoing a spiritual rebirth, Lady Macbeth stifles the confession that seeks to burst forth from her mouth, and instead aborts her salvation and herself through despair and suicide, becoming the baby that she imagines she might "[dash] the brains" out of. Lady Macbeth's stifling is also enacted by the Doctor and Waiting-Gentlewoman who observe her, as they agree to stifle communication of what they have witnessed: "what, at any time, have you heard her say?" – "That… which I

[111] See Gregory of Nazianzus: "The very eagerness with which we should lay bare our sickness to our spiritual physicians we employ in avoiding this treatment." (§19).
[112] See, for example, Huntley: "In the plan of treason not once do we have a twinge of conscience from Lady Macbeth; she is 'the fiend-like queen'" (398).

will not report after her" (12-14); "I think, but dare not speak" (79). This stifling of communication, particularly by a doctor, represents the antithesis of confession, and once again signals the dearth of confession in the world of the play.

Interestingly, the play inhabits a pagan world. Unlike in, say, Hamlet, "shriving" is never mentioned, and unlike in Elsinore, there is no priest at Dunsinane. Scotland was Christianised later than the rest of Britain, and in this play Shakespeare represents it as being still only on the edge of Christianity. The play shows impulses towards Christianity beneath the surface, but they cannot come to fruition. This is contrasted with the play's representation of England, which has a saint ruling it: Edward the Confessor. In contrast to Macbeth, this king heals his people: "at his touch, / Such sanctity hath heaven given his hand, / They presently amend" (4.3.143-5); "sundry blessings hang about his throne / That speak him full of grace" (4.3.158-9) This saint becomes, in a sense, the solution to Scotland's problems through sending soldiers to restore order (it is perhaps not a coincidence that Edward the *Confessor* provides this healing and restoration). The world of the play is not a world without repentance, but rather repentance is not yet recognised or labelled for most characters. The play experiments with characters who cannot understand or articulate the guilt they feel.

The Good Confession: Cawdor as Foil

In what appears to be an exception to the rule, near the start of the play a model confession and death is established in the report of the previous thane of Cawdor's final moments. Although this detail initially appears irrelevant to the progression of characterization or plot, it in fact provides the standard of confession of which Macbeth and Lady Macbeth will continually fall short, and functions as a reminder of the unavailability and unreachability of confession for Macbeth and Lady Macbeth.

> I have spoke
> With one that saw him die; who did report
> That very frankly he confess'd his treasons,
> Implor'd your Highness' pardon, and set forth
> A deep repentance. Nothing in his life
> Became him like the leaving it. He died
> As one that had been studied in his death,
> To throw away the dearest thing he ow'd,
> As 'twere a careless trifle. (1.4.3–11)

The idea that Cawdor died "[a]s one that had been studied in his death" evokes the medieval and early modern tradition of the *Ars Moriendi*. This offstage QSP fulfils the criteria for a good confession (confession, contrition, and penance/restitution), and is, theologically, one of the best Christian deaths in Shakespeare. Malcolm reports that he makes a textbook confession, 'frankly' confessing his sins (which suggests honesty and humility) and showing a 'deep repentance' (which suggests 'true contrition'). This, given Aquinas' stipulation that true contrition obtains forgiveness,[113] creates implied absolution. Cawdor's confession

[113] According to Aquinas: "Since it is requisite for the remission of sin that a man cast away entirely the liking for sin which implies a sort of continuity and solidity in his mind, **the act which obtains forgiveness is** termed by a figure of speech '**contrition**'" (*Lib. Sent*. IV, dist. xvii; cf. Supplem. III, Q.ii, a. 1, sol. 1. (*emphasis mine*).

“implored” the “pardon” of his king, the king functioning as a divine analogue in medieval and early modern tradition.

The requirement for penance and restitution is implicitly fulfilled by the man’s acceptance of death: “To throw away the dearest thing he ow’d, / As ‘twere a careless trifle”. This echoes Matt 16:25 “For whosoeuer will saue his life, shall lose it: and whosoeuer shall lose his life for my sake, shall finde it.”. This establishes itself as a point of contrast with Macbeth, who observes that he has given his “eternal jewel […] to the common enemy of man” (3.1.67–8), and is willing to “jump the life to come” (1.7.7). As Macbeth becomes the new Thane of Cawdor, and Cawdor’s treachery foreshadows Macbeth’s, Cawdor’s death as a redeemed sinner makes him a foil for Macbeth, inviting a comparison regarding his ability and Macbeth’s inability to confess.

Cawdor’s successful confession serves to reinforce the absence of Christian confession in the play. Nowhere in the play is a priest mentioned, doctors reject and stifle attempts at confession, and confession between laypeople is rendered impossible due to the breakdown of trust throughout the play (“There’s not a one of them but in his house / I keep a servant fee’d.” – 3.5.130–31). Cawdor’s confession itself is reported rather than performed, and the religious and eschatological elements of it are implicit only. Cawdor’s confession therefore serves as a symbol of the repentance and confession that constitute both spiritual salvation and moral and psychological health, and Macbeth and Lady Macbeth’s inability (or unwillingness) to perform it.

Lady Macbeth as Diabolical Confessor to Macbeth

In this section I will argue that Lady Macbeth parodies the role of confessor and spiritual director to Macbeth in Act 1 Scene 5. Spiritual direction has existed since the early church, reaching a ‘Golden Age’ in the fifteenth century.[114] The role of the confessor often incorporated spiritual direction, but the spiritual director need not have been a priest, and female spiritual directors were not uncommon.[115] Lady Macbeth’s language represents her as an inverted form the confessor and spiritual director to Macbeth: she knows him well, worries over his ‘faults’, weaknesses and predispositions, and devises a way to help him overcome them, coaching him through the murder. She also ‘prays’ for guidance and spiritual strength for herself so that she will be able to support him in his ‘spiritual battle’.

In saying of Macbeth, “Yet do I fear thy nature, / It is too full o’ th’ milk of human kindness” (1.5.16–17), Lady Macbeth refers to conscience, or right reason (still part of fallen human nature for Catholics, but interestingly, not for the more Calvinist branches of Christianity). Lady Macbeth seeks to banish from herself and her husband “compunctious visitings of nature”, ‘compunction’ meaning “pricking or stinging of the conscience or heart; regret or uneasiness of mind consequent on sin or wrong-doing; remorse, contrition.” (*OED*, 1a). In this way Lady Macbeth parodies a priest, who guards against original sin and concupiscence preventing salvation and spiritual improvement. “Thy nature” and “Human kindness” can mean either original sin, which the priest-confessor-spiritual-director seeks to combat, or the

[114] See Ranft, “A Key” (7-26).
[115] See Ranft, *A Woman’s Way* (477), and Diefendorf (155-71).

conscience, which Lady Macbeth, as diabolical priest-confessor-spiritual-director, seeks to destroy (her referring to 'the milk of human kindness' shows that Lady Macbeth thinks of it as the latter).

Like a confessor, Lady Macbeth worries over Macbeth's strengths and weaknesses: "Thou wouldst be great, / Art not without ambition, but without / The illness should attend it" (1.5.18–20). She sees sin as an illness — a deformity of human nature — just as a confessor does. But while a priest seeks to heal, Lady Macbeth seeks to make ill, recognising that human nature must be mutilated in order to commit sin. This reinforces the image of the priest as doctor, which is invoked in Macbeth's plea for healing of the "stuff'd bosom" in Act 5 Scene 3, and in the representation of Edward the Confessor.

Like an inverted priest or spiritual director, Lady Macbeth desires her husband to come to her so that she may 'minister' to him and strengthen him in his vices:

> Hie thee hither,
> That I may pour my spirits in thine ear,
> And chastise with the valor of my tongue
> All that impedes thee from the golden round,
> Which fate and metaphysical aid doth seem
> To have thee crown'd withal. (1.5.25–30)

Lady Macbeth's summons, "Hie thee hither, / That I may pour my spirits in thine ear" employs the previously-discussed *topos* of moral insemination through the ear ("spirit" was a term used for 'semen').[116] This builds on the witches' metaphorical insemination of Macbeth with the temptation to murder Duncan in 1.3. The idea of 'impregnating' Macbeth, coupled with the use of the verb "to chastise", which has salutary moral connotations (*OED*, "chastise"), suggests that Lady Macbeth is taking on a masculine role, strengthening, in addition to her diabolical parody of spiritual director, the parallel with a priestly confessor. This is supported by the use of the word 'valor', which connotes a manly kind of virtue, often associated with courage in battle (*OED*, "valour", n. 1b).

Inverted Examination of Conscience: Invoking Darkness and Self-Deception

Lady Macbeth's infamous "unsex me here" soliloquy (1.5.38–54) manifests itself functions as an inverted examination of conscience, inverting the prayer of the penitent for self-knowledge and healing. Instead, Lady Macbeth explicitly asks for spiritual blindness, and for corruption of both body and soul. In the vein of Renaissance literary anti-confessions such as Richard III's "I am determined to prove a villain" (1.1.30) and Satan's "Evil be thou my good" (*Paradise Lost* 4.110), Lady Macbeth shows self-awareness in her embracing of evil that can be contrasted with Hamlet's or Duke Vincentio's moral self-deception in quasi-examinations of conscience.

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[116] Thomas Vicary (c. 1490 — 1561), physician, surgeon and anatomist, writes of "the generative spirit, which resides in the sexual organs and is responsible for procreation." (see *OED* 'spirit', 21.a). Cf. Sonnet 129: "Th' expense of spirit in a waste of shame / Is lust in action".

In praying for a spiritual transformation using anatomical and medical metaphors, Lady Macbeth invokes a longstanding medieval mystical tradition. In a fifteenth-century prayer sequence written by a Cistercian nun, the speaker envisions her heart as being unnaturally hard because it will not shatter as the rocks did at the crucifixion of Christ. She views this shattering as the natural and appropriate response: "O treuli I may seie þat my herte is more hard than is the hard ston, for stones Lord at youre deth to bursten" (Pollard, 55).

She prays, "O benigne God, softe my herte… and anoynte my hard herte with the precious licour of yowre swete blood so that loue, pite, and compassion may abide in me" (55). She pleads for a suppling of her heart by grace so that she may become more tender, compunctious, and more easily wounded. This *topos* appears in Ezekiel 36:26: "I will take away the stonie heart out of your body, and I will giue you an heart of flesh", and in *Doctor Faustus*: "My heart's so harden'd, I cannot repent" (2.2.18). While the speaker of the MS seeks a unity with nature in 'bursting' for Christ, Lady Macbeth seeks, by contrast, a rupturing of her relationship with nature: "unsex me here"; "Make thick my blood" (1.5.41, 43). Both women, then, are seeking a destructive transformation of the self. The nun sees herself as flawed and seeks a softening so that she may be in harmony with nature, and join in the death and ultimate resurrection of Christ (56). Lady Macbeth, by contrast, seeks a hardening of herself so that she may be in disharmony with nature. And, instead of death and unification with Christ, she seeks to re-enact his murder.[117]

At the end of the prayer the speaker asks for greater self-knowledge, linking knowledge of God with knowledge of self: "clense the blindnesse of myn gostli eyen and herte…so pat I may haue traue verray knowing of yowre diuine bounte and trewe sight and knowing of my self and of alle my sinnes" (55). Lady Macbeth, by contrast, seeks less self-knowledge ("that my keen knife see not the wound it makes"), and less knowledge of God ("nor heaven peep through the blanket of the dark"):

> Come, thick night,
> And pall thee in the dunnest smoke of hell,
> That my keen knife see not the wound it makes,
> Nor heaven peep through the blanket of the dark,
> To cry "Hold, hold!"(1.5.50–54)

This is echoed in Macbeth's:

> Come, seeling night,
> Scarf up the tender eye of pitiful day,
> And with thy bloody and invisible hand
> Cancel and tear to pieces that great bond
> Which keeps me pale! (3.2.49–53)

This moral darkness and rejection of self-awareness is a motif that runs throughout the play:

[117] An analogy between Duncan and Christ is evoked in places such as "this Duncan / Hath borne his faculties so meek, hath been / So clear in his great office, that his virtues / Will plead like angels" (1.7.16-19), and "His silver skin laced with his golden blood" (2.3.109).

> Stars, hide your fires;
> Let not light see my black and deep desires.
> The eye wink at the hand; yet let that be
> Which the eye fears, when it is done, to see. (1.4.50–53)

Both Lady Macbeth and Macbeth seek diabolic intervention to conceal conscious comprehension of the implications of their sin from themselves so that they can sin unimpeded. This is an inversion of the typical confessional structure, and marks yet another way in which Shakespeare experiments with the dramatic potential of confession. Macbeth and Lady Macbeth both express a need for cognitive dissonance and concealment ("To know my deed, 'twere best not know myself" – 2.2.70), which is manifested through the motif of darkness. They are unlike other Shakespearean villains such as Richard III, Aaron the Moor, Iago, or *The Tempest's* Antonio, who seem to manifest the behaviour of psychopaths, showing no twinges of conscience (except for a brief moment in the case of Richard III, as has been discussed). Perhaps, at its core, Macbeth's and Lady Macbeth's downfall is caused by a lack of self-knowledge: they seem to think they have what it takes to be *Übermenschen*, to murder and successfully quell their consciences, but they (like Dostoyevski's Raskolnikov two and a half centuries later) do not.

Macbeth's aside, "Stars, hide your fires" (1.4.50–53) is the inverse of an examination of conscience, in which the penitent seeks to become conscious of his sins and vices, and to 'shed light' on them, especially ones he may be unconsciously concealing from himself. Here, however, Macbeth is aware of his the sinful nature of his intentions, but seeks to hide them from himself in order to go through with his scheme without being crippled by his conscience. He is performing a kind of conscious self-deception, or suppression, attempting to strengthen, not remedy, *ignorantia*.

Light obviously represents grace, goodness and the eye of God, but also knowledge and consciousness. That is why Macbeth and Lady Macbeth are constantly calling on darkness to cover their sins — not just from the knowledge of others, but also from themselves. Lady Macbeth's "hell is murky" mirrors the darkness of Dante's *Inferno*.[118] The attempted divorce between the eye and the hand — between consciousness and action — is the opposite of the goal of the penitential structure, which is to unify the self through fostering an awareness of one's behaviour. The fact that these lines are phrased as a supplication makes them a kind of inverse prayer, increasing their diabolical aspect, which is compounded in Lady Macbeth's 'unsex me here' soliloquy. Shakespeare seems to be fascinated by the tension that is created when we manipulate or coach ourselves to behave in ways that are contrary to our nature (for example, Henry V's coaching his soldiers before battle to "stiffen the sinews", "imitate the action of the tiger" and "Disguise fair nature with hard-favor'd rage" 3.1.7,6,8).

The Repurposed Confession: Malcolm and Macduff

In 4.3.37-139 Malcolm tests Macduff through a quasi-confession that is hyperbolic regarding both his supposed vices and virtues. This exercise shows neither self-deception nor achieved

[118] Eg. "Round through that air with solid darkness stain'd" (III.28)

self-awareness, and neither manipulation nor reconciliation. Instead, it shows a quasi-confession being used as a tool by the quasi-penitent to determine the moral nature of the quasi-confessor, highlighting the breakdown of trust in the play.

Malcolm expresses suspicion of Macduff's claim that "I am not treacherous" (18). He reminds him that "A good and virtuous nature may recoil / In an imperial charge" (19-20), articulating the problem of the breakdown of trust that lies at the heart of the play. Malcolm then plays with this problem of being unable to "find the mind's construction in the face" (1.4.12) through a confession of hyperbolic vices as an attempt to expose Macduff's moral status and intentions:

> It is myself I mean; in whom I know
> All the particulars of vice so grafted
> That, when they shall be open'd, black Macbeth
> Will seem as pure as snow, and the poor state
> Esteem him as a lamb, being compar'd
> With my confineless harms. (4.3.50-55)

Malcolm continues, confessing to lust and avarice in hyperbolic terms:

> There's no bottom, none,
> In my voluptuousness. Your wives, your daughters,
> Your matrons, and your maids could not fill up
> The cistern of my lust (60-63)
>
> With this, there grows
> In my most ill-compos'd affection such
> A stanchless avarice that, were I king,
> …
> I should forge
> Quarrels unjust against the good and loyal,
> Destroying them for wealth. (76-8, 82-4)

Macduff's desperate responses promise to facilitate Malcom's supposed vices: "We have willing dames enough" (73); and "Scotland hath foisons to fill up your will / Of your mere own" (88, 89).

Malcolm finally confesses to total depravity:

> Had I pow'r, I should
> Pour the sweet milk of concord into hell
> Uproar the universal peace, confound
> All unity on earth. (97-100)

This hyperbolic confession of diabolism finally pushes Macduff to despair: "O my breast, / Thy hope ends here!" (113-14). As Elizabeth Mazzola observes, "No wonder that upon hearing Malcolm's confession, the anguished Macduff curses the fate that would keep Scotland reeling even after Macbeth is expelled" (117).

Having satisfied himself of Macduff's pure intentions, Malcolm now confesses virtues which are equally as extreme as his supposed vices:

> [I] here abjure
> The taints and blames I laid upon myself,
> For strangers to my nature. I am yet
> Unknown to woman, never was forsworn,
> Scarcely have coveted what was mine own,
> At no time broke my faith, would not betray
> The devil to his fellow, and delight
> No less in truth than life. My first false speaking
> Was this upon myself. (123-131)

Malcolm's proclaimed virtues are, however, problematic in their own way. The claim that his "first false speaking" was "upon [him]self" is so hyperbolic that it suggests either deliberate deception, which disturbingly likens him to "treacherous" (18) Macbeth, or a lack of the self-knowledge that he claims to possess in line 50. Similarly, his claim that he "would not betray / The devil to his fellow" (128-9) is problematic. Treachery of the devil is necessarily virtuous, and loyalty diabolic. Moreover, Malcolm's claims to virtue suggest a lack of the strength and cunning that is required of a ruler. Malcolm's self-revelation has ironically called upon him the suspicions with which he initially viewed Macduff. The uneasiness that this causes is expressed in Macduff's final comment, "Such welcome and unwelcome things at once / 'Tis hard to reconcile" (138-9), which echoes Macbeth's "So foul and fair a day I have not seen" (1.3.38).

This uneasy dialogue shows a new form of experimentation with the QSP device in which the form of confession is used by the quasi-penitent as means by which to determine the moral character and intentions of the quasi-confessor. In it the form of confession is hollowed out and repurposed, continuing the play's pattern of a lack of redemptive confession.

Both *Othello* and *Macbeth* show a new stage in Shakespeare's experimentation with and development of the QSP device. While in *Hamlet* and *Measure for Measure* confession underpins the entire play, its function here is more subtle. *Othello* reproduces the figure of the corrupt confessor and corrupt penitent (both embodied by Othello), manipulating others and deceiving himself in order to justify his own crimes, as Hamlet and Duke Vincentio have done. It experiments, additionally, with confession as a platform for the *topos* of moral insemination, a thread which runs through *Measure for Measure* and *Macbeth*, forming a striking link between the three. *Macbeth* then marks a radical shift in Shakespeare's experimentation with QSPs, produced by the significance of their absence in a 'resounding silence'. These are the last plays (chronologically) in which the corruption of the Sacrament of Penance through its secular imitation is developed. Chapter 6, which focuses on the Last Plays and their anticipation in *King Lear*, will explore the final stage of the development of the QSP device, in which a successful transition of the sacrament into the secular realm is explored. These transitions through chronological stages suggest that Shakespeare's experimentation with the device was not static but dynamic, and its development a conscious move on the part of the playwright.

Chapter 6

Successful QSPs: Secular Imitations of Confession in *King Lear, The Winter's Tale, Cymbeline*, and *The Tempest*

Up until this point, the QSPs that Shakespeare has developed have been almost exclusively instances of moral self-deception and manipulation, with the exception of Clarence's quasi-confession to the Keeper in *RII* and Laertes' to Hamlet. They have shown the secularization of the Sacrament of Penance as a process of corruption in which characters with secular power appropriate the structures and language of the sacrament for unethical purposes. In this stage of Shakespeare's career a new and final development of the QSP device emerges. *King Lear* and three of the four Late plays, *The Winter's Tale, Cymbeline,* and *The Tempest*,[119] show a rise of 'successful' QSPs: secular instantiations of the elements of the Sacrament of Penance in which moral introspection results in self-knowledge, and confession among the 'priesthood of all believers' results in reconciliation.

QSPs in *King Lear*

In Act 4, Scene 7, lines 44-84 of *King Lear*, Lear and Cordelia use the language of the Sacrament of Penance in order to enact their reconciliation. Unlike most of the previous QSPs that have been studied, in this interaction there is no self-deception or manipulation. Instead, the use of the structures of the Sacrament of Penance in a secular setting generates successful recognition and restoration. Lear is a willing penitent, and Cordelia an effective confessor.

Upon waking, Lear uses eschatological language:

> You do me wrong to take me out o' th' grave:
> Thou art a soul in bliss, but I am bound
> Upon a wheel of fire, that mine own tears
> Do scald like molten lead. (4.7.44–7)

Lear takes Cordelia for a saint and places himself in either hell or purgatory.[120] While his language is ambiguous, a reference to purgatory would suggest a cleansing, penitential journey of redemption from his sin, which describes his experience in the play. Lear indirectly confesses his sin:

> I know you do not love me, for your sisters
> Have (as I do remember) done me wrong:
> *You have some cause* (4.7.72–4, italics mine).

He shows contrition: "If you have poison for me, I will drink it" (71), and suggests that he has performed penance on his "wheel of fire". He also performs a symbolic restitution

[119] This study will exclude *Pericles*, as about half of it was written by somebody else, commonly believed to be George Wilkins, and so it is therefore not useful in the study of a device developed by Shakespeare.
[120] See Muir's Arden edition, fn. 47.

through kneeling to his daughter (58). Cordelia grants absolution, wiping away his sin in saying "No cause, no cause" (74), and Lear explicitly signals the penitential language of forgiveness, absolution and reconciliation: "forget, and forgive" (83). As van Dijkhuizen observes,

> Far from suggesting a causal relation between the sense of guilt which Lear expresses and her forgiveness of his deeds, she obliterates her father's wrongdoings and effectively denies that they have occurred, in a gesture reminiscent of divine forgiveness as a radical erasure of sin (*A Literary History*, 58).

Cordelia's request for Lear to "hold your hand in benediction o'er me" (57) also signals the restoration of the father-daughter relationship. The QSP, desacramentalised and performed in a secular setting, is now psychologically, socially and spiritually successful. Lear has gained self-knowledge, and even though he and his daughter are captured, he has nonetheless gained a sense of freedom, joy, and peace:

> Come let's away to prison:
> We two alone will sing like birds i' th' cage;
> When thou dost ask me blessing, I'll kneel down
> And ask of thee forgiveness. So we'll live,
> And pray, and sing, and tell old tales, and laugh
> At gilded butterflies (5.3.8–13)

Even though the play is a tragedy and will end in Lear and Cordelia's deaths, this moment of quasi-confession and absolution anticipates the endings of the Romances (*WT, Tempest, Cymbeline*). It also anticipates them structurally, as all will follow the same pattern of sin and the resultant destruction of family, a penitential journey, self-knowledge, confession, forgiveness, restoration of the lost kin, and absolution. This structure shows a new, syncretistic penitential model in which Catholic and Reformed penitential practices are blended to produce a successful outcome of self-knowledge and grace.

The second and final QSP in *King Lear* occurs in 5.3.163-256. In this quasi-confession Edmund, moved by Edgar's account of his and Gloucester's suffering, and the belief that Goneril and Regan loved him, performs a quasi-confession as a willing penitent to Edgar. Edgar plays the role of an effective confessor, and absolves and reconciles with his brother.

Edmund's quasi-confession takes place once he has received mortal wounds from his brother. Edmund analogically fulfills the requirement for confession saying, in response to Edgar's accusations, "What you have charg'd me with, that have I done, / And more, much more, the time will bring it out" (163-4). Edgar, who plays the priestly analogue in having caused his brother to confess, absolves him from his sin and performs restoration:

> …Let's exchange charity.
> I am no less in blood than thou art, Edmund;
> If more, the more th' hast wrong'd me. (5.3.167-9)

In an echo of Cordelia's forgiveness of Lear in which she kneels and asks for "benediction" (4.7.57), Edgar humbles himself and confesses to Edmund, creating a radical moral equality.

Edmund has analogically performed confession and received absolution, with the mortal wounds he has received from Edgar satisfying the requirement for penance. Edmund's contrition, however, is performed gradually. On hearing Edgar's harrowing story of their father's torture and his "bleeding rings" (190), he says, "This speech of yours hath mov'd me, / And shall perchance do good" (200-201). The final push needed for Edmund's contrition comes from learning that Goneril and Regan have killed one another, supposedly for love of him. There is an irony in Edmund's mistaken belief — "Yet Edmund was belov'd!" (5.3.240) — as Goneril and Regan appear to be incapable of loving anybody, and die out of lust, greed, and spite.[121] Edmund's false belief nonetheless motivates him to repent and do "some good" (244). This display of the power of received love alludes to the Christian belief in all people being loved by God. Even his interpretation of the sisters' deaths as having been out of love for him alludes to Christ's death out of love for the world (Jn 3:16). This awakens a yearning for goodness in Edmund that is hinted at elsewhere, the text suggesting that Edmund's Machiavellianism is a result of having been denied love by his father ("Look, sir, I bleed" 2.1.41).

Filled with grace in this moment, Edmund shows contrition and seeks to perform restitution through attempting to spare Lear and Cordelia from his death writ: "Some good I mean to do" (244). Unlike his Machiavellian precursor Iago, and in anticipation of *Cymbeline's* Jachimo, Edmund rejects his Machiavellian philosophy in trying to set things right. His resolution, "Some good I mean to do, / Despite of mine own nature" (244-5) also provides a grace-filled answer to Angelo's conclusion in *MM* that he is powerless to resist the urges of his sinful nature. Despite being a tragedy, and being written around the time of *Othello* and *Macbeth,* which show Shakespeare continuing to experiment with problematic, corrupted, or absent versions of the Sacrament of Penance, *King Lear* marks a new experimentation with QSPs. In this play successful QSPs occur as a vehicle for grace, reconciliation and redemption, and anticipate, thematically and structurally, the Romances. In these last plays, Shakespeare explores themes of reconciliation and redemption.

QSPs in *Cymbeline*

Cymbeline is a Romance play about sin, restoration, and redemption. Like *King Lear*, it is set in a pre-Christian world, but experiments with Christian hamartiological ideas. The play contains one offstage confession and two quasi-confessions, the latter continuing the pattern of successful secular imitations of the elements of the Sacrament of Penance performed within the 'priesthood of all believers'.

The first quasi-confession is an offstage admittance of wrongdoing in 5.5.31-61, in which the Queen confesses her sins on her deathbed, and they are reported to Cymbeline by Cornelius. In a fit of truth-telling, the evil Queen confesses her manipulation of the king and her murderous designs against his and Imogen's lives. The word "repented" is used ironically, however, as she "repented / The evils she hatch'd were not effected; so / Despairing died" (59–61).

[121] For an alternative, feminist reading of Goneril and Regan, see Lesley Kordecki and Karla Koskinen's *Re-Visioning Lear's Daughters: Testing Feminist Criticism and Theory* (2010).

The next confession is performed by Jachimo in 5.5.139-208, and 411-19. In this quasi-confession Jachimo plays the willing penitent, and Cymbeline, Posthumus, and the court are his effective confessors. While his confession is littered with pagan imagery—references to "Dian" (180) and "Phoebus' wheel" (190)—it fulfills the requirements of the Sacrament of Penance. Jachimo confesses his sins (153-208) and expresses contrition: "O would / Our viands had been poison'd, or at least / Those which I heav'd to head!" (155-7). Jachimo expresses a desire for penance in submitting to Posthumus' threat to kill him, and restitution through returning Imogen's jewellery, symbolic of her reputation which he has also restored:

> But now my heavy conscience sinks my knee,
> As then your force did. Take that life, beseech you,
> Which I so often owe; but your ring first,
> And here the bracelet of the truest princess
> That ever swore her faith. (5.5.412–17)

He then receives absolution from Posthumus, whose unhesitating mercy finishes the line:

> Kneel not to me.
> The pow'r that I have on you is to spare you;
> The malice towards you, to forgive you. Live,
> And deal with others better. (5.5.417–20)

The third quasi-confession is Posthumus' in 5.5.209–227, in which he also functions as the willing penitent. Posthumus performs contrition: "My queen, my life, my wife! O Imogen, / Imogen, Imogen!" (226-7); confession: "I am Posthumus, / That kill'd thy daughter" (217-18); and a desire for penance: "O, give me cord, or knife, or poison, / Some upright justicer!" (213-14). He is absolved from his sins by Cymbeline, who imitates Posthumus' mercy to Jachimo as an effective confessor: "We'll learn our freeness of a son-in-law: / Pardon's the word to all" (421-22). While Posthumus' quasi-confession appears to be as successful as Jachimo's, there is a suggestion of insincerity in his hyperbole: "any thing / That's due to all the villains past, in being, / To come!" (211-13). His hyperbolic self-accusations also contain strangely redemptive language that undermine his repentance: "I / That all th' abhorred things o' th' earth amend / By being worse than they" (215-17); "every villain / Be call'd Posthumus Leonatus, and / Be villainy less than 'twas!" (223-5).

Despite these hints of insincerity in Posthumus' quasi-confession, his and Jachimo's QSPs represent a new stage of successful secular confessions which will characterize the Romances, becoming more complex in *The Winter's Tale*.

QSPs in *The Winter's Tale*

The plot of the *Winter's Tale* centres around repentance, as Leontes, in a paranoid fit of jealousy, apparently causes the deaths of his wife and two children. He practices penance for over sixteen years until his wife and daughter are miraculously found to be alive and restored to him in a celebration of reconciliation and forgiveness. There are two QSPs in this play. The first is Leontes' initial quasi-confession upon learning that his jealousy was unfounded, and that he has destroyed his family as a result (3.2.153-172). Paulina is significantly absent for

this quasi-confession, and while Leontes analogically satisfies the requirements of the Sacrament of Penance, he does not receive absolution. The second QSP is a rhetorical exercise performed by Paulina. Unlike the other rhetorical, manipulative QSPs we have seen, in which the process is corrupted, this one performs a salutary function. Surrounding these two explicit models of the QSP is an ongoing competition between Catholic and Reformed penitential models which, I will argue, culminate in a successful synchronisation which facilitates Leontes' redemption.

The penitential aspects of *The Winter's Tale* have been widely recognised and discussed.[122] Sarah Beckwith, for example, reads Leontes' penitence in this play as the process of radical recognition of Hermione and himself, mediated "through the very medium of religious theatre" (140). Beckwith argues that Leontes' awakening to the humanity of Hermione is symbolised by her miraculous transformation from lifeless statue to flesh:

> It is only by fully acknowledging the absolute lucidity of Leontes' remorse that we can credit the final resurrection of his hopes and loves… his remorse… has awakened him to the reality of Hermione. (141)

Similarly, she argues that Leontes grows in self-knowledge: "Leontes is transformed in his understanding of himself—sinful and redeemed from sin in one and the same moment" (142). David Beauregard argues that the play's "central action is structured along the lines of the three 'parts' of the Roman Catholic sacrament of penance, following the movements of contrition, confession, and satisfaction" (109). Conversely, Paul Stegner argues that the play enacts a contest between masculine and feminine forms of penance ("Masculine", 195). In my reading of the play I will argue that, contrary to Beauregard's and Stegner's readings, the play experiments with a successful synchronisation of Catholic and Reformed penitential theologies and practices as the final stage in Shakespeare's career-long experimentation with failed secular performances of penance.

Stegner argues that Paulina and the lords' (Camillo and Cleomines') differing approaches to sin and prescriptions for Leontes' penance are determined by gender. He claims that Paulina's counselling Leontes to "not repent these things, for they are heavier / Than all thy woes can stir: therefore betake thee / To nothing but despair" (3.2.208–10) is a reflection of women's religious scrupulosity, Paulina aligning herself with the "much derided figure of the unregulated woman" (Stegner, "Masculine" 195). Camillo and the other Sicilian lords, on the other hand, represent, according to Stegner, a more balanced, masculine approach.

Contrary to Stegner's reading, I will argue that instead of being distinguished on gendered lines, Camillo and Paulina's penitential approaches represent those of the Catholic and Reformed Churches respectively. Leontes unmistakeably refers to Camillo as an analogue of a Catholic confessor:

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[122] See, for example, Chapter 6 of Sarah Beckwith's *Shakespeare and the Grammar of Forgiveness*; Chapter 6 of David Beauregard's *Catholic Theology in Shakespeare's Plays*; Martha Oberle's "I Have Sinned: The Sacrament of Penance in *The Winter's Tale*"; Lara Smith's *Pardon My Great Profaneness: The Sacrament of Penance in Shakespeare's* The Winter's Tale; and Paul Stegner's "Masculine and Feminine Penitence in *The Winter's Tale*".

> I have trusted thee, Camillo,
> With all the nearest things to my heart, as well
> My chamber-councils, wherein, priest-like, thou
> Hast cleans'd my bosom: I from thee departed
> Thy penitent reform'd. (1.2.235–9)

Paulina also wields a spiritual authority over Leontes: "My true Paulina, / We shall not marry till thou bid'st us" (5.1.81-2). The key difference between the penitential models of Paulina and Camillo is the issue of atonement. Paulina says,

> A thousand knees
> Ten thousand years together, naked, fasting,
> Upon a barren mountain, and still winter
> In storm perpetual, could not move the gods
> To look that way thou wert. (3.2.210–214)

For Camillo, on the other hand, and later Cleomines, penance is a finite thing:

> Sir, you have done enough, and have perform'd
> A saint-like sorrow. No fault could you make
> Which you have not redeem'd; indeed paid down
> More penitence than done trespass. At the last,
> Do as the heavens have done, forget your evil;
> With them, forgive yourself. (5.1.1–6)

Cleomines cautions against scrupulosity and overburdening the penitent to the point of despair: "You tempt him over-much" (5.1.73). In this way he echoes the Catholic penitential tradition.[123] Paulina, on the other hand, invokes a Reformed approach in which performing penance is futile.

In 3.2 Paulina tells Leontes that "This news is mortal to the queen: look down / And see what death is doing" (3.2.148–9). The queen is not dead, however, only unconscious, and can be revived. Paulina cannot, will not, or pretends not to see the difference. In an analogical sense, Hermione's death is a symbolic representation of Leontes' spiritual death caused by his sin. For, as scripture says, "the wages of sin is death" (Rom 6:23). The play reinforces this through Hermione's miraculous resurrection upon the fulfillment of Leontes' penance. Paulina's approach to Hermione's body as representative of Leontes' soul is therefore

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[123] See, for example, William Bonde's *Directory of Conscience* (1527), which warns against the dangers of scrupulosity. Bonde warns that a scrupulous mind unchecked may develop an unhealthy paranoia about sin to the point where it may "[percieve] that same synne that is but venyall, to be grevous and mortall" (7). Cleomines' injunction, "Do as the heavens have done, forget your evil", also evokes the Catholic belief that God chooses to 'forget' sins once they have been confessed:

> Now, when a priest learns of a sin in confession, "even if he knows [the sin] as an individual, he nevertheless knows it in the forum and tribunal of God, which God wanted to be so secret that the sins confessed there were certainly considered as forgotten, as if they never happened." Therefore, "when a priest, as God, says 'I absolve you,' he promises to consider the sins as if he never heard them; thus in the external forum the priest can say that he never knew of them. (Cf. Soto lxxix, translated in Tutino, 122).

representative of the Reformed view of sin, which rejects the distinction between mortal and venial sins as those which kill the soul and those which merely harm it, respectively. In Reformed theology all sins are mortal, and any action on our part towards our own salvation is futile, as help must come solely from God.

Leontes initially takes a Catholic approach: "Her heart is but o'ercharg'd: she will recover" (3.2.150), and promotes human action to assist Hermione: "Beseech you, tenderly apply to her / Some remedies for life" (3.2.152–3). Paulina, however, rejects this possibility: "I say she's dead: I'll swear't" (3.2.203).

Immediately after calling for "remedies for life", Leontes begins to analogically perform the three requirements of the Sacrament of Penance, signalling the first QSP of the play. Leontes' sorrow for having offended Apollo fulfils the requirement for contrition: "Apollo, pardon / My great profaneness 'gainst thine Oracle!" (3.2.153–4). Next, Leontes determines to perform satisfaction through restitution: "I'll reconcile[124] me to Polixenes, / New woo my queen, recall the good Camillo" (3.2.155–6). Leontes then proceeds to confess his sins:

> For being transported by my jealousies
> To bloody thoughts, and to revenge, I chose
> Camillo for the minister to poison
> My friend Polixenes (3.2.158-61)

Leontes' confession ends with a piercing vision of the state of his soul, filled with humility and self-awareness, if tinged with envy: "how he glisters / Thorough my rust! and how his piety / Does my deeds make the blacker!" (3.2.170– 2).

Significantly, Paulina is absent for this QSP, exiting and returning immediately before and after. At this point in a Catholic confession the confessor would offer the penitent consolation, encouragement and advice, prescribe a penance, and, finally, give absolution. Paulina, however, bursts back onto the scene and calls Leontes a tyrant (175). She belittles him, saying his jealousies were "Fancies too weak for boys, too green and idle / For girls of nine" (181–2), and reiterates his sins in language calculated to torment: "damnable ingrateful" (187); "monstrous" (190); "though a devil / Would have shed water out of fire, ere done't" (192–3); "O think what they have done, / And then run mad indeed: stark mad!" (182–3). She waits until her torments have reached a crescendo before revealing (or, more accurately, claiming) that Leontes' wife is truly dead. Paulina presumably knows at this point that Hermione is not dead. Having not witnessed his quasi-confession immediately prior, she may therefore be understood as putting on a spectacular performance in order to evoke repentance, shame and guilt within the king, and bring him to a kind of salutary despair (echoing Latimer's approach discussed by Greenblatt in *Shakespearean Negotiations*, 129-38).

Paulina culminates in counselling Leontes to despair: "Do not repent these things, for they are heavier / Than all thy woes can stir: therefore betake thee / To nothing but despair..."

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[124] The word 'reconciliation' is recorded by the *OED* as being first used to name the Sacrament of Penance as early as 1624 ("reconciliation" n., 1d), 13 years after the first performance of *The Winter's Tale*; however, since words almost always appear orally before they appear in writing, it is possible that this meaning was in usage at the time.

(3.2.208–10). Paulina may be seen here as performing a Lutheran penitential model, in which no assurance of forgiveness is offered, and the sinner comes closest to God's grace when nearest despair. As Luther says in his treatise refuting the freedom of the will,

> God has certainly promised his grace to the humbled: that is, to the weeping and despairing. But a man cannot be thoroughly humbled until he comes to know that his salvation is utterly beyond his own power, advice, zeal, will, and works, and absolutely depending on the will, direction, pleasure and work of another, that is, of God only… Who truly does not hesitate to depend wholly upon the will of God, that man totally **despairs in himself**, chooses nothing for himself, but waits for God to work in him; such a man is nearest to grace, that he may be saved [*emphasis mine*].[125]

Having been challenged by a lord regarding the "boldness" (218) of her speech, Paulina then changes tack and invokes a Catholic penitential model as a rhetorical challenge to those around her. In lines 132-243 Paulina plays the penitent in order to bring Leontes to a state of salutary despair. Beckwith does not comment on this quasi-confession, and Beauregard dismisses it as "adding to the atmosphere of contrition" (114). Paulina's quasi-confession is worthy of attention, however, as it represents a redeemed version of the traditional QSP: in this instance Paulina manipulates her quasi-confessor, Leontes, not for corrupt purposes, but in order to save him. Through her hyperbolic and sardonic use of *occupatio* in lines 218–232, Paulina, who has been scolded by a Lord for the "boldness of [her] speech" (218) in calling Leontes "tyrant" (207) and telling him to "despair" (210), now says "I do repent" (220). In doing so she rhetorically fulfils the requirement for contrition. She then confesses the 'sin' of having "show'd too much / The rashness of a woman" (221) due to "[t]he love I bore your queen" (228). Finally, she fulfills the need for penance in saying "[l]et me be punish'd" (225), and promises not to sin again: ("I'll speak of her no more", etc. 229-32). Her manipulation is powerful and successful in showing, of course, the sinfulness of the confessor, the innocence of the penitent, and the injustice of the lord who accused her of "[making] fault / I' th' boldness of [her] speech" (217–18).

Leontes' response to Paulina shows a blending of Reformed and Catholic penitential theologies. Leontes submits himself to Paulina's Reformed program for salutary despair: "Come, and lead me / To these sorrows" (242-3). However, he also makes a resolution to perform Catholic penance:

> Once a day I'll visit
> The chapel where they lie, and tears shed there
> Shall be my recreation. So long as nature

[125] "*Deus certe promisit humiliatis, id est, deploratis et desperatis, gratiam suam. Humiliari vero penitus not potest homo, donec sciat, prorsus extra suos vires, consilia, studia, voluntatem, opera, omnino ex alterius arbitrio, consilio, voluntate, opere suam pendere salutem, nempe Dei solius Qui vero nihil dubitat, totum in voluntate Dei pendere, is prorsus* ***de se desperat****, nihil elegit, sed expectat operantem Deum, is proximus est gratiae, ut saluus fiat*." from *De Servo Arbitrio* (3:123-4).

> Will bear up with this exercise, so long
> I daily vow to use it. (3.2.238–42)

In one sense Leontes is simply saying that he intends to wallow in "shame perpetual" (3.2.238) for the rest of his life. In another, however, his language is charged with the concept of redemption. 'Recreation' can mean merely a pastime, but it is always used in the sense of an enjoyable pursuit (*OED*), which does not fit in this context. It can also mean nourishment and consolation (*OED* n. 2a, 2b), which may be a reference to Psalm 42:3: "My teares haue bin my meate day and night", and which is in direct opposition to Paulina's counsel to despair. More strikingly, when read as 're-creation' it has strong theological connotations. Leontes sees this lengthy form of penance as salvific: his tears are both a form of baptism which will re-create him in the image of God by washing away the stain of his sin, and an outward sign of penitence which, coupled with his previous fulfilment of the other elements of the Sacrament of Penance, will 'wash him white as snow'. The use of the word 'exercise' also conjures images of Catholic spiritual exercises, such as those of Ignatius Loyola. His language therefore syncretises Catholic and Reformed penitential theology regarding penance and despair.

Act 5 Scene 1 contains a showdown between Cleomines and Paulina regarding whether Leontes, after 16 years, should move on from his penitential grief and remarry. Cleomines represents the Catholic view, which holds that once a sin is absolved through confession, and penance and restitution are performed, it is to be forgotten and the penitent encouraged to move on and think of it no more. Paulina, however, refuses to allow Leontes to move on and find peace. She imagines herself as a ghost embodying (so to speak) his guilt, which will haunt him for the rest of his life, rejecting Catholic theological notions of the certainty of forgiveness obtained in the Sacrament of Penance:

> Were I the ghost that walk'd, I'ld bid you mark
> Her eye, and tell me for what dull part in't
> You chose her; then I'd shriek, that even your ears
> Should rift to hear me, and the words that follow'd
> Should be "Remember mine." (5.1.63–7)

This reinforces the dichotomy in which Camillo and Cleomines represent the Catholic penitential model and Paulina the Reformed. Leontes' position continues as one of syncretism, as he submits himself to Paulina's Lutheran counsel to despair of any remedy of his own making, and yet makes daily visits to the church in a performance of Catholic traditions of penance and atonement.

A closer examination of Paulina's language and behaviour, however, suggests that her theology may also be somewhat syncretistic. Paulina uses the Catholic penitential language of intercessory prayer and fasting to initially quantify Leontes' sin (3.2.210–14). She claims that fasting is useless, and yet prescribes to Leontes a sixteen-year abstinence from marriage (and therefore marital relations) which, although necessary for her resurrection-scheme, is nonetheless a kind penance. In addition to this, while she promotes the Reformed idea that Leontes' grief should have no finite end, and that no human effort can redeem him, she nonetheless has an end-date to his period of penance in mind, and performs a 'miracle' in

supposedly restoring Hermione to life, the Catholic nature of which is fairly explicit.[126] Even the derivation of her name from St Paul, which initially suggests an association with Protestantism, as St Paul's authority was appealed to by Reformers as grounds for the principle of justification by faith alone in his Letter to the Romans, suggests a kind of syncretism, as St Paul, unlike, say, Luther or Calvin, was also a father of the Catholic Church.

This syncretism in Paulina's penitential theology and Leontes' penitential practice suggests a final stage in Shakespeare's experimentation with QSPs, culminating in *The Tempest*, his last monographic play. In this stage they are represented as successful desacramentalisations of the Sacrament of Penance in which self-awareness and redemption are achieved.

QSPs in *The Tempest*

Successful, redemptive, secular confession is found again in Shakespeare's final play, *The Tempest*. Penitential elements of this play have, of course, been observed in critical discourse. Herbert Coursen writes, for example, of Prospero's "attempts to put Alonso and the others through a penitential experience, to evoke in each a 'heart's sorrow' leading toward redemption" (316). Similarly, Sarah Beckwith observes that "[t]he languages of penance emerge most clearly in the play, first, through the exploration of the project of restitution, and second, through a eucharistic language of feast and participation." (148).[127]

The Tempest explores the role of art in moral awakening:

> I cannot too much muse
> Such shapes, such gesture, and such sound, expressing
> (Although they want the use of tongue) a kind
> Of excellent dumb discourse. (3.3.36–39)

Prospero orchestrates an analogous 'play within a play': he coordinates a micro-tragedy for Alonso, using the theatre as a means to bring him to repentance. As Robert Reid notes, "Prospero explicitly creates and controls each spectacle" (494).[128] This micro-tragedy contains analogical sacraments. The titular tempest at the start of the play performs a symbolic, communal baptism[129]; the magic banquet in 3.3 represents (among other possibilities) the eucharist, from which the sinners are excluded; and Alonso's repentance forms a successful QSP.

Alonso demonstrates contrition through his response to Prospero's allegation that he has "lost [his] daughter" (5.1.148):

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[126] This is signalled by Catholic references to statues in churches, and to Transubstantiation: "If this [transformation inside a chapel of a lifeless object — statue/bread — into living, human flesh and blood] be magic [which is what Catholics were accused of], let it be an art / Lawful as eating" (5.3.110-111).
[127] For more on confession and penance in *The Tempest* see Simon Palfrey's *Doing Shakespeare* (2011); McCoy's *Faith in Shakespeare* (2013); and Kathryn Swanton's *More Human than Divine: The Communality of Forgiveness in Shakespeare's Later Plays and Golden Age Comedies*, (2015).
[128] See also Tonning, Judith E. "'Like This Insubstantial Pageant, Faded': Eschatology and Theatricality in The Tempest." *Literature & Theology*, vol. 18, no. 4, 2004, pp. 371–382.
[129] This has been noted by Reid, p. 498. John Norton also discusses Prospero's tears as a form of baptism in pp. 397-8 of "Prospero Humiliated: Protestant Theology in The Tempest." *Shakespeare*, vol. 5, no. 4, 2009, pp. 394–406.

A daughter?
O heavens, that they were living both in Naples,
The King and Queen there! That they were, I wish
Myself were mudded in that oozy bed
Where my son lies. (5.1.148-52)

He makes immediate restitution and confession ("Thy dukedom I resign, and do entreat / Thou pardon me my wrongs" 5.1.118-19). Penance is analogically fulfilled through his believing his son to be dead: "I have lost / (How sharp the point of this remembrance is!) / My dear son Ferdinand" (5.1.137-9). Finally, he receives absolution from Prospero: "I embrace thy body; / And to thee and thy company I bid / A hearty welcome." (5.1.109–111). This penitential journey is signalled by penitential language:

Ariel. Thee of thy son, Alonso,
They have bereft; and do pronounce by me
Ling'ring perdition (worse than any death
Can be at once) shall step, by step attend
You, and your wayes, whose wraths to guard you from,
Which here, in this most desolate Isle, else falls
Upon your heads — is nothing but heart's sorrow,[**contrition**]
And a clear life ensuing [**amendment**]. (3.3.75–82)

Prospero. Though with their high wrongs I am strook to th' quick,
Yet, with my nobler reason, 'gainst my fury
Do I take part. The rarer action is
In virtue than in vengeance. They being **penitent,**
The sole drift of my purpose doth extend
Not a frown further. [*emphasis mine*]. (5.1.25–30)

Alonso does not engage in self-deception or manipulation in his imitation of these practices. And, while Prospero, the quasi-confessor, manipulates him, the quasi-penitent, throughout, this manipulation has, like Paulina's manipulation of Leontes, a salutary end.

Prospero himself also undergoes a redemptive arc. It is initially unclear whether Prospero intends to release Alonso, Antonio and Gonzalo at all. He must be prompted to mercy, and indeed humanity, by an inhuman being ("your affections / Would become tender … Mine would, sir, were I human" (5.1.18–20). Upon finally choosing forgiveness, his mercy towards his Antonio has a grudging quality to it:

For you, most wicked sir, whom to call brother
Would even infect my mouth, I do forgive
Thy rankest fault, — all of them (5.1.130–32)

Prospero also fails to acknowledge his own poor leadership and neglect of his responsibilities, which paved the way for the usurpation, and potentially even partially necessitated it:

I, thus neglecting worldly ends, all dedicated
To closeness and the bettering of my mind

With that which, but by being so retir'd,
O'er-priz'd all popular rate (1.2.89–92)

Despite this neglect, he describes himself as being, ironically, "[l]ike a good parent" (94) in assigning his power to his brother. The comparison reveals a subconscious awareness of his fault, which he rationalises through placing all of the blame on his "false brother['s] / … evil nature" (92–3). In another irony, he claims that his brother "Made such a sinner of his memory / To credit his own lie — he did believe / He was indeed the Duke" (101–103). He, however, is also 'making a sinner' of his own memory in exculpating himself from his downfall, and his failure to protect his kingdom and child.

While Prospero does not explicitly confess his failure as a ruler, he does perform a restitutive gesture in resolving to "drown [his] book" (5.1.57), his books being what he neglected his rulership for. This image also suggests a redemptive reimagining of the damned Faustus' futile promise as the devils carry him off to hell: "I'll burn my books" (Marlowe, *Faustus* 5.2.190).

While elements of the reconciliation in *The Tempest* remain problematic, it nonetheless offers a syncretistic vision of redemption, combining Catholic and Reformed penitential approaches through a successful, secularised imitation of the structures of the Sacrament of Penance. *King Lear, Cymbeline, The Winter's Tale* and *The Tempest* mark, as has been said, the final stage of Shakespeare's experimentation with QSPs. In these plays a hopeful model of Christian penitential practice is envisioned in which Catholic and Reformed structures and theology are combined to produce a successful, laicised imitation of the Sacrament of Penance performed by the 'priesthood of all believers'.

Chapter 7
Conclusion

This thesis has explored the extent and complexity of Shakespeare's experimentation with the elements of the Sacrament of Penance and its Reformed revisions as a dramaturgical device. It has argued that Shakespeare engaged with these structures in a much greater and more comprehensive way than has been previously observed. It has shown that Shakespeare developed the device of the Quasi-Sacrament of Penance as a way of representing psychological complexity in his characters, and that his experimentation with this device can be traced in stages throughout his career.

There are useful ways in which the data collected in this thesis can be analysed, and the QSP hermeneutic used as a unique platform for comparison between characters and plays. Table 1 of the Appendix shows a collation of the QSPs identified. They are categorised by type of QSP (quasi-confession, quasi-examination of conscience, or rejection of confession and/or introspection); type of penitent (willing, unwilling, or corrupt); and type of confessor (corrupt, unwilling, seducible, incompetent, or effective). While not all QSPs can be categorised in this way, such as those in *Macbeth*, this tabulation offers opportunities for meaningful comparisons between characters and their interactions within and across plays using comparison points that have in many cases not been used before. Below are outlined several conclusions that can be drawn from a synchronic analysis of QSPs in Table 1.

Firstly, corrupt penitents seek out characters who could insightfully criticise them (i.e. who are represented as being perceptive and knowing the corrupt penitent well) but do not have the secular power to do it. This is the case in quasi-confessions with a corrupt penitent and an unwilling confessor, as is shown in Table 2 (see Appendix). Bullingbrook (now Henry IV in the scene in question), Hamlet, Duke Vincentio all rely on their status as rulers to keep their respective quasi-confessors from using their temporary role as quasi-confessor to actually criticise them while they play the penitent. Each of these quasi-confessors has enough insight into the corrupt penitent to do so: Exton foolishly *does* point out Bullingbrook's sin in asking for Richard II to be killed; Ophelia, Gertrude, and Laertes all know Hamlet well enough to morally critique him, and Ophelia gently attempts to: "My honor'd lord, you know right well you did" 3.1.96. Friar Thomas similarly attempts a gentle reprimand of the Duke ("It rested in your Grace / To unloose this tied-up justice when you pleas'd" 1.3.31-2), but is silenced by the Duke's linguistic dominance, underpinned by his secular power ("I do fear– Too dreadful" 1.3.34). This represents each of these corrupt penitents as being subconsciously aware of the immoral nature of the behaviour which is being discussed in the QSP, but using their power or status in the discussion to justify it. The exception to this rule is Paulina. The Late Plays experiment with penitential structures in a different way to the tragedies, histories, and problem comedies, as has been discussed. In this QSP Paulina is Leontes' social inferior, and she manipulates him using penitential language and structures for a salutary purpose. It is also important to clarify that Paulina's classification as 'corrupt' refers to her corruption of the penitential process and manipulation of Leontes for salutary purposes rather than from moral corruption.

Secondly, an unwilling confessor or penitent is almost always socially or politically inferior to the person who is initiating and manipulating the QSP (i.e. the corrupt confessor or the corrupt penitent). Table 3 shows the QSPs with a social disparity between the confessor and the penitent. Again, the exception is Leontes and Paulina, for whom the purpose of the QSP is arguably not corrupt. This shows that across the plays a fundamental requirement for successful or effective penitential engagement is the ability to speak freely. Self-awareness, reconciliation, and redemption cannot occur when one party cannot speak freely and openly to or in front of the other. This potential for the corruption of the process through social disparity was anticipated in Catholic penitential structures: a person is protected from becoming an unwilling penitent because the Sacrament of Penance must be initiated by the penitent themselves. A priest is protected, in turn, from becoming an unwilling confessor through the separation of secular and Church powers: the priest has clear authority within the sacrament, and secular authority, such as kingship, is irrelevant. Shakespeare's plays suggest that in order for the desacramentalisation of confession and penance to work, it must take place only where linguistic equality and freedom exists. This is exemplified by the next observation:

Thirdly, a willing penitent paired with an effective confessor will achieve some level of self-knowledge, humility, and true repentance. Table 4 shows instances in which a QSP is performed by a willing penitent and an effective confessor. In each of these examples the characters listen to one another and are able to speak openly and without restraint. A further observation is that these characters are not necessarily social equals (take Clarence and the Keeper, for example, although the balance of power while Clarence is imprisoned is on the Keeper's side). Each of these quasi-confessions is initiated with the goal of self-awareness and reconciliation, and as nobody is attempting manipulation or self-justification, secular (social and political) power structures seem to be irrelevant. For a secular confession to work, therefore, the plays seem to suggest that the confessor must have a moral authority over the penitent. There is a sharp distinction in these scenarios between socio-political authority and moral authority. In addition to this, they must have the ability to speak freely, or else their moral authority will be overridden by a corrupt penitent's socio-political authority (as in the case of Hamlet and Ophelia). A willing penitent is precisely somebody who freely chooses to submit themselves to the moral authority of another.

Fourthly, when a character has or is offered an opportunity for moral self-examination or confession and they refuse it, the refusal is meaningful. Table 5 shows rejections of confession and/or moral self-examination in situations in which it is offered or would be expected by a Christian audience (such as prior to death). In each of these QSPs the opportunity for confession or for moral self-examination in terms of Catholic or Reformed penitential theology is presented (implicitly or explicitly), and the expectation created through penitential language. The characters' failure to perform successful confession or moral self-examination is used by Shakespeare as dramatic 'negative space' to depict self-deception, corruption and/or despair. This is brought to a climax in *Macbeth* (which defies the categorisations that have emerged from the other plays and so has not been tabulated), where the refusal or absence of opportunities for penance and redemption underpin the play.

A diachronic analysis of QSPs also yields important insights regarding Shakespeare's development of the dramatic device, and for this reason the thesis has analysed QSPs in plays

largely in the order in which those plays they were written. Table 6 shows the chronological development of the QSP device across Shakespeare's career, divided into four stages. This table traces the origin of Shakespeare's experimentation with moral self-deception, introspection and manipulation using the elements of the Sacrament of Penance, which is found in the early history plays, written in the 1590s: *Richard III, Richard II, 2 Henry IV* and *Henry V*. The QSP device, in which characters perform, wittingly or unwittingly, a secular imitation of one or more of the elements of the Sacrament of Penance producing attempted, failed, or achieved moral introspection, or to deceive themselves and manipulate others, is then refined in *Hamlet* and *Measure for Measure* at the turn of the seventeenth century. This can be identified as the high point of Shakespeare's engagement with QSPs in which introspection, confession and penance permeate the plays. QSPs in these plays are easy to categorise and compare. They yield fruitful patterns such as the power imbalance and manipulation seen consistently in the combination of the corrupt penitent and the unwilling confessor.

In 1604-06 Shakespeare's experimentation with the device continues in *Othello*, *King Lear*, and *Macbeth*. Othello's self-justifying quasi-confession of his uxoricide echoes the pattern of other corrupt penitents such as Henry IV and Hamlet. In *King Lear* Shakespeare begins to experiment with secular imitations of Catholic penitential structures as vehicles of redemption and grace rather than manipulation and self-deception. This experimentation functions as a prototype for QSPs in the Late Plays. In *Macbeth*, however, another new form of experimentation occurs through the radical deconstruction of Christian penitential structures, and the result is a play underpinned by 'aborted confessions' and a blockage against repentance.

Finally, in the Late Plays, *Cymbeline, Winter's Tale,* and *The Tempest* (1609-1611), we see Shakespeare expand upon the pattern laid out in *King Lear* and create a syncretistic framework in which Catholic and Reformed penitential elements are combined to produce secular imitations of the Sacrament of Penance which yield forgiveness, reconciliation, self-awareness, repentance and redemption. While most of Shakespeare's engagement with QSPs exploits the problematic nature of secular confession, using it to create psychological complexity through self-deception, his experimentation with successful secular confessions in *King Lear* and the Late Plays represents reconciliation, redemption and self-knowledge as achievable through non-sacramental confession providing certain conditions are met (as outlined above).

An analysis of QSPs according to genre also reveals interesting patterns. A glance at Table 1 will show that QSPs seem to occur regardless of genre, as they are found in tragedies, comedies, histories and the romances. However, thinking about tragedies in terms of their settings as being pre-Christian or not, and comedies in terms of their content (problem comedy or not) shows that there are some subgenres, or settings, in which Shakespeare did not represent complex moral introspection and Catholic penitential structures. Table 7 shows Shakespeare's plays by genre, with the genre of tragedy divided into classical and non-classical (including the ahistorical world of *King Lear*) and problem comedies distinguished from 'pure' comedies. The plays that have been excluded from this table are those in which Shakespeare does not have sole authorship, namely *Edward III*, *Henry VI* Parts 1, 2 and 3, *Henry VIII*, *Thomas More*, *Arden of Faversham*, *Titus Andronicus* (George Peele wrote Act 1

and 4.1), *Two Noble Kinsmen* (a collaboration with Fletcher), and *Pericles*.[130] Significantly, QSPs do not appear in these plays anyway. The appearance of the QSP device exclusively in plays with sole authorship suggests that this device was Shakespeare's invention.

Analysis of Table 7 suggests that Shakespeare may have chosen to avoid representing Christian penitential practices in pre-Christian settings, and in pure comedies. The only play set in a pre-Christian world that contains a meaningful engagement with the structures of Catholic confession is *King Lear*. Even then, *Lear* is not strictly set in pre-Christian history, but in a pseudo-fantasy world outside of time (the Fool, in a metatheatrical moment, ascribes his prophecies to Merlin, "for I live before his time"). This shows that time, space and genre are not important here, as opposed to other pre-Christian plays that are set at crisis points in ancient history, such as *Coriolanus*. This suggests that while Shakespeare is careless about minor anachronism in the technical sense (such as the clock in *Julius Caesar* or Cleopatra's desire to play billiards), he is not when it comes to ideological and psychological verisimilitude: his pre-Christian characters are, for the most part, properly pre-Christian.

Potential for broader application of the QSP hermeneutic

There is potential for the application of the QSP hermeneutic beyond Shakespeare's works. The plays of Thomas Middleton (1580-1627) and John Webster (c.1580-1632) produce characters who in engage in self-deception and show subconscious cognition in a similar way to Shakespeare's. Consider, for example, Beatrice's dropping her glove in front of the "loathed" De Flores in *The Changeling* (written in 1622), which, as Daalder observes, suggests "a sexual invitation that she extends unconsciously" ("Introduction", xxvi). Similarly, Vittoria claims in *The White Devil* (written in 1612) to have had a dream in which her husband and sister uproot a yew tree, suggesting a subconscious intuition of their adultery and plans to kill her, which she cannot make sense of at a conscious level (*WD* 1.2.229–55). In like manner the Duchess of Malfi's brother is represented as repressing his incestuous desires for her, which eventually drive him mad (*DM* 2.5.38–45; 5.2, *passim*).

An example of a character manifesting this psychological complexity through self-deception in a quasi-confession is Beatrice in Middleton's *The Changeling*. Alsemero confronts Beatrice with her sins:

> I'le all demolish and seek out truth within you
> If there be any left, let your sweet tongue,
> Prevent your hearts rifling; there Il'e ransack
> And tear out my suspition. (5.3.36-39)

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[130] Gary Taylor argues that Middleton contributed some parts of *Macbeth*, (see Taylor, 2014) but none of these parts contain QSPs. Taylor also argues that Middleton had a hand in *Measure for Measure*, (Taylor, 2007, p. 2001) but this is an ambitious and not widely supported claim.

Beatrice initially denies his accusations: "Shew me the ground whereon you lost your love. / My spotlesse vertue may but tread on that / Before I perish" (5.3.41-3). She then maintains her innocence regarding the adultery she committed, while admitting to murder:

> To your bed's scandal I stand up innocence,
> Which even the guilt of one black other deed,
> Will stand for proof of, your love has made me
> A cruell murdress (5.3.62-5)

Like that of many of Shakespeare's corrupt quasi-penitents, Beatrice's syntax casts blame for her sins on her victim, Alsemero ("your love has made me"). She continues:

> I have kist poyson for't, stroakt a serpent,
> That thing of hate, worthy in my esteem,
> Of no better imployment, and him most worthy
> To be so imployd; I caus'd to murder
> That innocent *Piracquo*, having no
> Better means then that worst, to assure
> Your self to me. (5.3.66-72)

Beatrice therefore confesses her sins to Alsemero with language that suggests a self-deceiving attempt to avoid responsibility for her behaviour, and to manipulate him, her quasi-confessor, into accepting at least some of the blame.

There is also potential for the application of this hermeneutic beyond early modern literature. Charlotte Brontë's novels, for example, experiment with Catholic penitential practices, as is exemplified by the Protestant Lucy Snowe visiting a Catholic confessional in *Villette*. A dialogue in *Jane Eyre* (1847) shows the analytical potential of the QSP hermeneutic. In one of their early conversations, the wealthy and mysterious Mr Rochester speaks to Jane, his new governess, about his sinful life. The power imbalance between them is clearly established, Rochester saying "I claim only such superiority as must result from twenty years' difference in age and a century's advance in experience" (184) in addition to Jane's reminder that she is his "paid subordinate" (186). Rochester manipulates Jane into the role of confessor ("I am forced to confess" 188), while attempting to control her language: "therefore speak" (184); "You have no right to preach to me" (189); "you are not my conscience-keeper" (190). Rochester, like Hamlet, confesses to vague, unspecified sins: "I am a trite, commonplace sinner" (188). Like Hamlet, he also presents himself as a victim: "I like to lay half the blame on ill-fortune and adverse circumstances" (187). He uses Catholic penitential language throughout, even saying in regards to his ward "I keep it and rear it on the Roman Catholic principle of expiating numerous sins, great or small, by one good work" (194). Jane tries to resist being manipulated as Rochester's quasi-confessor: "I have no wish to talk nonsense" (192), but is nonetheless drawn into playing the role: "Repentance is said to be its cure, sir" (189). Reading this and other dialogues in *Jane Eyre* through the QSP hermeneutical lens suggests new and exciting points of comparison between this novel and Shakespeare's plays.

This thesis offers a new hermeneutic in the field of Shakespeare studies, and fresh insights into Shakespeare's plays. It shows the previously unrecognised extent to which he draws on the medieval penitential tradition in his characterisation, and contributes new insights to the

discussion of intellectual influences on Shakespeare. It also suggests the viability of the Catholic penitential tradition as a source for the complex psychological model Shakespeare uses in his characters, given that it is predicated on an implicit understanding of the human mind as complex, self-deceiving, and having multiple layers, some of which are hidden from conscious awareness. This psychological model is built into the structures of the Sacrament of Penance. Elements such as the examination of conscience, the seal of confession, the separation of spiritual and secular authority within the confessional, and the requirement for auricular confession presuppose a mind which has multiple layers and is prone to self-deception.

This thesis also demonstrates the vital role that the Reformation played in Shakespeare's development as a dramatist. It seems likely that the Church of England's criminalisation of the Sacrament of Penance and relegation of its structures to the secular realm — into the hands of the 'priesthood of all believers' — instructing them to 'confess to one another', presented Shakespeare with great psychological and dramatic potential. His initial experimentation with the secularisation of Catholic penitential structures shows a preoccupation with the potential for this still-developing practice to be abused. Again and again, Shakespeare's plays explore the ways in which the dismantling of the medieval penitential structures, developed over centuries and designed to combat self-deception and manipulation of others insofar as is possible, may leave holes for self-deceptive and manipulative behaviours to enter and flourish. In *King Lear* and the Late Plays, however, Shakespeare culminates in an exploration of the successful practice of desacramentalised confession through a syncretism of Catholic and Reformed penitential structures reliant on free will and grace.

The QSP hermeneutic offers an approach to studying Shakespeare that is organic to his socio-historic context, and would be comprehensible to an Elizabethan audience, for many of whom Catholic and Reformed penitential structures, theology, and debates were a matter of great significance. It offers a plausible solution to the problem first implicitly raised by Samuel Johnson of the origins of Shakespeare's innovative representation of interiority and self-deception. Finally, this hermeneutical approach has the potential for extension beyond Shakespeare studies. It offers a methodology for analysing a fictional text's engagement with Christian penitential structures and psychological complexity, or "that within which passeth show".

Appendix

Table 1:
Categorizable QSPs in Shakespeare's Plays

Reference	Description	QSP Type	Penitent	Confessor
***Richard III* (1.4.1–75)**	Clarence to Keeper	Quasi-Confession	Willing	Effective
***Richard III* (5.3.109–207)**	Solil. Richard	Quasi-Examination-of-Conscience	Corrupt	
***Richard II* (3.3.147–59)**	Solil. Richard	Rejection of Introspection & Confession	Corrupt	-
***Richard II* (4.1.220–318)**	Richard to Bullingbrook, Northumberland, & Public	Quasi-Confession	Unwilling, Corrupt	Corrupt
***Richard II* (5.5)**	Solil. Richard	Rejection of Introspection & Confession	Corrupt	-
***Richard II* (5.6.30–52)**	Bullingbrook to Exton & Lords	Quasi-Confession	Corrupt	Unwilling, Incompetent
***2 Henry IV* (4.5.183–240)**	Henry IV to Prince Hal	Quasi-Confession	Corrupt	Willing, Seducible
***Henry V* (4.1.289–305)**	Solil. Prince Hal	Quasi-Confession	Corrupt	[God]
***Hamlet* (2.2.550–605)**	Solil. Hamlet	Quasi-Examination-of-Conscience	Corrupt	–
***Hamlet* (3.1.88-149)**	Hamlet to Ophelia	Quasi-Confession	Corrupt	Unwilling

***Hamlet* (3.3.36-72)**	Solil. Claudius	Quasi-Examination-of-Conscience	Willing→ Corrupt	-
***Hamlet* (3.4.8-217)**	Gertrude to Hamlet	Quasi-Confession	Unwilling	Corrupt
***Hamlet* (3.4.171–9)**	Hamlet to Gertrude	Quasi-Confession	Corrupt	Unwilling
***Hamlet* (4.4.32–66)**	Solil. Hamlet	Quasi-Examination-of -Conscience	Corrupt	-
***Hamlet* (5.2.1–70)**	Hamlet to Horatio	Quasi-Confession	Corrupt	Seducible
***Hamlet* (5.2.226–52)**	Hamlet to Laertes	Quasi-Confession	Corrupt	Unwilling
***Hamlet* (5.2.313–331)**	Laertes to Hamlet	Quasi-Confession	Willing	Effective
***Hamlet* (5.2.332–58)**	Hamlet's death	Rejection of Confession/ Introspection	Corrupt	-
***Measure for Measure* (1.3)**	Duke to Friar Thomas	Quasi-Confession	Corrupt	Unwilling
***Measure for Measure* (2.2.161–186)**	Solil. Angelo	Quasi-Examination -of-Conscience	Willing → Corrupt	-
***Measure for Measure* (2.3)**	Juliet to Duke	Quasi-Confession	Unwilling	Corrupt
***Measure for Measure* (2.4.1–17)**	Solil. Angelo	Quasi-Examination -of-Conscience	Corrupt	-

***Measure for Measure* (2.4.30–170)**	Isabella to Angelo	Quasi-Confession	Corrupt	Corrupt
***Measure for Measure* (3.2.261–282)**	Solil. Duke	Quasi-Examination of Conscience	Corrupt	-
***Measure for Measure* (5.1.366–374, 474–7)**	Angelo to Duke	Quasi-Confession	Corrupt	Incompetent
***Measure for Measure* (5.1.527)**	Duke to Public	Quasi-Confession	Corrupt	Unwilling, Incompetent
***Othello* (5.2.25–125)**	Desdemona to Othello	Quasi-Confession	Unwilling	Corrupt
***Othello* (5.2.338–356)**	Othello to Venetians	Quasi-Confession	Corrupt	Seducible / Unwilling
***King Lear* (4.7.44–84)**	Lear to Cordelia	Quasi-Confession	Willing	Effective
***King Lear* (5.3.163–256)**	Edmund to Edgar	Quasi-Confession	Willing	Effective
***Cymbeline* (5.5.139-208, 411–19)**	Jachimo to Posthumus, Cymbeline, and the Court	Quasi-Confession	Willing	Effective
***Cymbeline* (5.5.209–227)**	Posthumus to Cymbeline and the Court	Quasi-Confession	Willing	Effective
***Winter's Tale* (3.2.153-172)**	Leontes to Lords	Quasi-Confession	Willing	[Ineffective due to inter-ruption]

***Winter's Tale* (3.2.132–243)**	Paulina to Leontes	Quasi-Confession	*Corrupt*	Unwilling
***The Tempest* (5.1.118-152)**	Alonso to Prospero	Quasi-Confession	Willing	Effective

Table 2:
Corrupt Penitent, Unwilling Confessor

Reference	Description	QSP Type	Penitent	Confessor
***Richard II* (5.6.30–52)**	Bullingbrook to Exton & Lords	Quasi-Confession	Corrupt	Unwilling, Incompetent
***Hamlet* (3.1.88–149)**	Hamlet to Ophelia	Quasi-Confession	Corrupt	Unwilling
***Hamlet* (3.4.8–217)**	Hamlet to Gertrude	Quasi-Confession	Corrupt	Unwilling
***Hamlet* (5.2.226–52)**	Hamlet to Laertes	Quasi-Confession	Corrupt	Unwilling
***Measure for Measure* (1.3)**	Duke to Friar Thomas	Quasi-Confession	Corrupt	Unwilling
***Measure for Measure* (5.1.527)**	Duke to Public	Quasi-Confession	Corrupt	Unwilling, Incompetent
***Winter's Tale* (3.2.132–243)**	Paulina to Leontes	Quasi-Confession	*Corrupt*	Unwilling

Table 3:
Social Disparity between Confessor and Penitent

Reference	Description	QSP Type	Penitent	Confessor
***Richard II* (4.1.220–318)**	Richard to Bullingbrook, Northumberland, & Public	Quasi-Confession	Unwilling, Corrupt	Corrupt

***Richard II* (5.6.30–52)**	Bullingbrook to Exton & Lords	Quasi-Confession	Corrupt	Unwilling, Incompetent
***Hamlet* (3.1.88–149)**	Hamlet to Ophelia	Quasi-Confession	Corrupt	Unwilling
***Hamlet* (3.4.8–217)**	Gertrude to Hamlet	Quasi-Confession	Unwilling	Corrupt
***Hamlet* (3.4.171–9)**	Hamlet to Gertrude	Quasi-Confession	Corrupt	Unwilling
***Hamlet* (5.2.226–52)**	Hamlet to Laertes	Quasi-Confession	Corrupt	Unwilling
***Measure for Measure* (1.3)**	Duke to Friar Thomas	Quasi-Confession	Corrupt	Unwilling
***Measure for Measure* (2.3)**	Juliet to Duke	Quasi-Confession	Unwilling	Corrupt
***Measure for Measure* (5.1.527)**	Duke to Public	Quasi-Confession	Corrupt	Unwilling, Incompetent
***Othello* (5.2.25–125)**	Desdemona to Othello	Quasi-Confession	Unwilling	Corrupt
***Othello* (5.2.338–356)**	Othello to Venetians	Quasi-Confession	Corrupt	Seducible / Unwilling
***Winter's Tale* (3.2.132–243)**	Paulina to Leontes	Quasi-Confession	*Corrupt*	Unwilling

Table 4:
Willing Penitent, Effective Confessor

Reference	Description	QSP Type	Penitent	Confessor
***Richard III* (1.4.1–75)**	Clarence to Keeper	Quasi-Confession	Willing	Effective
***Hamlet* (5.2.313–331)**	Laertes to Hamlet	Quasi-Confession	Willing	Effective

***King Lear* (4.7.44–84)**	Lear to Cordelia	Quasi-Confession	Willing	Effective
***King Lear* (5.3.163–256)**	Edmund to Edgar	Quasi-Confession	Willing	Effective
***Cymbeline* (5.5.139-208, 411–19)**	Jachimo to Posthumus, Cymbeline, and the Court	Quasi-Confession	Willing	Effective
***Cymbeline* (5.5.209–227)**	Posthumus to Cymbeline and the Court	Quasi-Confession	Willing	Effective
***The Tempest* (5.1.118-152)**	Alonso to Prospero	Quasi-Confession	Willing	Effective

Table 5:
Rejected Confession or Examination of Conscience

Reference	Description	QSP Type	Penitent	Confessor
***Richard III* (5.3.109–207)**	Solil. Richard	Quasi-Examination-of-Conscience	Corrupt	
***Richard II* (3.3.147–59)**	Solil. Richard	Rejection of Introspection & Confession	Corrupt	
***Richard II* (5.5)**	Solil. Richard	Rejection of Introspection & Confession	Corrupt	
***Hamlet* (2.2.550–605)**	Solil. Hamlet	Quasi-Examination-of-Conscience	Corrupt	
***Hamlet* (3.3.36–72)**	Solil. Claudius	Quasi-Examination-of-Conscience	Willing→ Corrupt	
***Hamlet* (4.4.32–66)**	Solil. Hamlet	Quasi-Examination-of -Conscience	Corrupt	
***Hamlet* (5.2.332–58)**	Hamlet's death	Rejection of Confession/ Introspection	Corrupt	

***Measure for Measure* (2.2.161–186)**	Solil. Angelo	Quasi-Examination -of-Conscience	Willing → Corrupt	
***Measure for Measure* (2.4.1–17)**	Solil. Angelo	Quasi-Examination -of-Conscience	Corrupt	
***Measure for Measure* (3.2.261–282)**	Solil. Duke	Quasi-Examination of Conscience	Corrupt	

Table 6:
Chronological Development of the QSP in Shakespeare's Plays

Early Emergence and Development (c.1592–1599)	**High Point (c.1599–1604)**	**Further Experimentation (c.1604–1606)**	**The Late Plays: Redemption (c.1609–1611)**
Richard III *Richard II* *2 Henry IV* *Henry V*	*Hamlet* *Measure for Measure*	*Othello* *King Lear* (anticipates Late Plays) *Macbeth* (experiment in failed/absent penance)	*Cymbeline* *Winter's Tale* *The Tempest*

Table 7:
Shakespeare's Plays by Genre (with Substantially Sole Authorship)

The plays in Red below contain at least one QSP.

Classical Tragedies	**Histories**	**Non-Classical Tragedies**	**'Pure' Comedies**	**Romances**	**Problem Comedies**

Julius *Antony* *Coriolanus* *Timon*	*Richard III* *King John* *Richard II* *1 Henry IV* *2 Henry IV* *Henry V*	*Romeo* *Hamlet* *Othello* *Lear* *Macbeth*	*Comedy Err* *Taming* *Two Gent* *LLL* *Midsummer* *Merchant* *Merry Wives* *Much Ado* *As You Like* *Twelfth*	*Cymbeline* *Winter's Tale* *Tempest*	*Troilus* *All's Well* *Measure*

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