“MARK THIS SHOW”: ON DRAMATIC ATTENTION IN CHRISTOPHER MARLOWE’S AND WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE’S TRAGEDIES

by

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Abstract

This dissertation will argue that the early modern theatre and the early modern church were both concerned with keeping the attention of their audiences, and that one of the ways that dramatic interest in Christopher Marlowe's and William Shakespeare's plays was generated was by staging acts that can be read as ambiguous, interrupted, failed or parodic confessions, prayers, and sermons. In particular, I will argue that when the characters in Marlowe’s and Shakespeare’s tragedies fail to find solace in acts that model reformed devotional practices, they eventually suffer the strange but dramatically engaging consequences of their tragic passions like despair, hatred, jealousy, fear, and rage. This dissertation, then, will bridge the turn to religion and affect studies as a means of arguing that early modern tragedy was consumed with attracting, and sustaining, the dramatic attention of the audience. While it is not possible to say, with any finality, why tragedies hook an audience's attention, it is possible to suggest how Marlowe's and Shakespeare's tragedies used the passions generated by the failure of model devotional acts as a means of capturing and sustaining the attention of the audience.
Preface

This dissertation is original, unpublished, independent work by the author, Jamie Paris.
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Dedication

For Erin and/or Matthew,
may the winner do with it what they will
Macbeth reports that he is unable to pray shortly after murdering the sleeping Duncan (1.7.12-13). He has “done the deed” (2.2.15), but he is unsettled by the boys in the “second chamber” (2.2.17). After looking down at his “hangman’s hands” (2.2.26) covered in blood, Macbeth begins to express remorse for what he has done, calling the spectacle of his hands, stained with royal blood, “[t]his…sorry sight” (2.2.18). According to Macbeth, what is most concerning, however, is not the deed, or getting away with regicide; what has his full attention is the prayer the boys spoke after they woke in the night and the fact that he could not join them in gaining comfort from it:

There’s one did laugh in’s sleep,

And one cried ‘Murder’, that they did wake each other.

I stood, and heard them. But they did say their prayers,

And addressed them again to sleep. (2.2.20-23)

Here, the boys are comforted by joining together in a common prayer, a prayer in which Macbeth, with his guilty mind, rank sins, and hangman’s hands, cannot participate.

Macbeth’s failure to join the boys in prayer is a marker of the character’s guilt, a marker that seems far more indicative of the seemingly real feelings of the character than his merely saying that he feels guilty would have been. By discussing Macbeth’s “real feelings,” I am
not saying that the character Macbeth has feelings, but that he seems to have them, and that
the creation of these seeming feelings is authentic because of the religious register of the
scene. Here I am following Katharine Eisaman Maus and her discussion of inwardness.1
According to Maus, in early modern thought “Persons and things inwardly are” but “persons
and things only outwardly seem.”2 This statement implies that “a person’s thoughts and
passions, imagined as properties of a hidden interior, are not immediately accessible to other
people.”3 Moreover this moment seems somehow beyond what Stephen Greenblatt calls self-
fashioning, insofar as, if the understanding of self-presentation is about a self-conscious,
careful, and artful process that is under the relative control of the fashioner,4 this moment
seems to be a window into what Macbeth actually feels about what he has done. My point is
that Shakespeare is using Macbeth’s failed prayer to give the audience the impression that
they are seeing not what Macbeth ought to say, as they might if the character were
emotionally and spiritually composed, but what he “really” feels.

Lady Macbeth tries to distract her husband from the idea of common prayer and
encourages him to consider whether the boys, who are “lodged together” (2.2.24), really
witnessed his deed, but Macbeth seems transfixed. According to 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’. (2.2.25-28)

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1 Katharine Eisaman Maus, Inwardness and Theater in the English Renaissance (Chicago:
University of Chicago Press, 1995), 4-5.
2 Ibid., 5.
3 Ibid., 5.
4 Stephen Greenblatt, Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare (Chicago:
According to Macbeth, the boys ask God to bless *us* and that this common prayer distracts them from whatever scared them and allows them to sleep. By “common prayer,” I mean a prayer that is made between two or more people where the act of individual devotion makes the participants members of a religious community, even if this community only lasts for the duration of the prayer. The boys are, from Macbeth’s perspective, a Christian community, with, as Hamlet would put it, “free souls” (3.2.226) that are not touched by what they have seen. Their affective and spiritual calm is evidenced by the fact that they can say “Amen” together and then return to sleep. Macbeth, in contrast, has murdered sleep. “Amen” is a concluding formula and a form of affirmation. By being unable to say “Amen” with the boys, Macbeth is unable to ask for God to bless the children while they sleep and he is unable to join them as a member of a Christian community with free souls who can find calm in repentance. Because he cannot say “Amen” he is doomed to endure the psychic and affective consequences of his sin, without relief, alone.

Although Lady Macbeth would encourage her husband to “Consider it not so deeply” (2.2.29), since, “These deeds must not be thought | After these ways: so, it will make us mad” (2.2.32-33), Macbeth seems unable to stop fixating on his inability to join the boys in a common prayer. Macbeth, for example, says

But wherefore could not I pronounce ‘Amen’?

I had the most need of blessing, and ‘Amen’

Stuck in my throat. (2.2.30-32)

A subtle but important distinction is drawn here between the desire or need to repent and the ability to repent. To repent is to turn away from sin and to return to God and at least part of what Macbeth is saying is that he cannot return, since what is done cannot be undone. While
the boys may be turning to God as a means of comforting themselves from a scare in the night, they are not, like Macbeth, in need of God’s forgiveness for a rank and potentially unforgivable sin. Macbeth, of course, cannot divert his attention away from his spiritual and psychological torment, despite his wife’s urgings.

Macbeth is becoming isolated, even from his wife, evoking what Paul Hammond has called the problem of strangeness in tragedy, where the protagonist becomes estranged from himself, language, and his community.\(^5\) Thus, Macbeth’s inability to join the boys in prayer creates dramatic attention because it allows us to see the character having an earnest moment of remorse; Macbeth seems to realize that his actions will both make him the leader of a community and permanently alienate him from God and his community. Such a moment is so engaging to watch because it inspires a very difficult kind of pathos, if not compassion, for a character for whom the audience might not otherwise have much sympathy. Macbeth will soon regain a semblance of composure, but for this moment the audience is allowed access to Macbeth not as he might want to appear, but Macbeth as the character really is. The audience is given a similar religiously charged moment when Lady Macbeth is found sleepwalking later in the play (5.1), confessing her role in the “Unnatural deeds” (5.2.69).

Such seemingly unguarded moments, I am arguing, encourage dramatic attention by blending the audience’s desire to know what a character really feels or thinks with religious forms, like prayer, that seem to promise spiritual and psychological authenticity.

This dissertation argues that the early modern church and the early modern theatre were both concerned with capturing the attention of their audiences, and that dramatic interest in Christopher Marlowe’s and William Shakespeare’s plays was partly generated by

staging acts that can be read as ambiguous, interrupted, failed, or parodic confirmations, confessions, prayers, and sermons. In particular, I will argue that when the characters in Marlowe’s and Shakespeare’s tragedies fail to find solace in acts that model reformed devotional practices, they eventually suffer the strange but dramatically engaging passions like despair, hatred, jealousy, fear, and rage. Ramie Targoff argues that there are early modern binaries between sincerity and theatricality, inwardness and outwardness, and I am arguing that confession, confirmations, prayers, and sermons are dramatically engaging because they outwardly express what is typically inward and these moments seem sincere within the theatre, a mode of communication that was attacked by antitheatricalists as essentially insincere.6

Dramatic attention is captured when characters preach (Lear), pray (Claudius and Faustus), or confess (Othello, Barabas). I will explore how these confessions, confirmations, prayers, and sermons encourage the audience to mark the shows. When Claudius struggles with the question of repentance,7 when Faustus contemplates asking God for forgiveness, and when Lear asks others to mark him while he preaches, there is a sense that these characters are being honest with the audience, exposing their true thoughts and feelings, and the character’s seeming sincerity in the face of pending failure encourages the audience to mark what the characters are saying. A character’s seeming honesty is engaging because it blends

dramaturgical techniques, such as a direct address, with the representation of failed, but earnest, forms of devotion. This dissertation, then, will look at Claudius and Othello, who are unable or unwilling to repent; at Faustus, who gets too distracted by the magic of the theatre itself to take the time to repent; at Lear, who starts to pray but get distracted; and at Aaron and Iago, who utterly refuse to repent for what they have done.

The importance of performed honesty and sincerity on the early modern stage is directly related to outward manifestations of devotional conformity which was privileged over conversion itself during the English Reformation. For example, *The Book of Common Prayer* was relatively modest in its claims, noting in the preface that regular church attendance would produce a “great advancement of godliness” in the nation by requiring that the congregation read out the entire Bible once a year because this repetition would both stir the clergy to godliness and encourage the people to love “true religion.”

Elizabethan religion demanded outward religious conformity that would in time encourage a genuine love of true religion. The unofficial policy of the state was not to “[make] windows into men’s souls.”

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8 Brian Cummings, ed, *The Book of Common Prayer: The Texts of 1549, 1559, and 1662* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 4. For the sake of this dissertation, I am using the 1599 edition of the *Book of Common Prayer* (BCP), since this is the edition that Marlowe, Shakespeare, and their audience would have known. I have, however, found Cumming’s edition invaluable because it allows the reader to see the variations in the services, both great and small, between the three editions, and it is a good reminder that part of paying religious attention during an age of doctrinal transformation would have been paying close and careful attention to small but important variations.

According to Targoff, Elizabeth’s stance meant that the state would not make “probing
inquiries into personal faith, so long as worshippers came to service on Sunday.” Targoff
further suggests that an effect of this policy was that “not only Catholic recusants and
Puritans resisters, but middle-of-the-road English subjects were capable of sustaining a
pretense of conformity that successfully masked their unreachable inwardness.” According
to Steven Mullaney, Marlowe’s and Shakespeare’s England was both a nation of converts
and of coverts, and it was just as hard for them to know who believed what as it is for us
today. What this creates is a situation where theatrical attention could have been generated
by staging moments that seemed to offer more than a pretense of conformity, that expose
what a character really is thinking, feeling, or believing. I am arguing that Marlowe and
Shakespeare have their dramatic characters create dramatic attention by staging moments that
seem to give the audience windows into the character’s souls, such that we think that we
really know what an Abigail, a Barabas, Claudius, a Lear, a Faustus, or an Aaron feels,
thinks, or believes because they confess to the audience.

that this is a nice encapsulation of the Elizabethan “don’t ask, don’t tell” attitude towards
religious nonconformity.

10 Targoff, Common Prayer, 2.

11 Ibid., 2.

12 Steven Mullaney, “Affective Technologies: Towards an Emotional Logic of the
Elizabethan Stage,” in Environment and Embodiment in Early Modern England, eds. Mary
calls this the Elizabethan version of “don’t ask, don’t tell.” I would argue that such
compromises have a unique effect when it comes to attention. Rather than the US military
policy taking attention away from the sexual orientation of its soldiers, for example, “don’t
ask, don’t tell” actually placed more emphasis on others to monitor, and speculate upon, the
sexuality of their co-workers. Likewise, I would suggest that any policy that allowed people
to be converts as long as they were covert would have actually placed more attention on the
small interpersonal signs that someone might use to intentionally or unintentionally signal
their faith.

13 My referencing of the confessions, confirmations, and prayers of racialized characters like
Aaron, Barabas, Othello brings up an underling theme in my dissertation of the impact of
Working with Anthony B. Dawson’s theory of audience participation, Allison P. Hobgood’s idea that the audience is a co-creator of dramatic meaning in early modern drama, and Bridget Escolme’s idea that characters build a relationship with the audience through direct addresses, this dissertation will argue that Marlowe’s and Shakespeare’s tragedies hold the attention of the audience by having characters confess and confide directly to them, creating an intimacy with villainy, unrepentant sin, and despair that would have been titillating during an age of religious turmoil. This dissertation addresses specific theatrical and dramaturgical moments with religious implications in Marlowe’s and Shakespeare’s plays, and while it takes into account critical voices associated with what Ken Jackson and difference in the discussion of the English Reformation. At the risk of oversimplification, I think that it is evocative that questions of religious difference became more and more important on the English stage as the state officially argued for the need for religious uniformity and commonness. I will explore these issues in more detail in my third chapter. Dawson, “Performance and Participation,” in *The Culture of Playgoing in Shakespeare’s England: A Collaborative Debate*, eds. Anthony B. Dawson and Paul Edward Yachnin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 11; Allison P. Hobgood, *Passionate Playgoing in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 6; and Bridget Escolme, *Talking to the Audience: Shakespeare, Performance, Self* (New York: Routledge, 2005). Dawson’s term “participation” evokes a connection between the role of the audience as participants in the creation of theatrical meaning and the Eucharistic controversy over the “real presence” of Christ and the participation of the faithful in early modern England (11-12). In the same way that the Eucharist only becomes real in the presence of the faithful, Dawson suggests that theatre becomes “real” with the willing participation of the audience. In my first chapter I will add to this discussion by considering Richard Hooker’s and the *Book of Common Prayer*’s positions on Eucharistic participation. Hobgood’s offers a phenomenological account of early modern play going, arguing that attending the early modern theatre was an embodied experience, and that an early modern audience consisted of “conscious, collaborative, co-creators” (5-6). Thus, for Hobgood, the early modern audience “had the capacity to transform drama just as they were transformed by it” (6). Escolme is interested in the way that characters left alone on the stage build a relationship with the audience that gives the character the illusion of a version of self or subjectivity (5). What matters for me is that this building is a two-way phenomenon. The audience and the actor have to participate in this relationship for it to work.
Arthur F. Marotti call the turn to religion,\textsuperscript{15} the argument of this dissertation is dramaturgical and it will address the texts as writing for the stage.

The use of these religiously charged acts is, I argue, formal and dramatic as well as religious. Shakespeare and Marlowe are not trying to sneak theology into the theatre. Rather, I take my cue from Claudius’s metadramatic question about his failed attempt at prayer: “What form of prayer | Can serve my turn?” (3.3.51-52). Form has three senses here. As Dawson argues, Claudius’s phrasing throughout this scene draws the viewers’ attention to the posture, or form, of his body.\textsuperscript{16} The question of form, however, is also theoretical in this scene. Claudius is trying to find a form, or formula, of prayer that will allow him to repent his sin and relieve himself of guilt while, at the same time, retaining his crown. Finally, form brings us to consider dramaturgy. The prayer serves a turn for the plot of the play and creates an emotionally and religiously charged scene. It is this relationship between theology, performance, literary and rhetorical forms (like prayers) and dramaturgy that this dissertation will explore in its discussion of Marlowe’s and Shakespeare’s tragedies.

1.1 Estrangement, Attention and the Turn to Religion


According to Jackson and Marotti, the general trend in historicist and postmodern criticism of Shakespeare points to “the multiple ways in which the playwright dismantles religious practices only to end in a position, paradoxically, that is still ‘religious.’”17 It is important to remember that the turn to religion is still relatively recent. Claire McEachern, for example, notes that much of the New Historicist scholarship of the 1990s focused on questions of the subject, power, and the relationship between text and context, but that overall this scholarship “slighted the role of religious institutions and languages.”18 For critics of tragedy like Jonathan Dollimore, for example, religion in early modern tragedy was a politically expedient ideology.19 Marlowe and Shakespeare don’t necessarily dismantle religion as much as they theatricalize it. My work pushes against critics like Huston Diehl, who argue that the Elizabethan and Jacobean stage were “both a product of the Protestant Reformation—a reformed drama—and a producer of Protestant habits of thought—a

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19 Jonathan Dollimore, *Radical Tragedy: Religion, Ideology and Power in the Drama of Shakespeare and his Contemporaries*, 3rd ed. (New York: Palgrave, [1984], 2010), 12. To be fair, Dollimore does argue that religion was not invented by the powerful to keep men in awe, but that religion “has historically served to legitimate systems of power and subjection …, and what was happening in the Elizabethan period was of the upmost historical importance: religion was increasingly being perceived in terms of such legitimation” (14). While I think that Dollimore’s position is a nice encapsulation of the Prologue Machevil from Marlowe’s *The Jew of Malta*, his equation of religion with ideology misses the stunning complexity and plurality of religious discourse, belief, and practice in Elizabethan and Jacobean England. Furthermore, while Machevil does view religion as little more than a tool to keep men in awe, it is important to remember that he is a caricature of Machiavelli, and that the point of his prologue was far more to incite an affective response in the audience than to offer something like Marlowe’s position on religious matters. Put another way, it is important not to see the confession of a caricature as a confirmation of Marlowe’s possible religious beliefs.
reforming drama."²⁰ I am not convinced that Protestant habits of thought were taught through
the stage, or that the early modern public theatre took it upon itself to teach the audience how
to think like a Protestant. I am not sure that there were consistent Protestant habits of thought
in early modern England, and I agree with Patrick Collinson that “Shakespeare and countless
others of his generation did not know what to believe” because of the frequent changes in the
official religion of the early modern English state.²¹ Debora Kuller Shuger argues that there
was general agreement on doctrinal matters in Elizabethan and Jacobean England, but that a
closer analysis of the literature shows “an unexpected and at times drastic ideological
pluralism.”²² Rather than a unified Elizabethan world picture, the religious system is “in a
state of flux.”²³ For Mullaney, the English Reformers largely gave up on the stage as a means
of spreading Reformed theology and the religious independence of the secular theatre is part
of the reason why church leaders were so adamant about the dangers of the public stage.²⁴

Furthermore, as Dawson suggests, historicist critics can overplay their hands when
discussing confessional issues in early modern drama; debates, for example, about Hamlet’s
place in purgatory, Macbeth’s reprobation, or Faustus’s damnation address these plays as

²⁰ Huston Diehl, Staging Reform, Reforming the Stage: Protestantism and Popular Theatre
219.
²² Debora Kuller Shuger, Habits of Thought in the English Renaissance: Religion, Politics,
and the Dominant Culture (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 9.
²³ Ibid., 9.
²⁴ Steven Mullaney, “Affective Technologies,” 71-72. See also Steven Mullaney, The Place
of the Stage: License, Play, and Power in Renaissance England (Ann Arbor: University of
Michigan Press, 1997), 7. According to Mullaney in The Place of the Stage, drama is the
most social and metropolitan of all art forms, and that early modern drama “got under way by
occupying or taking up a place in the cultural landscape that was not quite proper to it.
However central that drama has come to be in our own understanding of Elizabethan culture
and society, we need to keep well in mind the fact that, in the sixteenth century, what has
come to be know as popular drama situated itself neither at the heart of the community nor
even within it” (8).
evidence of religious controversy, rather than seeing them as plays that use religiously charged material for dramatic ends. Alison Shell sees Shakespeare’s plays as “saturated in religious discourse” and his “dramaturgy [as] highly attentive to religious precedent.”

And yet, Dawson says that the relationship between early modern theatre and religion “is typically indirect and diffuse rather than allegorical.” For Dawson, early modern plays use “religious analogies” to “produce responses akin to religious feelings, but at the same time these feelings undergo a transfer when they shift into the theatrical sphere. They become part of a dominantly aesthetic and affective domain” where meaning can be placed “up for grabs.”

Following from Dawson, perhaps the early modern English theatre is not simply a substitute for older religious forms; rather, “the theatre appropriates and redeployed the language of religion, as it does a host of other languages and practices, [and this] allows it to tap into the social capital that such languages gives access to.” Early modern theatre, in this way, is not a dismantling or deconstructive medium; rather, it is an estranging and transformative one. That is, religion comes up in secular plays in ways that can estrange and defamiliarize the topics and this defamiliarization enables the audience to think about the religious topic in a new light. By “estranging” I do not mean that tragedies create distance between the audience and the characters, although they can do that as well; rather, what I am arguing is that the

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27 Ibid., 84-85.

28 Ibid., 87.
strangeness and defamiliarization of tragedy can encourage the audience to pay closer attention to the pain and suffering of a character than its members might otherwise do.\textsuperscript{29} My argument that the defamiliarization of religious topics constitutes dramatic attention builds on early modern theories of tragedy. Consider, for example, Sir Philip Sidney’s observation that tragedy can make horrible things delightful through poetic imitation.\textsuperscript{30} This sense of delight is not necessarily one of happiness, nor am I foregrounding what David Hume called the paradox of tragic pleasure wherein the viewer takes pleasure in watching the suffering of another.\textsuperscript{31} Rather, tragic delight involves a fascination with something strange and unfamiliar that encourages the audience to look closer at something from which, were they to see it as real life, they would look away.\textsuperscript{32} Here, then, it is helpful

\textsuperscript{29} Victor Shklovsky, “Art as technique,” in Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader, trans. Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reis, ed. David Lodge (London and New York: Longman, 1988), 20. My use of defamiliarization here is influenced by the work of Russian formalist Victor Shklovsky, and his argument that works of art render objects and events unfamiliar. For Shklovsky, the point of making objects in art unfamiliar is that it slows down the process of perceiving the object (20). In this way, what is represented is less important than the method of representation, since any object, event, or bit of information can be render strange if it is turned into art (20, 26).


\textsuperscript{31} David Hume, “Of Tragedy,” in Philosophy of Literature: Contemporary and Classical Readings, eds. Eileen John and Dominic McIver Lopes (New York: Blackwell, 2007). See also Augustine of Hippo, Confessions, ed. and trans. R. S. Pine-Coffin (London: Penguin, 1961), 56-58 and 173-174, where Augustine admits that he was a regular spectator at the theatre. For Augustine, the reason that people enjoy watching others suffer is that it provides them with an escape from their own unhappiness. Thus, when Augustine turns towards God he rejects the theatre and the kinds of emotional comforts (or crutches) that watching plays implies.

\textsuperscript{32} For a contrasting idea to Hume, see Martha C. Nussbaum’s Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 301-350. Nussbaum argues that seeing the suffering of another can produce compassion, a painful emotional state “occasioned by the awareness of another person’s underserved misfortune” (301). In particular, where Nussbaum diverges from Hume is when she argues that tragedies encourage the audience to pay careful attention to characters during moments of extreme suffering (352).
to come back to Mullaney and his argument that there is a connection between the historical traumas created by the five changes in Religion between 1530 and 1560 and the emergence of the English popular theatre as a space where the Elizabethan and Jacobean culture was encouraged to think “about itself, especially about its more painful conflicts and contradictions, when other methods and media fail.”

The theatre, for Mullaney, was a space where new collective thinking occurred, and it created a “complex cognitive space for playwrights, players, and audiences to occupy and experience—an inhabited affective technology, within which, and with which, they could think and feel things not always easy or comfortable to articulate.” A religious topic rendered strange on the early modern stage, then, enabled the audience to collectively process their shared and unsettled religious and political history.

Discussions of religion were theatrical as well as theological on the early modern English stage because of the Elizabethan Proclamation of 16 May 1559 banning unlicensed interludes and plays, especially those touching on matters of religion and policy. Specifically, the officials who licensed plays were told to:

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34 Ibid., 74.
35 Quoted in Louis Montrose, The Purpose of Playing: Shakespeare and the Cultural Politics of the Elizabethan Theatre (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 24. According to Montrose, “The Elizabethan government perceived much of the established popular and religious culture to be tainted by the superstitions and idolatrous practices of the old faith” and since this popular culture was loyal to the local community, the regional nobility, or the Catholic church, Montrose suggests that it was “regarded by the Protestant Tudor state as a seederbed for dissent and sedition” (24). For more on the critique of the Elizabethan theatre see Jonas Barish “Puritans and Proteans” in The Antiheatrical Prejudice (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 80-131. For a good primer on the role of the English Reformation in early modern popular culture see Peter Burke, “The Triumph of Lent: The Reform of Popular Culture,” in Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe (Surrey: Ashgate, [1978], 2009), 289-334.
permit none to be played wherein either matters of religion or of the governance of the
estate of the commonwealth shall be handled or treated, being no meet matters to be
written or treated upon but by men of authority, learning, and wisdom, nor to be
handled before any audience but of grave and discreet persons.36

An implication of the proclamation was that playwrights could not be trusted to handle
matters belonging to the state or the church with sufficient care, and that the mass audiences
of the English public theatre were not filled with grave and discreet persons who would pay
close, careful, attention to what was being said.37 I suggest here that the proclamation is more
than what Jonas Barish calls the anti-theatrical prejudice,38 or what John Northbrooke would
call an argument against idleness (1577).39 The implication is that theatregoers really do pay
close and careful attention to moments when matters of state or religion are discussed on the
English stage precisely because these moments are fundamentally interesting and engaging.
People want to see public speech acts that do not express conformity with the official state
religious position, and such demonstrations could have been seen as subversive. That is, the
cognitive space of the theatre encouraged the players and the audience to engage these
religious questions together, as non-experts, not as “grave and discreet persons.” Thus, the

36 Paul Lester Hughes, and James Francis Larken, eds, Tudor Royal Proclamations (New
Haven: Yale University Press, 1969), 115-16
37 For more on this topic see Janette Dillon’s Language and Stage in Medieval and
Renaissance England (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 117-119, where she
argues that the issue at stake in this proclamation was the shift from private university
performances of plays in Latin to more public English performances. She notes that if Latin
plays were seen as “worthy and improving” of the students and the audience, then vernacular
plays were seen as potentially subversive (118).
38 Barish, The Antitheatrical Prejudice, 1-5.
39 John Northbrooke, “A Treaties Against Dicing, Dancing, Plays, and Interludes, with Other
Idle Pastimes,” in Shakespeare’s Theater: A Sourcebook, ed. Tanya Pollard (Malden, MA:
audience can become a collective who could take pleasure in rendering such matters strange together.

1.2 Marlowe’s and Shakespeare’s Confessional Position(s)

While this dissertation is not invested in the confessional position of Marlowe or Shakespeare, it seems necessary to say something about this issue. As Shell notes,

Any study of Shakespeare and religion must confront a paradox. Shakespeare’s writing has been seen both as profoundly religious, giving everyday human life a sacramental quality, and as profoundly secular, foreshadowing the kind of humanism that sees no necessity for God. Perhaps, as a paradox should, this describes the same phenomenon in two ways. Both characterisations recognise Shakespeare’s high doctrine of the audience; both acknowledge that part of his dramatic sophistication is to depict human particularity while implying a transcendent, portentous quality to the human condition.40

For the most part critics are willing to assume that, as Greenblatt puts it, “Shakespeare was not a theologian.”41 Nevertheless, Shakespeare wrote about topics that addressed and defamiliarized religious issues. Shakespeare’s plays addressed religious questions that would have been of interest to theatregoers during times of religious transformation.42 Religious

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criticism gets tricky when critics try to extrapolate Shakespeare’s religious position, or Marlowe’s lack of one, from what their characters say in a work of fiction.

While some critics still want to debate Shakespeare’s supposed Catholic leanings, Dawson argues that it is unreasonable to speculate on the confessional position of dramatist. David Scott Kastan argues convincingly that Shakespeare was not a partisan in the post-Reformation theological debates, but he “recognized and responded to the various ways in which religion charged the word in which he lived.” Kastan further argues that debates about Shakespeare’s faith both provide a welcome distraction from the authorship debate and that “a dissident Shakespeare is for us more appealing, perhaps more useful, than a Shakespeare who for so long has been co-opted to articulate and guarantee the norms of a dominant culture.”

On the other hand, Gary Taylor proposes that “the [cumulative] evidence for Shakespeare’s Catholic sympathies is convincing enough that we should be arguing about it” and complains that Shakespeare studies has not embraced the Catholic thesis because there is a prejudice against Catholicism, since “[e]ven in our ecumenical era, many of Shakespeare’s most enthusiastic readers would recoil from the vision of a papist

43 See David N. Beauregard’s *Catholic Theology in Shakespeare’s Plays* (Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Presses, 2008) and Joseph Pearce’s *Seeing the Catholic Presence in the Plays* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2010). Beauregard’s very well-written book ultimately argues that there are so many Catholic references in Shakespeare’s plays that he must have either been a a recusant Catholic, church papist, or that he must have had a strong cultural attachment to his Catholic background. Also, see Eamon Duffy, “Bare Ruined Choirs: remembering Catholicism in Shakespeare’s England,” in *Theatre and Religion: Lancastrian Shakespeare*, eds. Richard Dutton, Alison Gail Findlay, and Richard Wilson (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003) and Arthur F. Marotti, “Shakespeare and Catholicism,” in *Theatre and Religion: Lancastrian Shakespeare*, eds. Richard Dutton, Alison Gail Findlay, and Richard Wilson (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003).


46 Ibid., 16.
bard.” Richard Wilson has argued that there is a “Catholic turn” in Shakespeare studies, and this turn has produced evocative work by critics like Eamon Duffy, and Arthur F. Marotti. While neither thinker comes out and says, directly, that they know that Shakespeare is a Catholic, they establish doubt about Shakespeare’s confessional position while contending that Shakespeare might have had Catholic sympathies. Importantly, for Duffy, “if we cannot quite be sure that Shakespeare was a Catholic, it becomes clearer and

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That time of year thou may'st in me behold
When yellow leaves, or none, or few, do hang
Upon those boughs which shake against the cold,
Bare ruin'd choirs, where late the sweet birds sang. (1-4)

Duffy argues that the reference to “Bare ruin’d choirs” is a reference to England’s Catholic past and, more specifically, to the ruins of England’s monasteries. While I am not convinced that he is right about this, I think that this is a good example of the way that religious attention works. What Duffy is doing is exactly what I think that an early modern audience might do with a religious reference in Marlowe’s or Shakespeare’s plays. Duffy thinks that what Shakespeare has said “confesses” his real confessional position and, as such, he pays close and careful attention to a poem that he might have otherwise glossed over. Marotti, in contrast, is more reserved than Duffy, noting that Shakespeare’s upbringing “was both Catholic and Protestant” and that the primary problem with discussing Shakespeare’s faith is one of vocabulary, since the categories of Protestant and Catholic are “too rough as categories—especially if we consider the possible divergence between devotional inclinations and pious beliefs, on the one hand, and religiously inflicted politics and loyalty to the state, on the other.” Nevertheless, for Marotti, Shakespeare’s romances and tragi-comedies “reflect a sensibility closer to the Catholic Providentialism” (221) and “[t]hough he was alert to the intellectual and political complexities and ambiguities of his world he may have outwardly conformed to the official state religion, Shakespeare could not, and apparently did not wish to, sever his or his culture’s ties to a Catholic past and its residual cultural presence” (231).
clearer that he must have struck alert contemporaries as a most unsatisfactory Protestant. While I completely agree that Shakespeare seems unlikely to be a dogmatic Protestant, it is important to place pressure on Duffy’s use of the term “alert.” Does a scholar’s alertness to the evidence of Shakespeare’s potential Catholicism say more about what they are alert to than it possibly could about the confessional leanings of the poet?

Shakespeare is not Milton or Donne. Indeed, the cumulative evidence for Shakespeare’s Catholicism is unconvincing, and arguments for it tend to commit an appeal to probability or have a post hoc ergo propter hoc argumentative structure. Essentially, what Duffy and Marotti have in common is a rhetorical move based on a negative hypothesis. Since we cannot prove that Shakespeare was not a Catholic, and since there are references to things in his plays and poems that are seemingly Catholic, then we cannot prove that Shakespeare was not a Catholic. Taylor has forcefully argued that we cannot go from maybe to is without finding a clear declaration of Shakespeare’s faith. Since such a declaration is unlikely to be found, the evidence for Shakespeare’s Catholic leanings is, at best, circumstantial.

While most critics accept a certain religious ambiguity in Shakespeare’s oeuvre, Marlowe has not been afforded the same generosity. According to Jonathan Parker, Marlowe is “[t]he other, in all senses” to Protestant Christian drama. For Greenblatt, Marlowe’s characters and his drama are defined by a will to absolute play that reflects their creator’s

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49 Duffy, “Bare Ruined Choirs,” 56.
disregard for official state religion.\textsuperscript{52} According to Greenblatt, the playwright reflects radical beliefs such that “[i]n his turbulent life and, more importantly, in his writing Marlowe is deeply implicated in his heroes, though he is far more intelligent and self-aware than any of them.”\textsuperscript{53} For Greenblatt, Marlowe wrote “as if the admonitory purpose of literature were a lie, [inventing] fictions only to create and not to serve God or the state.”\textsuperscript{54} In Greenblatt’s view, Marlowe is a kind of proto-Oscar Wilde, writing art for art’s sake. For the cultural materialist Dollimore, the evidence of Marlowe’s “actual atheism” is “well documented, albeit in terms of reaction to it rather than first-hand testimonies.”\textsuperscript{55} Much of this history is indebted to Richard Baines’s confession against Marlowe in “The Baines Note” (c1593), where he says that Marlowe said that “the first beginnings of religion was only to keep men in awe” and that “all Protestants are hypocritical asses.”\textsuperscript{56} Here we might also consider Tiffany Jo Werth’s argument that in early modern England the ungodly “were everywhere accused and nowhere self-proclaimed, a contradictory absent presence growing and exerting a profound – and anxious – influence upon English culture.”\textsuperscript{57} Of course, saying that a writer is an atheist or ungodly is complex and, as Werth notes, “The ungodly, the unbeliever, the skeptic, the blasphemer, and the atheist were elusive signifiers that held multiple, overlapping, contradictory and highly polemical uses.”\textsuperscript{58} As Patrick Cheney reminds us,

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\textsuperscript{52} Greenblatt, \textit{Renaissance Self-Fashioning}, 220-221.
\textsuperscript{53} Ibid., 220.
\textsuperscript{54} Ibid., 220.
\textsuperscript{55} Dollimore, \textit{Radical Tragedy}, 84.
\textsuperscript{58} Ibid., 176.
\end{flushleft}
Marlowe’s literary works have long been held to have a “special relationship with his life.” Yet, as Marlowe biographer David Riggs notes, much of the evidence for Marlowe’s apparent radicalness and transgressive temperament “sits at once removed from his own voice. [The evidence] consists of reported speech, observations by unfriendly witnesses, and passages drawn from his plays.” Thus, “[s]keptics rightly insist that the atheist and troublemaker exist only in these documents. He is an irretrievably textual being.”

One reason it is difficult to discuss Marlowe’s plays outside of the context of the author’s apparent transgressive radicalism is that scholars want to use Marlowe as a brand that represents an early modern sexual, theological, and aesthetic radicalism. In some ways this is another version of puritan Thomas Beard’s dismissal of Marlowe in *The Theatre of God’s Judgment* (c.1597). According to Beard, Marlowe was a professional scholar who became notorious for “atheism and impiety,” and who died because “he denied God and his son Christ, and not only in word blasphemed the Trinity, but also (as it is credibly reported) wrote books against it, affirming our Saviour to be but a deceiver, and Moses to be but a conjurer and seducer of the people, and the Holy Bible to be but vain and idle stories, and all

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59 Patrick Cheney “Introduction: Marlowe in the Twenty-first Century,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Christopher Marlowe*, ed. Patrick Cheney (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 1. Also, see Patrick Cheney’s essay *Marlowe’s Counterfeit Profession: Ovid, Spenser, Counter-Nationhood* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2011) and his discussion of Marlowe’s literary career (5-7). In particular, Cheney insightfully argues that a difficulty of discussing Marlowe’s complete works is that we do not have a complete set of cultural artifacts, “but simply a shard or series of shards buried deeply beneath layers or artistic and biographical debris” (6).


61 Ibid., 24.

62 Thomas Beard, “The Theatre of God’s Judgments,” in *Shakespeare’s Theater: A Sourcebook*, ed. Tanya Pollard (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004). According to Pollard, Beard was the first person to tell “the now mythic story of Christopher Marlowe’s violent death” (166).
religions but vain and idle policy.” For Beard, moreover, what makes Marlowe’s death satisfying is the terrible manner of it: “for he even cursed and blasphemed to his last gasp, and together with his breath an oath flew out of his mouth […] that it was not only a manifest sign of God's judgment, but also an horrible and fearful terror to all that beheld him.”

According to Lukas Erne, the transgressive, atheistic, and homosexual Marlowe is so attractive to scholars because this figure is essential to the creation of a Marlowe industry. According to Erne,

... all of us with an interest in Marlowe have something to sell. The commodity called ‘Marlowe,’ which we try to sell at academic conferences, in university seminars, and to academic publishers, has been selling well in recent times. I believe that Marlowe’s cultural and, in particular, academic capital results to no slight degree from a mythographic creation with which it is in our best interests to be complicit. Marlowe was an atheist, and people who think differently and subversively matter. Marlowe was a homosexual, and sexual difference matters. So Marlowe matters.

For Erne, Marlowe seems modern, and critics pay attention to his works because he is implicitly addressing decidedly modern concerns. Leah Marcus proposes this to be the case even in the early modern period where Marlowe’s plays had to contend with what she calls the “Marlowe effect.” “For Renaissance audiences of Doctor Faustus,” she claims, “watching ‘Marlowe’ meant watching a theatrical event balanced on the nervous razor edge.

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63 Ibid., 92-93.
64 Ibid., 93.
66 Ibid., 30.
between transcendent heroism and dangerous blasphemy—transgression not only against God but also against cherished national goals and institution.” Stephen Orgel notes of Marlowe’s homosexuality and radicalism that while he is reported to have said that “all they that love not tobacco and boys [are] fools” (xxxv), in reality “the transgressive Marlowe is largely a posthumous phenomenon,” that was “embodied in, if not created by, Richard Baines’s and Thomas Kyd’s lurid testimony, which formed part of the evidence upon which he was investigated by the Privy Council, and circulated after Marlowe’s death.” However, just as Margreta de Grazia posited a need for Hamlet without Hamlet, I would argue that there is a need for Marlowe without Marlowe. To see the work that religious affect is doing in his text requires bracketing his supposed atheism and looking at the texts themselves.

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67 Leah S. Marcus, “Textual Indeterminacy and Ideological Difference: The Case of ‘Doctor Faustus.’” Renaissance Drama 20.4 (1989), 4. Also, see Leah S. Marcus, Unediting the Renaissance: Shakespeare, Marlowe and Milton (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), where she argues that “Unlike most Elizabethan playwrights, Marlowe as a historical figure was relatively well known to the public for his alleged atheism, his reputed contempt for the authority of church and state, the enigmatic strangeness of his violent death” (66). Thus, while the “author function” was not particularly important for most early modern playwrights, Marcus argues the Marlowe effect was an important part of the editing, staging, publishing, and scholarship of his plays long after his death (66).


69 Margreta de Grazia, ‘Hamlet’ without Hamlet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007). According to de Grazia, there is no need to read Hamlet as if the character Hamlet did not exist, since doing so would eliminate the vast majority of the book (1). Rather, what she wants to do without is what she calls the modern Hamlet, “the one distinguished by an inner being so transcendent that it barely comes into contact with the play from which it emerges” (1). Such a reading of the play, de Grazia argues, allows us to see a character who is disposed after his father’s death, “and, as far as the court is concerned, [Hamlet is] legitimately dispossessed” (1). My desire to read Marlowe without Marlowe comes from a belief that Marlowe’s story was over defined by The Baines Note (c. 1593) and, to a lesser extent, Thomas Beard’s discussion of Marlowe’s violent death as a kind of cosmic justice against Marlowe for being a transgressive atheist. While I do think that there is something deeply religiously transgressive about Marlowe’s plays, what I argue in this dissertation is that the transgression has to do with the way that Marlowe subverts tragic form and estranges basic religious concepts like repentance.
Marlowe’s text do not contain evidence for his atheism, rather they contain evidence that Marlowe employed subversive political and religious positions in his work as a way of enhancing what Marcus has called the “Marlowe effect” and thereby capturing the attention of his audience.70

Rather than reading a deep connection between Marlowe’s life and works, as happens in critical biographies about Marlowe by Park Honan,71 Constance Brown Kuriyama,72 and Riggs,73 this project will engage him as a dramatist that is every bit as ambiguous and ambivalent about religion as is Shakespeare. Marlowe’s and Shakespeare’s tragedies share an interest in duality and theological ambiguity.

1.3 Chapter Outlines

The first chapter of this dissertation, “‘To Enlarge the Devil’s Kingdom:’ On Participation, Praying, and Preaching in Marlowe’s Doctor Faustus,” investigates the relationship between repentance, distraction, and dramatic suspense in Marlowe's Doctor Faustus. This chapter will situate Doctor Faustus within larger debates about the relationship between religion, theatre, and distraction in early modern England as staged by antitheatricalist writers John Northbrooke (1577), Anthony Munday (1580), and John Greene

70 Marcus, Unediting the Renaissance, 66.
Faustus’s failure to repent is not, I am arguing, due to his being a member of the reprobate, as critics like David Bevington and Eric Rasmussen, Pauline Honderich, Tom McAlindon, and Kristen Poole imply. Rather, the play keeps the question of Faustus's ability to repent in tension until the play’s dénouement. Faustus's attempts to repent are consistently interrupted by either Lucifer or Mephistopheles as a means of maintaining some level of dramatic suspense. The dramaturgical issue is not that Lucifer and Mephistopheles distract Faustus from turning his full attention to God and repenting for his sins, but that they get him to turn his attention away from God and towards plays. To enlarge the “Devil’s kingdom,” Mephistopheles must work to gain, and then maintain, the soul of the blasphemer. In this way, the problem is not with getting Faustus to turn his attention to the Devil; the problem is with maintaining the doctor’s attention until he dies. The play, moreover, is about dramatizing a process whereby Mephistopheles, by means of the theatre, keeps Faustus in danger of damnation by keeping him distracted from thoughts of repenting. Evocatively, while the audience is watching Faustus’s distraction, they are further engaged in the story, in a space that many antitheatrical critics suggested was fundamentally ungodly. Thus, at the

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same time that Marlowe is theorizing the relationship between repentance and distraction, he is creating a theatrical spectacle that encourages his audience to turn their attention away from God and to focus on the theatre.

In the second chapter, “‘Forgive Me My Foul Murder:’ On the Dramaturgical Function of Claudius’s Prayer” addresses the dramaturgical function of Claudius’s failed attempt at prayer in Shakespeare’s Hamlet. Hamlet has been well discussed by major figures within the turn to religion like Greenblatt, Dawson, and Targoff, and Maus makes Hamlet’s seeming interiority central to her claim about inwardness. Rather than reading Claudius at prayer as an example of Hamlet’s tendency towards delay, this chapter will add to the discussion of the play by arguing that Claudius’s confession is essential to the plot. Without this confession, the audience can not be sure that Claudius has killed his brother in order to take the throne, that he is unrepentant, and that he deserves to die within the larger logic of revenge tragedy. What is essential to the scene, then, is that the audience does not doubt Claudius’s attempt at confession. Rather than simply condemning Claudius as sinful, Shakespeare enables Claudius to build a relationship with the audience that encourages a strange kind of empathy with the villain while, at the same time, justifying the revenge plot of the protagonist.

The third chapter, “‘Is Black So Base a Hue?’ On the Racialized Confessions of Shakespeare’s Aaron in Titus Andronicus and Marlowe’s Barabas in The Jew of Malta,” situates Shakespeare’s and Marlowe’s discussion of the relationship between race and religion alongside Elizabeth’s letters arguing for the deportation of all blacks and

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blackamores. Building off the work of scholars like Kim Hall, Ian Smith, Lara Bovilsky, Mary Floyd-Wilson, and Margo Hendricks and Patricia Parker, this chapter will argue that the relationship between race and religion on the early modern stage is complex, but that it is also not a coincidence that raced characters in tragedies find themselves cast as villains, or scapegoats, that the play needs to expunge from an implicitly Christian community. In particular, through a reading of Queen Elizabeth I’s letters on “Negros and Blackamores,” I will show that the early modern discourse on race did not view racialized men as persons, but rather as subjects who could not be converted to Christianity. Building on the work of scholars who study early modern religion, moreover, this chapter will ask what kind of a place there was for the discussion of race and religion within the turn to religion? In this chapter I will discuss the theatrical confessions of Aaron, Barabas, and Ithamore. In doing so I will show that these confessions are excessive and improvisational and are also captivating to those who hear them. The issue is not that Marlowe encourages the audience to identify with the alien Other, but that Marlowe draws that Other into a strange and contingent world, and creates dramatically interesting and ambiguous plots that render the racialized meanings of those characters strange and estranging. In this chapter, moreover, I will look in particular at the complicated ways in which Marlowe and Shakespeare encourage the audience to pay

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attention to the surprisingly complex racialized stage villains. In doing so, I will argue that Marlowe and Shakespeare ask the audience to be not just to witness but to participate in the actions of these stage racialized villains. Thus, the way that Shakespeare and Marlowe use these dramatic confessions by raced villains enables the audience to see them as characters that have something important, if deeply uncomfortable, to say to which it is worth attending to. Their confessions, moreover, render the very idea of confession and repentance strange.

The fourth chapter of this dissertation, “‘I Have Ta’en Too Little Care of This’: On Repentance and Repetition in Shakespeare's King Lear,” argues that King Lear is an exhausting play to watch because it draws, and redraws, the viewer’s attention to the suffering, despair, and disappointments of Lear. King Lear makes the audience acutely aware of the importance of religious habits and repetitions for forming affective bonds. In this chapter, I will be building on the scholarship of Shuger and Targoff on the importance of habit, and I will argue that the confirmation, sermons, and eulogies in the play demonstrate a shift in Lear’s thinking. At the opening of the play Lear seems more concerned with others that have wronged him. Towards the end of the play he seems more concerned with how he has wronged. Part of what makes King Lear so emotionally exhausting to watch is just how open, serious, and sincere Lear is in his desire to have attention and then to attend to others. There is an intensity of religious and dramatic attention in this play, which is amplified through repetition.

In the conclusion of this dissertation, entitled “‘What You Know, You Know:’ A Coda on Confirmation and Vengeance in Shakespeare’s Othello,” I argue that devotional and legal confirmation are central concern in Shakespeare’s Othello, and that the discourses of

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forgiveness enabled by confirmation and confession are complicated in this play by issues of race. In this way, while this chapter does not deal specifically with a religious form, it will address a present absence in *Othello* and it will tie together my interest in race and in tragic confirmations. My argument will be that Othello has difficulty confirming Desdemona’s guilt because he has a misplaced faith in her infidelity, a faith that Iago bewitches him into having. Furthermore, where the audience is an active participant in the pleasures of *Doctor Faustus*, I will argue that Othello’s jealousy is inaccessible, and that the audience attends to the play in a state of horror, since they know that Desdemona is innocent and that they are powerless to stop Othello from murdering her. Likewise, I will argue that Othello’s and Desdemona’s confessions of innocence are not confessions in the Protestant sense of these terms, but that they are confirmations. To make this reading work, I will place with play within what Sarah Beckwith calls the “grammar of forgiveness” in early modern thought.\(^8\) Othello confirms his crime, but he does so in such a way that it seems as if he does not fully understand the monstrosity of his actions. Perhaps most importantly for my reading, Iago refuses to speak a word after he has been captured, even when he is asked if he will speak to pray. Thus, the attention of the audience is held in this play until the final scene partly because spectators think that Iago’s malignity will finally be given some motivation. When Iago refuses to speak, the audience’s attention is kept because spectators are encouraged to speculate on his motivations in a way that they would not have been if he had been willing to pray and repent for his sins.

To conclude this introduction, I want to come back to the title of this dissertation—*Mark this Show*—and Marlowe’s *Doctor Faustus* as a way of drawing a connection between preaching and playing in Marlowe’s and Shakespeare’s tragedies. The line I am referencing is spoken by Marlowe’s Lucifer (2.3.104), who seems frustrated that Faustus keeps referring to paradise and creation when he discusses the potential pleasures of seeing a pageant of the Seven Deadly Sins (2.3.100). Lucifer tells Faustus to turn all of his attention towards the delights of Hell, and to “Talk of the devil, and nothing else” (2.3.104-105). Further, Lucifer asks Faustus to “examine them [the Seven Deadly Sins] of their several names and dispositions” (2.3.106). Lucifer attempts to use the interactive and participatory nature of live theatre to turn Faustus’s attention away from questions about Christian theology and towards taking pleasure in vices.

The binary created in the play, however, is not just between the sacred and the profane. Rather, what Lucifer is offering Faustus, and perhaps the audience, is a play that offers an alternate theology to Calvinism, where vice is privileged over virtue, and where there is pride in being marked for damnation. In this way, Faustus’s observation after the play that “this feeds [his] soul” (2.3.157) is telling because it implies that there is little difference for the audience between marking a play that encourages virtue or one that encourages vice. Lucifer tells Faustus that this show is nothing, and that in hell there is “all manner of delight” (2.3.158). The delights of hell are available to anyone who is willing to turn their attention from paradise and creation and to mark this show, in the same way that an antitheatrical discourse might be read as implying that the delights of heaven are available to those who are willing to turn their attention away from the theatres and towards more godly
pastimes. Lucifer’s equivocation implies that the audience is just as in danger of being tempted to hell as Faustus is. While it might be comforting for the audience to judge Faustus, the audience is at the same time implicated because they have watched, and perhaps taken pleasure in, the same spectacle that Lucifer uses to distract Faustus. In other words, when Lucifer says “mark this show”, he addresses something fundamental about how the theatre works. In order for the theatre to move the audience, the audience must mark, or pay attention to, theatrical form. I find it evocative that when Lear is about to preach to Gloucester, “I will preach to thee: mark me” (4.5.170). In the early modern context, both preaching and playing require the willing participation of the audience who must mark the theatrical or religious production. Thus, this dissertation will argue that the early modern

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82 Here is it worth seeing Jonathan V. Crewe’s “The Theater of the Idols: Theatrical and Anti-theatrical Discourse,” in Staging the Renaissance, eds. David Scott Kastan and Peter Stallybrass (New York and London: Routledge, 2013), and his argument that Marlowe and Shakespeare were not so much respondents but participants in what he calls “an anxious cultural discourse of theatre in which questions of chronological priority (of ‘attack’ and ‘response’) are not of paramount importance” (49).

83 While this dissertation is interested in acts of attention, critics within the “cognitive turn” like Evelyn B. Tribble have argued the cognitive ecology of the Globe enabled the distributed cognition of the audience by enabling an interplay of remembering and forgetting for the actors and the audience (37-38). Put simply, the cognitive load of remembering and attending to every detail of a play would have been too much for an early modern audience or an early modern actor, and thus distraction and moments that enable inattention would have been just as important to the affective technology of the stage as ones that pull in the attention of the audience. After all, if I am arguing that a moment like Claudius at prayer creates a heightened state of attention in an early modern audience, this heightened state must correspond to moments of relatively lower attention. Unfortunately, I came to read Tribble’s work late in the process of writing this dissertation and thus my dissertation will not take questions of cognition into account. For more on issues of cognition see Evelyn B. Tribble, Cognition in the Globe: Attention and Memory in Shakespeare’s Theatre (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); Evelyn B. Tribble and Nicholas Keene, Cognitive ecologies and the history of remembering: religion, education and memory in early modern England. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); and Evelyn Tribble, “Distributing Cognition in the Globe,” Shakespeare Quarterly 56.2 (2005): 135-155. See also Laurie Johnson, John Sutton, and Evelyn Tribble (eds), Embodied Cognition and Shakespeare’s Theatre: The Early Modern Body-Mind (New York: Routledge, 2014).
church and the early modern theatre were both concerned with capturing the attention of their audiences, or getting them to mark the show, and that Marlowe and Shakespeare generated interest and attention by staging acts at key moments in the plots of the plays that can be read as ambiguous, interrupted, failed, or parodic confessions, confirmations, prayers, and sermons.
Chapter Two

“To Enlarge the Devil’s Kingdom:”

On Participation, Praying, and Preaching in Marlowe’s *Doctor Faustus*

This chapter is interested in the relationship among repentance, distraction, and dramatic suspense in Christopher Marlowe’s *Doctor Faustus*. My claim is that

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84 For this dissertation, I am primarily using the A-Text of *Doctor Faustus* (1604), and not the B-Text (1616), since the A-Text presents the story as a tragedy, while the B-Text introduces more comic scenes. This is, in the end, a judgment call, and one that I am making based on my preference for the A-Text for the argument of this chapter and because doing so allows me to follow the critical consensus in the field of Marlowe studies that has congealed around the A-Text. According to Sara Munson Deats, Marlowe’s *Doctor Faustus* might be both the first great tragedy in the English language and the second most controversial play ever written (71). For Deats these controversies include concerns over the date of the play, the text of the play, the authorship of the play, and the role of Christian theology within the play itself. Deats notes that the B-Text is much longer and more comic than the A-Text, with an additional 676 lines and dozens of variations. She follows Michael J. Warren and Leah S. Marcus in suggesting that the two plays are just that, two different plays, and Deats notes that the current critical consensus is that the A-text “most closely represents Marlowe’s vision of the play” (73) and that the B-Text additions are a “potpourri including additions for which Henslowe paid William Bride and Samuel Rowley in 1602” (73). I am not wholly convinced by the idea that the A-Text better reflects Marlowe’s intention, since issues of intention have been controversial in the field of English literature for quite some time, but I do agree that many of the comic scenes added to the B-Text seem extraneous to the main thrust of the plot. It is important to remember Marcus’s argument in *Unediting the Renaissance* that having two texts might give a performing company “tremendous flexibility in terms of its ability to satisfy different audiences” (54). For example, Marcus notes that a touring company could switch between editions of the play to “match the prevailing belief systems in a given locale” (54). For Marcus, this is not a matter of situating the play to the desires of an audience to comfort them; in fact, she argues that “By situating the magician [as] the seductive antagonist of the style of belief that a given audience predominantly favored, particularly during a period when issues of doctrinal and ceremony were highly inflammatory and at the center of public debate, the theatrical company would be insuring the highest possible pitch of ‘ravishment’ and horror in terms of audience response” (54). I read Marcus as saying not that the B-Text represents Marlowe’s intention, but that a company could switch between the two editions of the play to better shock and thus sustain the attention of the audience. Thus, while I think that there are times that comparing the A-text to the B-text can be productive and that moving between the A-text and the B-text could produce radically different and engaging effects, this dissertation is going to focus on the A-text. See Sara Munson Deats, “*Doctor
Doctor Faustus gains and maintains the attention of the audience by making them active participants in Faustus’s damnable pleasures. To make this case, this chapter will have three parts: the first part deals with dramatic participation and audience culpability in Doctor Faustus, the second addresses Marlowe’s representation of prayer in Doctor Faustus, and the third part interrogates the way that Faustus captures and then releases the audience’s attention by praying before the audience through a consideration of the difference between an audience and spectator in early modern dramatic theory.

Doctor Faustus thematizes the participatory role of the audience. My reading responds to critics who read the play as Calvinist like Bevington and Rasmussen, Honderich, McAlidon, and Poole, and those who, like Diehl, argue that Marlowe “rehearses the magic, mystery, and wonder of the traditional religion in order to master and contain them.” According to Chloe Kathleen Preedy, this play is unique in Marlowe’s oeuvre because it “inhabits a supernatural Christian universe which harks back to the Heaven-and-Hell duality of late-medieval morality drama.” Furthermore, it is useful to remember Honan’s observation that Marlowe “draws on modern Christian arguments [and late-medieval dramatic structures] without

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86 Chloe Kathleen Preedy, Marlowe’s Literary Skepticism: Politic Religion and Post-Reformation Polemic. (London: Arden Shakespeare, 2012), 161,
undercutting his hero by depriving him of free will."\textsuperscript{87} That is, even if Faustus is damned from the start of the play, he is still a free moral agent who makes the choice to become a magician and to turn away from theology, and it is Faustus’s choices that hold the attention of the audience more than the question of his damnation itself. In saying this, I want to show that Marlowe employs religious discourses to capture and maintain the attention of his audience. Watching Faustus debate clearly damnable theology offers the audience a place in the discussion, as participant observers, while also offering them some assurance that what they are doing is nothing more than a pastime. Marlowe draws in the attention of the audience by making its members recognize how subversive it is to be a \textit{participating} audience that takes pleasure from watching a man attempt to know and do “more than heavenly power permits” (Epilogue 8).

This chapter is indirectly responding to Donald Hendrick’s reading of \textit{Othello} and his articulation of the connection between early modern theatre and early modern magic.\textsuperscript{88} Hendrick briefly discusses the role of magic in \textit{Doctor Faustus} in his essay, arguing that the use of magic in the play is identified with “psychological, criminal, and commercial practices of manipulations of attention.”\textsuperscript{89} I am suggesting that Marlowe’s \textit{Doctor Faustus} manipulates the attention of its audience through encouraging its members to be active participants in the show, not unlike how a magician can distract members of the audience by asking someone to come on stage and “help” perform a trick. I am not the first critic to suggest that Marlowe is invested in the relationship between attention and distraction. Sofer, for example, argues that

\textsuperscript{87} Honan, \textit{Christopher Marlowe: Poet \& Spy}, 206.
\textsuperscript{89} Ibid., 650.
Doctor Faustus “blur[s] the distinction between theatre and magic” and that “The play’s power in performance relies on keeping the ontological stakes of black magic deliberately uncertain” both for the character doing the magic and for the audience watching the magic being done.⁹⁰ Likewise, Gareth Roberts notes that the play is “contradictory” about the “efficacy or inefficacy of magical words” as a “synecdoche for other contradictions.”⁹¹ This creates what Genevieve Guenther calls the plays “soteriological danger,” a danger, Guenther argues, that Marlowe used to his “aesthetic advantage.”⁹² Sofer, Roberts, and Guenther read Doctor Faustus as playing on the thinness of the difference between performing magic and doing magic.

The unsettling role of magic and spectacle in the play, moreover, seems directly tied to the role of dramatic attention in the critical tradition. According to Diehl, Marlowe’s theatre reclaims magic as fundamentally dramatic while it “interrogates its own theatricality, creating spectacles that dazzle and seduce his audience while dramatizing the fall of a protagonist who is bedazzled by demonic shows and seduced by his own power to manipulate images.”⁹³ Thus, for Diehl, the spectators of Marlowe’s theatre “cannot help but become self-conscious about their own relation to the theatre.”⁹⁴ An odd manifestation of this self-consciousness is the persistent rumor that there may have been a demon conjured during a performance of Doctor Faustus, a story that is apocryphal and part of the creation of the Marlowe legend. According to Guenther, Marlowe “stages a Protestant conflation of

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⁹³ Diehl, Staging Reform, 77.
⁹⁴ Ibid., 77.
theatrical representation and magical practice that seemed to call devils to the stage,” and the rumor that devils appeared, or might have appeared, reminds us that the theatre was thought “to have such theological instrumentality that even representations of conjurations could appear to work magic.”\(^95\) Further, Guenther argues that one of the reasons that the play made some viewers think that there might have been actual devils summoned to the stage was that it created a mirror effect, where “the instrument of Faustus’s damnation is the very spectacle represented on stage” and this created a fear in the audience that “their own absorption in the events on stage served as evidence of their own reprobation.”\(^96\) Sofer goes as far as to argue that the play “equates conjuring with the dangerous verbal magic of performativity itself” by enacting the “theater’s potential to escape from the character’s (and the actor’s) control and [it] unwittingly bring into being that which it names.”\(^97\) Perhaps one of the reasons that the “extra devils” story is so attractive to scholars is that it conflates the distinction between being and seeming. What makes the Devil come? Saying the words and meaning them? Or the fact that only somebody whose soul was already in risk of being damned would ever say the words? What might it say about audience members who see extra devils on stage? Are they susceptible to the magic of the theatre, or might their being able to see the extra devils on stage be a sign that they do not have God’s grace? Likewise, might not the very act of being in the theatre and enjoying a play about the potential pleasures of damnation be a sign that audience members were something more than involuntary participants in the delights of hell?

\(^96\) Ibid., 64.
\(^97\) Sofer, “How to Do Things with Daemons,” 2-3
My reading of the audience is influenced by Escolme’s idea that the audience is an observer and co-creator of dramatic persons.98 Hobgood, further, argues that the early modern spectator is a “conscious, collaborative co-creators, alongside drama, of felt experience in Renaissance theatre.”99 For Jeremy Lopez, the early modern audience would have been acutely aware of the limitations of the early modern stage “and that the potential for dramatic representation to be ridiculous or inefficient or incompetent was a constant and vital part of audience’ experiences of the plays.”100 Furthermore, Nova Myhill and Jennifer A. Low contend that the audience is a “vital partner in the production of meaning in early modern England.”101 From the perspective of my larger thesis about dramatic attention, Hobgood’s, Lopez’s, and Myhill and Low’s observations help us to see that early modern audience members are not passive recipients of action; rather, the early modern audience was an active participant in the production of dramatic meaning. Furthermore, according to Ruth Lunney, Faustus “represents the new ‘debatable’ character, about whom the audience asks psychological questions (‘why?’) rather than ethical ones (‘should?’).”102 That is, Lunney argues that the pleasures of the play come not from asking “Ought Faustus have sold his soul?” but “Why did Faustus sell his soul?”103 Since the audience is an active producer of dramatic meaning, and since the primary questions of the play are

98 Escolme, Talking to the Audience, 2-5.
103 Ibid., 158.
aesthetic, the pleasures of the play come from the ambivalent feelings of admiration and contempt that Marlowe enables the audience to feel for a character who finds magic, and, by extension, theatre to be “his chiefest bliss” (Prologue 27).

*Doctor Faustus* maintains the attention of the audience by refusing to resolve the issue of whether or not Faustus can repent until the final scene, while it is never likely that Faustus will repent, for the play to maintain the dramatic attention of the audience it must either show Faustus doing particularly transgressive things with his ill-begotten powers, or it must hold open the possibility that Faustus may yet repent for his sins if given sufficient time or motivation. Faustus’s failure to repent, then, is not as many have argued due to his being reprobate, or to the play’s Calvinist theology. Marlowe creates dramatic attention in the plot by making it seem as if it is dramatically possible that Faustus might repent. The dramatic suspense of the play is dependent on the audience believing, at least to some extent, in the possibility that Faustus could repent, and turn away from the devil towards God, so long as he is willing to focus on his sins long enough to repent. However, if Faustus repents and avoids despair, then he will stop doing the exciting and damnable acts that makes the play entertaining. Marlowe resists, to some degree, making Faustus a scapegoat for these complicated pleasures by assuring that Faustus’s damnation happen offstage.

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106 This is a major difference between the A-Text and the B-Text. In the B-Text the play does not end with Faustus and Mephistopheles walking off together; rather, Faustus is torn to bits
2.1 “The Branch That Might Have Grown Full Straight:” On Audience Participation

*Doctor Faustus* is concerned with the role of the theatrical audience as active participants in creating the magic of the theatre, in the same way that the audience is asked to be interested in Faustus as a participant in his own damnation. To understand the role of participation in the play, we must address Faustus’s participation in his damnation and, in turn, the role of the audience members as willing participants in and takers of pleasure from the play’s themes of damnation. In taking up this task, it is helpful to consider the anxiety that antitheatrical writers had about the theatre putting the very salvation of the audience at stake. Early modern antitheatrical writers were deeply concerned with the way that watching plays might influence or change the spectators who marked them. According to Stephen Gosson, for example, the devil uses the theatre as an “outward spectacles” to “effeminate and soften the hearts of men” such that “vice is learned with beholding, sense is sickled, desire pricked, and those impressions of the mind are secretly conveyed over to the gazers, which the players to counterfeit on the stage.”\(^\text{107}\) For Gosson, moreover, watching a play was little more than the devil teaching men how to fail, or sin, and honest men who went to the theatre to watch a play were at risk of “depart[ing] infected.”\(^\text{108}\) For Thomas Beard, the theatre was a space that polluted the minds of the youth “with many filthy and dishonest speeches” and the

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108 Ibid., 108.
members of the audience had their eyes “infected with many lascivious and unchasted gestures and countenances” such that “their wits are their stained and imbrued with so pernicious liquor that (except God’s good grace) they will ever savor of it.” To make his point, Beard gives the example of a woman who went to watch a play and was then “possessed with an unclean spirit” that seemingly was only able to possess her because “he found her upon his own grounds.” The implication of Gosson and Beard was that going to the theatre and marking plays wakened the resolve of Christians and could lead to damnation but for God’s grace. Gosson and Beard assume that simply watching the play and being present in the theatre is more than enough to infect a wayward soul. Thus, for a play to encourage damnation, there is no need for the audience, or its members, to believe the argument of the show. They simply have to mark it, or attend to it, to be at risk of corruption.

It is in light of the idea that the theatre can weaken the resolve of a Christian spectator that I take up the role the theatre played in tempting Faustus to distraction. Consider, again, Lucifer’s instruction to Faustus that he should “Talk not of paradise nor creation, but mark this show” (2.3.104). This line implies that marking the theatre is in opposition to discussions of Christian theology, but theatre and the church were not always in opposition, and early modern reformers like Foxe thought that theatre could be a tool to teach the audience the theology and stories of the Reformation.

110 Ibid., 168.
111 Barish, The Antitheatrical Prejudice; Diehl, Staging Reform.
112 Mullaney argues that Foxe saw preachers, printers, and players as a “triple bulwarke against the triple crown of the Pope” in the 1570 edition of the Book of Martyrs, but that by 1576 players would be omitted from Foxe’s account (80-81). Further, for Mullaney, it is evocative that the 1576 edition of Foxe was published “in the same year that the Theatre was
Lucifer’s line, however, picks up on a larger early modern religious conversation that was sceptical, and at times abrasive, about the potential uses of theatre for religious instruction. The line seems, at first reading, to express an idea similar to that of William Prynne’s aphorism in *Histriomastix* (1633) that “[t]here [is] no Analogy between Preachers and Players, Sermons and Plays, Theaters and Churches.” As Barish has noted, however, Prynne’s own work is broken into theatrical divisions, with a Prologue, Chorus, and Catastrophe, which Barish argues seems to be an attempt to “turn the terminology of dramatic structure against its usual practitioners and make it serve a godly rather than a satanic purpose.” Prynne’s main frustration with the theatre has to do with its subject matter, and a play like *Doctor Faustus*, with its open discussions of the devil and possible idealization of magic, is exactly the kind of play that Prynne would argue is ungodly. In this reading, Lucifer is using theatre to distract Faustus from thinking of God and godly things and instead to stir up his desire for demonic pleasure. However, if the theatre is a tool of the devil, it is not one that he can use against the will of the audience. For Marlowe, the point of the theatre is that marking it is a distraction, thus making distraction the process of marking the theatre and not the result. Marlowe seems to be saying that the result of marking the theatre, at least for Faustus, is damnation.

In this way, Marlowe seems to be picking up on, and perhaps parodying, early modern critiques of the theatre. While a critic like Prynne might lead us to believe

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that the theatre was in opposition to God and godly things in the early modern imaginary, modern performance theory shows that the theatre and the church are similar. For example, in *Talking to the Audience*, Escolme says that “dramatic subjectivity [is] produced in the moment of performance,” by a triangulation of the staging conditions, the performer, and the audience’s (active, agentive) role in creating the dramatic persons on the stage.\(^{115}\) Thus, Lucifer’s instruction to Faustus to “mark the show” can be understood to mean that Faustus must be a participant in the theatrical creation he is about to witness, and that the show would not exist for him if not for his willing participation in creating theatrical meaning.

Dawson has used the term “participation” to refer specifically to this process, historicizing the audience’s relationship to the theatre by picking up on sixteenth-century debates about the Eucharist.\(^{116}\) Indeed, critics of *Doctor Faustus* like Marjorie Garber have discussed the way that Marlowe evokes the controversy over the Eucharist in *Doctor Faustus*, with Garber noting that Marlowe must have seen the remarkable and risky opportunities to evoke the Mass, what she calls “English Christendom’s purest moment of theatre.”\(^{117}\) Further, for Garber,

In fact, the Protestant liturgical reformers’ attempt to turn the Mass into a communion was directly analogous to the Tudor and Elizabethan dramatists’ efforts to transform the nature of the theatrical experience. The Protestant reformers set out to alter the central ceremony of Christian worship in England from a sacrifice offered to God by a priest on behalf of the people to

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\(^{115}\) Escolme, *Talking to the Audience*, 4.


one which suggested, in both words and actions, a feast in which the worshippers entered into communion with Christ by receiving the elements of the Eucharist. The worshippers became, in effect, a participating audience, whose belief insured the efficacy of the performance.\textsuperscript{118}

The issue with pushing this analogy too far is that the \textit{Book of Common Prayer} clearly sees Transubstantiation as more than a performance. Dawson notes that the term “participation” had two senses in the early modern period. On the one hand, it could mean “a kind of sharing or simply taking part in some joint activity—one participates in a ritual or a game.”\textsuperscript{119} On the other hand was a virtual participation “depending on representation and negotiation.”\textsuperscript{120} In Dawson’s reading of the Anglican position on “real presence,” for example, there is a need for both “presence and representation. The sacrament is not simply a memorial representation, not just a ritual designed to commemorate the Last Supper and the passion.”\textsuperscript{121} To be a full participant in the Eucharist, one must both believe in the ritual and agree that the bread and wine are symbols of Christ’s sacrifice and real presence. In the same way, Dawson contends, paying attention to the theatre involves a kind of double consciousness; the audience knows that the actors are just people pretending to be someone else, but at the same time acts as if the characters are real. In \textit{Bodies Spaces}, for example, Stanton B. Garner, Jr, argues that the process of turning the actor’s body into the character’s body “is at the heart of dramatic presentation, for it is through the actor’s corporeal presence under the spectator’s gaze that the dramatic text actualizes

\begin{footnotes}
\item[118] Ibid., 314-315.
\item[120] Ibid., 26.
\item[121] Ibid., 26.
\end{footnotes}
itself in the field of performance.”\textsuperscript{122} In the same way that the host “actualizes” itself through the willing participation of the faithful audience, so to might we say that the dramatic character’s corporeal presence only becomes a dramatic persona through the spectator’s gaze. The show depends, then, on the active participation of an audience willing to believe that the actor’s body comes to embody the character.\textsuperscript{123}

According to English divine Richard Hooker, for example, participation is the condition not just of the Eucharist, but of salvation itself. For Hooker, “Participation is that mutuall inward hold which Christ hath of us and wee of him, in such sort that ech possesseth other by wair of special interest propertie and inherent copulation.”\textsuperscript{124} In this way, for Hooker, all things are “pertaker of God, they are his ofspringe, his influence is in them, and the personal wisdom of God is for that verie cause said to excel in nimbleness or agilitie, to pearce into all intellectuall pure and subtle spirits, to goe through all, and to reach unto everie the which is.”\textsuperscript{125} That is, Hooker is saying that God participates in every spirit, but that he pierces pure and subtle ones. Further, for Hooker, “Wee are therefore adopted sonnes of God to eternall life by participation of the onlie begotten Son of God, whose life is the welspringe and cause of oures.”\textsuperscript{126} In this way, our salvation depends not just on our being willing to participate in Christ, but in Christ’s sacrifice enabling the conditions whereby one can have eternal

\textsuperscript{123} Another way of saying this is that the creation of dramatic personas requires what Samuel Taylor Coleridge called the “willing suspension of disbelief” (314). For more on this, see Samuel Taylor Coleridge “Biographia Literaria: or, Biographical sketches of my literary life and opinions” (1815-17), in Samuel Taylor Coleridge: The Major Works, ed. H. J. Jackson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 314.
\textsuperscript{124} Hooker, Of The Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity, 234.
\textsuperscript{125} Ibid., 236.
\textsuperscript{126} Ibid., 239.
life by participation. Hooker’s thinking relates to *Doctor Faustus*, insofar as the play does not exist without the participation of the playwright, the theatre, and the actors, but even then, the hold that the play has on the audience depends on their being willing to participate in the co-creation of dramatic meaning. To some degree, this is part of what the Prologue is getting at when it asks the audience to have “patient judgments” (10). A patient judgment, just like participation in Christ, is not passive, but an active engagement with the performance one is being asked to judge.

Coming back to Prynne’s binary between the church and the theatre, the goal of common prayer also involves participation and triangulation of the audience, the actor (or priest) and the setting. The preface to the *Book of Common Prayer*, for example, says that the people shall come to a “love of [Christ’s] true religion” through participating in the life of the church “by daily hearyng of holy scriptures read in the churche” and by praying together as participants in the church.\(^\text{127}\) The church does not work without the participation of the congregation, in the same way that the theatre does not work without the participation of the audience. Thus, it does not matter if the congregation has faith in the efficacy of the prayer as much as it matters that the congregation will be “stirred up to godliness themselves” through *communal* prayer. Likewise, it does not matter if a spectator believes a play to be “true” in the theatre as much as it matters that that spectator is moved by what he or she experiences in the collective space of the theatre. Being moved, in this sense, is not quite the same thing as paying attention. I can pay direct or indirect attention to many different things while I am in the theatre, from the actors on stage to the

audience members around me. But, being moved implies that something has captured my direct attention, and that the other events that are happening in the theatre become distractions. Think, for example, about how in the pageant of the sins the “action” of the scene is Faustus’s questioning the sins in their proper form, but as an audience member we might be distracted by the primary action of the scene and begin watching Lucifer and the other devils interact on the stage. Indeed, part of my point is that if the blocking of the scene or Lucifer’s gestures during this play occupy the attention of an auditor, they are, in a sense, moved by this distraction just as much as they would be if their attention followed the focalized action of the scene.

In the pageant of sins, Marlowe dramatizes the effect of audience participation when Lucifer attempts to show Faustus in the theatrical habit that will hasten his damnation. He does not let Faustus watch the pageant passively, but tasks him with “examin[ing] the sins] of their several names and dispositions” (2.3.106). Faustus is thus both observer of the play’s action and part of it—simultaneously a character, an actor, and a critic. Moreover, he becomes a more active participant as the pageant progresses. He asks the initial sins, Pride, Covetousness, and Wrath, their names, but after Envy’s set speech he exclaims “Away, envious rascal!” (2.3.133), and he tells Gluttony he will see him hanged, since “Thou wilt eat up all my victuals” (2.3.144). Finally, after Faustus meets Sloth and Lechery, Lucifer sends the actors “[a]way, to hell, to hell!” and then asks Faustus “Now, Faustus, how dost thou like this?” (2.3.155-156). The ambiguous “this” refers not just to the play in general, but specifically to the opportunity Lucifer has just given Faustus to examine the seven deadly sins. Faustus’s comment that his role as actor and examiner “feeds [his] soul”
(2.3.157) points again to the analogy between participation in the church and in the theatre. Faustus is not being infected with what the Book of Common Prayer calls a love of religion,¹²⁸ but instead edified by his participation in what Lucifer calls the delights of performance (2.3.158). By marking the show, Faustus is being asked not just to witness a spectacle that will hasten his damnation, but to participate actively in creating the conditions that will lead to his downfall—a downfall that could not happen without his collusion, just as his salvation could not happen without his participation.

Just as Faustus is a participant in his own downfall, so too is the audience complicit in co-creating the theatrical delights of hell. Consider, for example, Faustus’s request after the play to “see hell and return again” (2.3.159). Marlowe here is getting at a central pleasure of the play. The audience is allowed to witness, if not hell, then the slow process of a man’s damnation, but we are also assured that we can return after experiencing this voyeuristic pleasure. In this sense, Lucifer’s lie is telling. He says to Faustus, “Thou shalt [see hell]. I will send for thee at midnight” (2.3.161). Lucifer does send for Faustus at midnight, to be sure, but not that night; it is midnight at the end of the play when he comes for Faustus’s soul. On the night of the pageant, in contrast, Lucifer keeps Faustus distracted with a new book that allows him to “turn [him]self into what shape [he] wilt” (2.3.163). The play, in other words, offers Faustus instructions on how to act like something rather than on how to be something. That Faustus seems to believe Lucifer’s lies, and to take his book, promises the audience that their will be continued pleasures in this play so long as

Faustus is willing to take pleasure in seeming. The implicit promise to the audience is that they will see more delights, more acting, at least until midnight. The audience, like Faustus, is being asked to think about acting and to muse “on the devil” (2.3.166) with the assurance that all may end well—as of course, for the audience, it will. However, in the meantime, to get as much pleasure out of the play as possible its members will mark the action of the plot and help create the dramatic personage of Faustus, a man who will be eventually claimed for damnation.

My concern, then, with readings of Doctor Faustus which see it as primarily a play about the theology of election and predestination is not theological, but dramaturgical. By remaining in their seats after being told that the play would address a character “swoll’n with cunning of a self-conceit” (Prologue 20) and practicing “cursed necromancy” (Prologue 25), the audience is consenting to take pleasure in witnessing and co-creating Faustus’s exploits, including his Icarus-like fall. That is, Marlowe both lets the audience know that the play will end tragically but also keeps the exact nature of Faustus’s tragic downfall ambiguous for as long as he can. A dramaturgy of predestination does not sufficiently address the audience’s participation and complicity in Marlowe’s play. Consider, for example, the apology that the Chorus gives to the audience for the show the players are about to perform. According to the Chorus the play will not be a historical epic, like Tamburlaine the Great, nor will it be a love story between mythic figures. Instead, the Chorus offers

Only this, gentlemen: we must perform

The form of Faustus’ fortunes, good or bad. (Prologue 7-8)
The call to the audience to watch the play as if they were “gentlemen” is not dissimilar to Lucifer telling Faustus to mark the show and examine the characters. Both call for an audience who will be engaged, and perhaps complicit, participants in the action.

The Chorus’s argument about participation and complicity, moreover, corresponds to how the early modern English church understood the problem of election. According to the *Articles of Religion* (1571), the devil is particularly interested in sowing doubt in those doubtful of the doctrine of predestination and election; but for these doubts to take hold, the doubtful have to pay attention to them.\(^{129}\) The adversarial relationship between persons moved by the Spirit of Christ and those manipulated by the devil has to do with attention; according to the Articles, those moved by the Spirit of Christ have their attention turned towards godly things, whereas those possessed by the devil may find their thoughts dwelling on despair.

The *Article on Predestination and Election* (XVII) notes that the godly will find the contemplation of predestination and election “full of sweet, pleasant, and unspeakable comfort” because they have “the Spirit of Christ, mortifying the works of the flesh, and their earthly members, and drawing up their mind to high and heavenly things.”\(^{130}\) In contrast, this Article implies that “for curious and carnal persons, lacking the Spirit of Christ, to have continually before their eyes the sentence of God’s Predestination, is a most dangerous downfall, whereby the devil doth thrust them either into desperation, or into [wretchedness] of most unclean living, no less

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\(^{130}\) Ibid., 294.
perilous than desperation.”\textsuperscript{131} The Chorus hails the audience as “curious and carnal persons” and, while it does not imply that the audience lacks the Spirit of Christ, it does imagine that it will take pleasure from fixing attention on a character for whom “[n]othing so sweet as magic is to him, | Which he prefers before his chiefest bliss” (Prologue 26-27).

Coming back, then, to the themes of misdirection and indeterminacy in the play, let us turn to Lunney’s idea of Marlowe as the creator of the dramatic “debatable character”\textsuperscript{132} as a way of considering the interdependence of Faustus’s and the audience’s pleasure in watching his downfall. Lunney argues that what Marlowe introduced into English drama the idea that a character can evoke “divergent” views about their motivations.\textsuperscript{133} One of the reasons that characters like Faustus, or Hamlet, hold the attention of the audience is that it is possible for intelligent viewers to disagree about their motivations, because those motivations are left ambiguous within the play itself.

Thus, my point is that the attention of the audience is held by two interdependent pillars. First, the play is ambiguous about its theology, and as such we can never be sure within the world of the play if Faustus was always already damned, if his acts of repentance are unsatisfactory, or if what we are seeing is blasphemous or if it is about blasphemy. Second, what makes the play work is that we are not, as an audience, asked to judge Faustus so much as we are asked to try to understand him, his motivations, and his desires. In this way, I read the Chorus’s indifference towards the morality of the play as telling. The Chorus tells the audience that “we must perform | The Form of Faustus’ fortunes, good or bad”

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{131} Ibid., 294.  
\textsuperscript{132} Lunney, \textit{Marlowe and the Popular Tradition}, 125-126.  
\textsuperscript{133} Ibid., 126.
\end{flushleft}
(Prologue 7-8). The “we” of this passage relates not just to the players, but to the audience itself, who are asked to become engaged participants in the creation of the dramatic action. Moreover, Marlowe’s choice of the coordinating conjunction “or” rather than “and” is evocative. The Chorus is not saying that some of what they are going to see is good and that other things that Faustus is going to do will be bad, as they might if the task of the audience was one of moral accounting. Rather, the “or” implies an indifference about the goodness or badness of the actions themselves, since their morality or immorality is secondary to the pleasures of the form of the fortunes themselves. The pleasure is not so much in the adjudication of the rightness (or righteousness) of Faustus’s actions, but in the fact that it is difficult to decide if what Faustus did was good or bad. According to Deats, for example, Faustus “expresses all of our desires, our secret yearnings for more power over our lives, for wealth, for fame, and, yes, also for knowledge.”

To judge Faustus as wrong, by this reading, is to repress the fact that Faustus only expresses desires that many in the audience must have had. It is difficult for the audience to judge Faustus because they have been active participants in his pleasures. Thus, rather than seeing the audience as distant spectators to Faustus’s immoral actions, I am arguing that what is radical about the play is that Marlowe implicates the audience as active participants in Faustus’s decisions enabling them to debate not only if Faustus ought to do what he is doing, but also to speculate if they ought to be watching, and taking pleasure from, what Faustus is doing.

2.2 “Seek to Save Distressed Faustus’s Soul:” On Faustus’s Prayers

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Although the audience knowingly participates in Faustus’s damnation, the structure of the play nevertheless seems to imply that Faustus may yet repent and be punished for his transgressions but not necessarily go to hell. Faustus’s desire to repent comes up several times, in scene 2.1 (1-21), 2.3 (1.17), 5.1 (60-65), and 5.2. In each of these cases, Faustus is left alone on stage or is away from Mephistopheles and his distractions and Faustus’s thoughts drift from earthly pleasures and towards his potential salvation. Dramatically, the main issue with predestination is one of suspense. Predestination may or may not make for logical theology, but it hardly makes for good theatre.

The time provision in the contract between Lucifer and Faustus matters because Faustus seems to be able to walk away from the contract at any point and Lucifer seems unable to claim Faustus’s soul until the twenty-four years have expired. This allows the audience to feel that Faustus might find a clever way out before the time expires. The idea that Faustus might repent becomes troubled at the end of the play, however, when the Chorus says “Cut is the branch that might have grown full straight” (Epilogue 1): it seems unlikely that the branch would actually have grown straight had Faustus been given twenty-five or twenty-six or fifty years to repent.

The dramatic suspense of the play is maintained not because we think Faustus might repent but because we think Faustus is really conflicted about what he should do, in the same way that an early modern audience may feel conflicted about taking pleasure in the story of Faustus’s downfall. Consider, for example, Faustus’s remark about Christ in his final speech:
The stars move still; time runs; the clock will strike;
The devil will come, and Faustus must be damned.
O, I’ll leap to my God! Who pulls me down?
See, see where Christ’s blood streams in the firmament!
One drop would save my soul, half a drop. Ah, my Christ!
Ah, rend not my heart for naming of my Christ!
Yet will I call on him. O, spare me, Lucifer! (5.2.67-73)

Faustus implies that Lucifer will be a participant in his damnation but that Christ is not a participant in his salvation, an idea that seems in direct contrast to Hooker’s idea that Christ is a participant in the spirit of everyone. Faustus would leap up to God, but he is pulled down, presumably by Lucifer and/or the weight of his sins. He twice speaks of “my Christ,” implying that he does believe that Christ died for his sins, but even though Christ’s blood streams from the firmament, Faustus will not reach out to touch it. Faustus seems to need Christ to do more than simply offer him grace and forgiveness: he implies that Christ should do the work of repenting for him, rendering Faustus a passive recipient of his own salvation. If there is an agent here, it is Lucifer who will punish Faustus for naming Christ, and whom Faustus implies is the only person capable of saving him. Faustus begins to turn his attention to Christ’s blood, which can save his soul, but is distracted by the fear that Lucifer will literally tear him apart for naming Christ as his saviour.

The first time Faustus’s loyalty to Lucifer comes into question is during a theological debate between a Faustus and a Mephistopheles gone awry. Faustus enjoys quizzing Mephistopheles about theological issues, but he seems to cross a line
when he asks his familiar “who made the world” (2.3.65)? Mephistopheles will not
tell Faustus that God made the universe, even though he is, as Faustus puts it,
“bound…to tell [Faustus] anything” (2.3.69). He replies that such knowledge is
“against our kingdom” (2.3.70), implying that Faustus and Mephistopheles are both
members of the Kingdom of Hell and that even the damned make a distinction
between what the damned should seek to know and what knowledge is taboo.
Mephistopheles tries to redirect Faustus’s attention to the devil: “Think thou on hell,
Faustus, for thou are damned” (2.3.71); but Faustus, with contempt, tells
Mephistopheles that he will “[t]hink…upon God, that made the world” (2.3.72). The
exchange is redolent with dramatic tension about Faustus’s ability to be saved.

But why does Mephistopheles care if Faustus is thinking upon God? After all,
he has already signed his soul over to the devil. In a moment of doubt about his
Faustian bargain, after consulting with the Evil and Good Angels, Faustus seems to
agree with the Good Angel that it is “[n]ever too late, if Faustus can repent” (2.3.78),
and he begins to talk to Christ about his sins:

Ah, Christ, my Saviour,
Seek to save distressed Faustus’s soul! (2.3.81-82)

It is unclear whether this is an act of repentance, since Faustus is not admitting that
his soul is distressed because of the wicked things he has done and taking
responsibility for them, but rather is asking Christ to do the work to save his soul, in a
perversion of the idea of predestination. Faustus’s phrasing may imply that he regrets
what he is doing, but it is not clear whether this is because his actions have distressed
his soul or because they are transgressions against God. Regardless, this is a man
struggling to come to terms with his impending damnation, alone onstage, perhaps in a posture of prayer, calling on Christ to do the labour of saving his soul. Faustus’s repentance here is more than a theoretical possibility: it is a dramatic one. Faustus’s desire for Christ to save his soul betrays the same misunderstanding of Protestant theology he displays when he tells Mephistophel's to have a “manly fortitude, | [while] scorn[ing] those joys [he] never shalt possess” (1.3.86-87), or when he says that all men must “die an everlasting death”(1.1.48), or when he reveals that he is afraid and angered by “the heavy wrath of God!” (5.2.77). This is not a despairing Faustus, telling his friends, the other scholars, that his offence “can ne’er be pardoned” (5.2.14); these are the words of a character who is, as the Old Man suggests, “call[ing] for mercy” in order to “avoid despair” (5.1.56). The dramatic tension is maintained by the idea that perhaps Faustus might actually repent. But of course, Faustus does not finish his thought—instead, as he begins to feel repentant, Lucifer, Beelzebub, and Mephistopheles enter the stage and distract him.

The conflict, however, is not resolved through Faustus’s physical punishment, but by the pageant of sins. Lucifer does not, as the Evil Angel has promised, “tear [Faustus] in pieces” (2.3.79). Rather, he playfully tells Faustus that he is wasting his time praying to Christ, who “cannot save thy soul, for he is just. | There’s none but I have int’rest in the same” (2.3.83-84). Lucifer encourages Faustus to turn his attention from God to “think of the devil, | And of his dame, too” (2.3.91-92). There is something playful, even charming, about Lucifer asking Faustus to consider the devil’s dame. Rather than a fearsome figure, he seems more like a dry and entertaining wit. Faustus, perhaps in a state of terror over Lucifer’s terrible
appearance, promises to keep his vow to the Prince of Darkness in terms that seem almost a parody of demonic conversion:

Nor will I henceforth. Pardon me in this,
And Faustus vows never to look to heaven.
Never to name God or to pray to him,
To burn his Scriptures, slay his ministers,
And make my spirits pull his churches down. (2.3.93-97)

Faustus seems to be articulating a demonic version of “good” works, as if he needs to bribe his way into hell. What is most evocative here is the idea of being pardoned by Lucifer for naming God and praying to him; it is almost as if Faustus is saying that he has either sinned against or offended the Prince of Darkness by considering repentance. Furthermore, if considering God is something for which Faustus must apologize, then dramatically if not theologically, the implication is that his offense is real and that the threat of his converting back to Christianity is as strong as was the original threat of his conversion to necromancy.

Coming back to Faustus’s engagement with the play about the seven deadly sins as a way of expanding on the relationship between participation and distraction, while Lucifer seems mollified with these sinister oaths, he soon reveals the darker purpose of his visit: “Faustus, we are come from hell to show thee some pastime” (2.3.99). Faustus says that seeing a play about the seven deadly sins would be “as pleasing unto [him] as paradise was to Adam the first day of creation” (2.3.102-103). Certainly, Lucifer seems displeased by Faustus’s return to theological themes, and tells him to “[t]alk not of paradise nor creation, but mark this show” (2.3.104). Notice
the choice implied by the binary: marking the devil’s play is the securest way to enter his kingdom, just as meditating on salvation is the way to enter God’s.

Hendrick argues that the most engaging theatrical distractions are the ones that ask for the most participation from the audience. Consider Faustus’s discussion of the participation and distraction of his “hardened” heart in 2.3. After the Evil Angel tells Faustus that he “never shall repent” (2.3.17), Faustus says in monologue:

My heart’s so hardened I cannot repent.

Scare can I name salvation, faith, or heaven,

But fearful echoes thunder in mine ears:

‘Faustus, thou art damned!’ The swords and knives,

Poisons, guns, halters, and envenomed steel

Are laid before me to dispatch myself;

And long ere this I should have slain myself

Had not sweet pleasure conquered deep despair. (2.3.18-25)

If Faustus can only name salvation, faith, or heaven, then he will be able to focus his attention, and the audience’s attention, on them. But instead, he is distracted by his impending damnation, and his thoughts turn to despair. Faustus’s evocation of suicide raises for the audience a potential tragic ending of a Roman sort, where Faustus realizes the benightedness of his life and kills himself. Instead, however, Faustus is distracted even from his despair by the “sweet pleasure” that conjuring brings. In what follows, Faustus reminds himself and the audience of the pleasures he has

enjoyed, including having Homer sing to him (2.3.26). Why, Faustus asks, should a man who has had so many pleasures “basely despair” (2.3.31)? He then says that he is “resolved” that he “shall ne’er repent” (2.3.32); however, this statement seems to be conditional: he shall never repent so long as his conjuring brings him—and by extension the audience—enough pleasure to drown out his despair at losing salvation. Only when the pleasure is gone and there is nothing left to distract him will he try to repent in order to avoid damnation.

The audience, then, is placed in a space of double consciousness. We have to know that Faustus’s gambit is unlikely to work, and that the longer he puts off thinking about salvation to focus on his sweet pleasures, the harder it will be for him to repent. Yet, it is not clear that we should, like the Good Angel or the Old Man, hope for his repentance, since this would also bring an end to the pleasures of his transgressive plot. At the very least, the audience is asked to hope that Faustus will not repent until he has gotten all the pleasure he can from necromancy, so that its members, in turn, can enjoy these pleasures with him until he is dragged off to hell. The audience’s pleasure, in other words, depends on Faustus’s continued distraction.

2.3 “What Means This Show?” On Preaching as the Devil’s Labour

Building on the work of the previous section, I want to turn here to discuss the ways that Marlowe captures the audience’s attention through the use of the sermon form. My main argument in this section is that as Faustus speaks, as a preacher, to the audience as a collective and encourages its members to pay attention to his words.
More generally, the play is concerned with the way the sermon form uses vision and spectacle to create and maintain the attention of individual spectators. Rather than an either/or, spectator/auditor distinction in the nature of the audience’s participation, I argue that Marlowe captures, maintains, and then releases the audience’s attention using a both/and dramaturgical strategy that also reflects an important tension in early modern theories of preaching and liturgy.

In both the opening and closing scenes, Faustus talks directly to the audience to invite them to be complicit participants in his downfall. These moments are openly artificial: Faustus is not debating matters of theology when he gives his lecture and is not attempting to repent but to convince the audience that he could repent and that God is not doing enough to help him. The audience is asked to believe that the devil is willing to put as much work into capturing the soul of a man who seemingly wants to be damned as Christ puts into protecting the souls of the elect. The idea that the devil would do so fits the pattern of English Protestant thought on the role of the devil in the lives of individual Christians. Nathan Johnstone notes that the concept of the devil shifted during the wider Reformation, as clergy became convinced that “Satan offered an intimate threat to every Christian, especially when his agency was driven equally by a sense of the personal danger in the face of demonic power, and by a belief that diabolism lay concealed behind the superficial piety of the Catholic church.”136 That is, the devil represented a real threat to the Reformation, and his primary function became to tempt the individual to sin or doubt.137 Johnstone says

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137 Ibid., 2.
that Protestants “advocated a personal engagement with the demonic within the conscience,” stressing that each individual was ultimately responsible for resisting Satan’s influence.\footnote{Ibid., 2.} A primary task of priests, in this paradigm, was to help keep their congregation’s attention focused on the divine and away from the devil.

In \textit{Doctor Faustus} Marlowe blends the visual with the verbal to get the audience to pay attention to the protagonist. For instance, Faustus is introduced to the audience surrounded by his books “that have sustained and will destroy him.”\footnote{Dawson, “Props, pleasure, and idolatry,” 143.} The same strategy is evident in \textit{The Jew of Malta} when Barabas comes onstage surrounded by his gold. This strategy fosters a dramatic interest in the anti-heroic or villainous protagonist and a certain sense of envy in the audience. Just as the audience may desire Barabas’s wealth, they might also desire Faustus’s seemly endless knowledge. Faustus’s books are a kind of wealth just as Barabas’s gold is: the play begins with Faustus having to “[s]ettle [his] studies,” implying that he can have his pick of learned professions (1.1.1). Faustus’s costuming matters here: he is wearing a monk’s frock, and he says that he will be a “divine in show” (1.1.3), signalling that there will be a stark difference in the play between how something looks and what it really is. Further, as Faustus considers and dismisses subjects like logic, medicine, and law, he drops names—Aristotle, Galen, Justin—and Latin quotations that seem to imply that he has an impressive education, but not necessarily that he fully understands any of the thinkers to which he refers. Faustus seems to be educated in show. According to Deats, the juxtaposition of Faustus’s language and his seeming misunderstanding matters because “Faustus, like many another Marlovian
overreachers, pits the magnificent words against the ignoble deed.”¹⁴⁰ He does not really understand the ends of logic, medicine, or law, and his proofs of the irrelevance of these subjects show only that he has a talent for sounding as if he knows what he is talking about while, at the same time, obscuring issues and misleading the audience. Faustus’s switching back and forth between Latin and English is impressive and even showy, especially because he translates all of his Latin quotations into English, implying that he could have used the vernacular in the first place if his goal were really to convince the audience that the “metaphysics of magicians” is the only subject worth studying.

Rhetorically, then, Faustus’s sermon begins by celebrating man’s cleverness and by obscuring a serious theological issue about the nature of forgiveness and salvation with needless, distracting, and prejudicial asides. Further, as Deats notes, responses to Faustus tend to divide on the question of surface and depth. Those who care more about what she calls “Faustus mellifluous lines” tend to turn a blind eye to his “foolish escapades” and adopt a heroic reading of the character.¹⁴¹ In contrast, those who only look at what Faustus does “will judge Faustus not only [as] fatally flawed but [as] something of a fool as well.”¹⁴² According to Deats, then, the best readings of Marlowe come from those who are able “both to hear and see simultaneously.”¹⁴³ Here, moreover, it is helpful to consider what Robert A. Logan

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 88.
¹⁴² Ibid., 88.
¹⁴³ Ibid., 88.
calls the role of “amoral and immoral role-players” in Marlowe’s work.\textsuperscript{144} For Logan, Marlowe’s plays make amoral role-playing seem attractive, but “For all of Marlowe’s fascination with characters who energetically test the limits of human power, whatever their circumstances and intentions, not one comes to a happy conclusion. The chief cause is that impersonal force of flux which destroys all assertions of power and fixity but its own.”\textsuperscript{145} Thus, while Faustus’s rejection of humanism for the metaphysics of magicians may seem enticing, what Marlowe is setting up in this scene is that Faustus’s moral relativism will be the cause of his downfall.

Faustus’s articulation of the importance of magic, moreover, implies that it is a bookish way of thinking, just like Protestant Christianity, but that books of magic surpass divine ones because of their enticing pictures, which keep one’s attention. Directly after putting down a Bible, Faustus picks up a book of magic and begins to praise the text for its ability to give him power, honour, and omnipotence (1.1.56). According to Faustus,

\begin{quote}
These metaphysics of magicians
And necromantic books are heavenly,
Lines, circles, schemes, letters, and characters—
Ay, these are those that Faustus most desires.
O, what a world of profit and delight,
Of power, of honour, of omnipotence
Is promised to the studious artisan! (1.1.51-57)
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{144} Robert A. Logan, \textit{Shakespeare's Marlowe: The Influence of Christopher Marlowe on Shakespeare's Artistry} (Surrey: Ashgate, 2013), 89.
\textsuperscript{145} Ibid., 89.
These necromantic books compete with the Book for Faustus’s attention, and outcompete it due to their promise of profit and delight through the understanding of images. By decoding these lines, circles, and so on, Faustus will become a necromantic artisan.

Skill as a necromancer, moreover, is something one can obtain through industry, whereas one cannot become a member of the Reprobate or the Elect in a Calvinist framework without being selected or rejected by God. For Protestants, salvation comes not through works but through justification and election, something discussed in more detail in my next chapter. By decoding the visual signs, Faustus tells the audience, “All things that move between the quiet poles | Shall be at my command” (1.1.58-59). In other words, the audience should pay attention to him not because what he is doing is ethical or just, or because they will profit from his actions, but because they can delight in watching him bend the will of “Emperors and kings” to his desires (1.1.59). As Faustus says,

A sound magician is a mighty god.

Here, Faustus, try thy brains to gain a deity. (1.1.64-65)

The best the Bible can promise, according to Faustus, is “an everlasting death” for all who sin (1.1.48), while necromancy brings delight, earthly power, and the chance to become a god by means of one’s intelligence. For Faustus to hold our attention, we do not have to agree with him about the benefits of applying oneself to necromancy; we only have to agree that it is exciting to hear him discuss becoming a god on earth and would also be exciting to see him try—and likely fail—to become a sound magician.
In this light, Faustus’s misreading of “Jerome’s Bible” (1.1.38) is evocative because it tells us that he is already leaning towards despair before he signs a contract to sell his soul. Faustus views Jerome’s Bible well, but he does not view it with grace. He cites the first part of Romans 6:23, “[t]he reward of sin is death” (1.1.41), saying that such a theology is “hard” (1.1.41), and reasoning

If we say that we have no sin,

We deceive ourselves, and there’s no truth in us.

Why then belike we must sin,

And so consequently die.

Ay, we must die an everlasting death. (1.1.44-48)

What Faustus misses is the context of the line, since the next line of the passage he cites speaks of the rewards of faith as an everlasting life. The discussion of the rewards of sin here is given in juxtaposition to the idea of God’s gift of eternal life. Yet this disregard does not just mean that Faustus is a poor reader of scripture; his discussion of sin is an excuse, a means of sowing doubt in our minds and giving the audience permission to enjoy the play. If the reward of sin is death, and if we, as audience members, are all implicated and therefore all sinners, then we might as well enjoy the entertainment that the play provides. If Faustus is to be saved, he implies, taking up the study of magic will have no impact; and if he is already damned, then there is no reason for him not to “try his brains to gain a deity” (1.1.65). If the members of the audience are saved, then watching a play should play no part in their eventual fate; if the audience members are damned, they will be damned if they watch the play or not. The attention that the audience pays to sermons is intended to be
transformative, insofar as the audience is asked to turn their attention away from the world, and worldly things, and towards God. What I am arguing here, then, is that Marlowe is registering a scepticism about the sermonic, suggesting that collective acts of witnessing might not have any impact on the souls of the audience, whether or not one’s attention is fixed on God and Godly things, or on the demonic.

However, while it is the case that Faustus is able to dissemble when he discusses the pleasures of necromancy and to put off turning his attention away from necromancy and towards God throughout the play, in the last scene he finds, like Claudius, that there is no “shuffling” (*Hamlet* 3.3.61) when it comes to repentance. The play, then, shifts from the sermonic, as Faustus asks the audience to pay attention to the demonic rather than the godly, to prayers. The reason the prayer scene works has very little to do with its theatricality. The action of the scene is just Faustus standing on the stage. Rather, the scene works because Faustus is alone on the stage. The audience pays close and careful attention to what he says because there are no other distractions on the stage and because we suspect that he is being earnest. Faustus’s final prayer forces him, and by extension the audience, to address the consequences of his study of magic; he finds himself unable to dissemble or shuffle off his guilt but at the same time unwilling to repent the ambition that led him to his actions. What is most evocative about the final scene is not what Faustus says when he tries to rationalize away his sins, but how long he speaks for. He speaks for 115 lines, alone on stage, begging for more time so “That Faustus may repent and save his soul!” (*5.2.57-115*). Where his first long speech was filled with props, radical ideas, and an open defiance of biblical authority that seemed designed to capture the
audience’s attention, this scene is concerned with the dark consequences of those ideas, and lacks the distractions, playfulness, and self-assurance of the first scene. Marlowe relies on the audience to pay attention to the scene and listen closely to what Faustus is saying in order to find out if he will “get away with it.”

The length of Faustus’s final prayer creates dramatic engagement and tragic estrangement. A stage direction tells us that Faustus’s final confession begins when “[t]he clock strikes eleven” (5.2); and when Faustus pleads with God to allow his body to be tormented perpetually “So that [his] soul may but ascend to heaven” (5.2.87), another stage direction tells us that “The watch strikes” (5.2). It is as if time itself quickens here, as a punishment of Faustus for complaining about “the heavy wrath of God!” (5.2.77) and not turning his attention to repentance. Faustus even narrates this escalating time for the audience: “[a]h, half the hour is past! ’Twill all be past anon” (5.2.88-89). The striking of the watch seems to momentarily distract Faustus from his despair, and when he is not fixated on his imminent damnation he tries to pray:

O God,
If thou wilt not have mercy on my soul,
Yet for Christ’s sake, whose blood hath ransomed me,
Impose some end to my incessant pain.
Let Faustus live in hell a thousand years,
A hundred thousand, and at last be saved.
O, no end is limited to damned souls. (5.2.90-96)
According to Deats, moreover, Faustus’s lament can be read as a reference to Origen’s (CE 185-254) argument that a merciful God would not create a system that leads to perpetual torment, an idea that Marlowe as a student of divinity would have likely been aware of—an argument that promoted the existence of purgatory, a concept jettisoned by reformers.¹⁴⁶ In fact, Origen’s ideas were considered radical because he thought that even Satan would eventually be reunited with the divine. Further, Deats suggests that the audience’s conflicted sympathy for Marlowe’s protagonist might finally be won because he evokes a “particularly pitiless aspect of Calvinist/Lutheran Protestantism and wins audience allegiance for [Marlowe’s] hero through the failure of the punishment to fit Faustus’s crime.”¹⁴⁷ If Deats is right, then Faustus wins the audience’s sympathy in this scene at the expense of instilling doubt in its members’ mind about God’s mercy.

In petitioning God to let him suffer in hell as long as it is not forever, Faustus represents himself as helpless: God should save him “for Christ’s sake” and not for the sake of what Faustus has done or plans to do. The audience might feel like there is a limit to the tormenting of souls, but that it can only come if Faustus admits his wrongdoing and repents. And yet, it is hard to think of a more anticlimactic way to end the play than to have Faustus saved “at the last.” That is, while I take Deats’s point that Faustus articulates a theological injustice, would it not also have been a dramatic injustice for Faustus to be saved at this point in the play? The pleasure the audience is asked to anticipate here, and that is eventually denied, is that Faustus will

¹⁴⁶ Deats, “Doctor Faustus,” 87.
¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 87-88.
serve as a scapegoat for our own pleasure—made to suffer incisive pains on the stage, tormented in front of us, and then taken to hell.

Faustus has but half an hour to live, and yet he is bargaining for another thousand years of “incessant pain.” He may be implying that he is an ideal candidate for Purgatory, and that spending time being tormented might allow him to hope to one day atone for his sins. As Faustus gets closer to repentance, he seems to run out of time, as if his repentance comes right down to the proverbial buzzer:

No, Faustus, curse thyself. Curse Lucifer,
That hath deprived thee of the joys of heaven.

_The clock striketh twelve._

O, it strikes, it strikes! Now, body, turn to air,
Or Lucifer will bear thee quick to hell. (5.2.106-109)

Again the play gives us the pleasures of seeing Faustus tormented, with the added piquant irony that his dying sense of urgency is too late—he could have repented if he had started sooner. The stage directions (the clock) and Faustus’s repetition of “it strikes” alert the audience that the play is coming to its promised tragic end. Faustus is preparing us to shift our attention and pleasure as participants from co-creating his character to passive witnesses who must now watch him being tormented.

When Lucifer, Mephistopheles, and the other devils enter the stage, they likely do so through the “ugly hell” (5.2.114) of the hell-mouth. The final line of the play seems to come back, once again, to the issue of divided attention. Faustus’s final words are “I’ll burn my books. Ah, Mephistopheles!” (5.2.115). The first part of the line is likely said out of terror. In contrast, “Ah, Mephistopheles!” (5.2.120) is said
with relief; the ordeal is finally over. That is, seeing Mephistopheles seems to distract Faustus from the desperate terror with which he began the line and to imply a kind of release.

In conclusion, I come back to the idea of audience participation so that I can discuss the audience’s odd burden of judging Faustus for his sins. By audience participation I am speaking about the process the audience goes through both of co-creating the dramatic personal and also, and importantly, in judging the actions of that persona as part of the act of co-creation. Returning to Escolme and her sense that she cannot judge Macbeth because she feels “partly responsible for the figure he becomes in the act of performing to [her],” judging Faustus is in a real way to judge ourselves, since the audience is an active participant and co-creator of dramatic meaning in this play. According to Kristen Poole, if God is asked to judge Faustus in this play, it is important to remember that He is not the only judge. She looks at the opening Prologue’s request for the audience to be a patient judge, and notes that the audience is not just asked to hold their applause until the play is over, but to judge Faustus’s eschatological status. As she notes,

The Burden to judge in this case, however, is heavy. Just as Faustus finds himself torn between the urge to repent and a conviction of his own damnation, or between older and newer theologies, so too an early modern audience would find its relationship to Faustus fraught with uncomfortable ambiguities. For all of his failings, Faustus does have his good points. He has

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149 Poole, “The Devil's in the Archive,” 195.
150 Ibid., 195.
an intellectual curiosity that many might consider admirable, he is clearly well liked by his concerned friends, and he has an engaging sense of humour. In many of the pranks that he pulls, we are invited to laugh along with him, and are thus drawn into his company. Furthermore, the play creates an intimacy between Faustus and audience.\textsuperscript{151}

In this chapter, I have argued that it is difficult to judge Faustus because the audience is complicit in his pleasures. By “complicit” I do not mean that the audience equally responsible for Faustus’s fallings as the tragic hero, or that we have been unknowing co-conspirators in creating the wonder and pleasures of his downfall. Faustus can no more happen without being marked than Macbeth could, and thus the members of the audience are partly responsible for the pleasures they have taken in watching his downfall. Thus, my point is that dramatic participation both invites judgment and subverts judgment, since the behaviours with which we disagree are partly created by us and for our enjoyment. If the members of the audience do not “mark this show,” then, Faustus can not have performed his transgressions for its pleasure. Not only has the audience helped to create Faustus, but the things that he does are things that the audience might want to do themselves but would not dare to try. There is something deeply ambivalent about Faustus as a character and about \textit{Doctor Faustus} as a plot that encourages audience participation and identification with damnable actions while, at the same time, being rather ambivalent about the soteriological danger of audience participation. That is, where anti-theratricalist like Northbroke, Gosson, and Beard argue that the kinds of pleasures Faustus offers places the audience in danger of damnation, Marlowe is more ambivalent about the spiritual dangers of watching a subversive

\textsuperscript{151} Ibid., 195.
play.
Chapter Three

“Forgive Me My Foul Murder:” On the Dramaturgical Function of Claudius’s Prayer

This chapter will address the dramaturgical relationship between Claudius’s prayer and Hamlet’s delay. Typically, Claudius’s prayer is seen as evidence of Hamlet’s delay. For example, the issue of Hamlet’s delay, and the play’s lack of an objective correlative, was addressed in T.S. Eliot’s “Hamlet and His Problems,” where Eliot argues that the play never fully justifies Hamlet’s delay. The issue of Hamlet’s delay has become a central critical concern in recent years, with critics like Jacques Derrida, Kastan, and Robert Weimann weighing in on the issue. In *Hamlet*

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153 Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: the state of the debt, the work of mourning, and the new international*, trans Peggy Kamuf (New York and London: Routledge, 2006), 17-19; David Scott Kastan, *A Will to Believe*, 118-143; and Robert Weimann, *Author’s Pen and Actor’s Voice: Playing and Writing in Shakespeare’s Theatre* (Cambridge; Cambridge University Press, 2000), 23-5. According to Kastan, “It is now a commonplace that the problem of Hamlet, the problem for Hamlet, is his uncertainty about the nature of the ghost, an issue that can be decided (or perhaps can’t) by turning to religious debate in the sixteenth century on the question of salvation” (118) such that there has been a shift in critical readings of the play away from psychoanalytic readings and towards ones that address religion (118). Ultimately, however, Kastan thinks that such religious readings are too aggressive, and that Hamlet’s doubts about the Ghost say more about his desire to “re-establish attenuated psychological and social bonds [with his father] rather than to perform some act of intercession, or even of intelligence gathering” (120). While this essay is outside the scope of my project, I want to note that I find Richard Halpern’s discussion of economics, poiesis and praxis particularly evocative. Essentially, Halpern argues that Hamlet “explores the tension between action and production,” a tension that he says is still relevant to our times (450). See Richard Halpern, “Eclipse of Action: *Hamlet* and the Political Economy of Playing.” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 59.4 (Winter 2008), 450.
without Hamlet, de Grazia argues that the issue of Hamlet’s delay has become “the question to ask for the play.” She calls the question of Hamlet’s delay the “Mona Lisa of literature” and suggests that answering the question is central to understanding both Hamlet’s character and “the play that is at the heart of Shakespeare’s canon.”

My point here is not that Hamlet does not delay, but that the prayer scene is necessary so that the audience can have a confirmation that Claudius only seems repentant. While Claudius reveals what he has done, his confession is not a conversion, nor is it an act of repentance. While not all confessions are conversions, if confessing involves returning to God, then all confessions involve an acknowledgement that one’s previous actions were not quite sufficient and thus that one has to return one’s attention to God and Godly things. Thus, what I am saying is that, in a Protestant paradigm, to confess is to convert, and thus conversion is not a singular process, but an ongoing collection of processes of confessing and converting one’s will to God’s will. That is, admitting what he has done does not change Claudius, and as such this prayer is not a confession of his sins in the religious sense, even if it is given in the form of a prayer. The play, moreover, maintains the dramatic attention of the audience through directly engaging with a ambiguous religious issue, the relationship between merely admitting to sin and seeming to be repentant and actually repenting and turning one’s attention to God. Thus, I am going to argue that this scene is not about delay at all, but about confirmation.

This chapter is responding, then, to an emerging body of scholarship on Claudius at prayer, and it is adding to that body of scholarship by arguing that the

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155 Ibid., 158.
dramaturgical function of Claudius’s failed prayer is related to Hamlet’s delay. It is evocative that in 1997 Targoff could call Claudius at prayer “a well known but relatively unexamined moment in *Hamlet*” that for centuries was considered to be “little more than another example of Hamlet’s procrastination and delay.”\(^\text{156}\) For example, for Michael Neill, Claudius’s guilt is confirmed by his reaction to the mousetrap, and Claudius’s prayer is just an example of the role of surveillance in the play.\(^\text{157}\) Since then, however, important critics working on religion and theatre, such as Dawson and Targoff, have given readings of the scene that highlight its religious and dramaturgical importance.\(^\text{158}\) Yet, what I think that these critics are missing is a sense of the dramaturgical function that Claudius at prayer serves within the play itself. In a play about the limits of evidence and human knowledge, what Claudius’s failed act of repentance provides the audience is surety.

This chapter will argue that Claudius at prayer less as a moment that models early modern prayer and more as a way of distinguishing between confirmation and confession. To confirm something is to put knowledge and actions on display and to admit to what one has done and why one has done it. To confess, in contrast, involves an open acknowledgment of action and motivation, but it also involves a turning of one’s whole being away from sin and towards God. While I am calling what Claudius says a “confession,” I want to be clear that it is a failed one, but that it is a successful confirmation of how Claudius actually feels about murdering his brother. The OED

\(^{156}\) Targoff, “The Performance of Prayer,” 49
\(^{158}\) Dawson, “Claudius at Prayer” and Targoff, *Common Prayer*. 
says that *confession* was, by 1604, being used to mean “the disclosing of something the knowledge of which by others is considered humiliating or prejudicial to the person confessing; a making known or acknowledging of one's fault, wrong, crime, weakness,” or as the act of admitting sin.\(^{159}\) The early modern Protestant idea of confession, however, was somewhat more robust, insofar as it implies futurity. In Protestant thought, the confessant is to acknowledge his or her sins, to ask God directly for forgiveness, and to promise that he or she will act differently in the future. Indeed, the confessant’s ability to follow through on his or her confession was seen as a sign of God’s grace, whereas continued sinfulness was a sign of damnation. Thus, to confess is both to acknowledge one’s fault and to promise to return oneself to godliness in the future. According to the *Book of Homilies* (1571), confessing is not just for times when one has sinned, since all men are sinful and in need of justification from God if they are to receive “remission, pardon, and forgiveness of [their] sins and trespasses in such things as [they] hath offended.”\(^{160}\) Sinning is a turning away from God and repentance can be understood as a turning (or re-turning) of one’s spirit and body towards God.\(^{161}\) Since all men are born sinful and fallen, all men are in need of perpetual repentance to God, since the process of turning or returning to the divine was an ongoing struggle and not a one-off process. While Claudius “confesses” in the sense that he confirms his crimes, he does not turn or


\(^{161}\) Ibid., 24.
return to God. Indeed, part of the point of his confession is that there is no way for him to simultaneously keep the rewards of his sin while, at the same time, returning his attention to God and Heavenly things.

My argument, then, is supported by Maus’s work on inwardness, which proposes a tension between what people outwardly seem to be and what they actually are, and by Beckwith’s argument that theologies of forgiveness moved away from performed penance as a set of actions, toward repentance as “the turning or returning of the whole mind and soul and life to God.” I argue that what the audience sees in *Hamlet* are forms of prayer where characters take sentiments that would typically be private and make them external and theatrical. Moreover, what draws the audience’s attention to Claudius’s prayer is that he is alone on stage, speaking to God, while its members overhear him confess his guilt. Claudius’s externalization of his guilt and inability to repent for his sins matters to my larger dissertation because his confession helps to hold the attention of the audience without leading to moments where the transgressions of the play, both real and imagined, can be redressed.

Finally, this chapter is addressing the relationship between vengeance and justification in *Hamlet*. For Maus, Deborah Willis, and Pollard, revenge tragedies are primarily about the question of who has a right to justice against those

who have harmed their family. According to Maus, for example, revenge tragedies “feature someone who prosecutes a crime in a private capacity, taking matters into his own hands because the institutions by which criminals are made to pay for their offenses are either systematically defective or unable to cope with some particularly difficult situation.”\textsuperscript{167} For Maus, the structure of revenge tragedy “complicates the issues of justice with which it is so deeply concerned” because “[r]evenge...evokes mixed moral feelings.”\textsuperscript{168} What I am arguing is that \textit{Hamlet} minimizes the mixed moral feelings about revenge and regicide by having Claudius’s prayer establish his guilt beyond a reasonable doubt. The prayer establishes that Claudius killed his brother, that he feels guilty for what he has done, and that he is unrepentant. In short, the prayer marks Claudius as a character who cannot be forgiven and who it is thus justifiable for Hamlet to kill.

3.1 On Penance and Confession

The relationship between penance and confession was complicated during the English Reformation. In The Ten Articles (1536), for example, penance is understood as a sacrament that leads to salvation.\textsuperscript{169} In the Thirty-Nine Articles (1571), penance was no longer a sacrament and the only good works that are said to please God are those that spring from a lively faith in Christ.\textsuperscript{170} According to Shuger, there was a general reformation of the Catholic conception of penance, a reformation that she

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charts by giving a close reading of William Allen’s *Defense of Purgatory* (1565). Shuger argues that the defense of penance has three crucial aspects. First, penance is a “retribution for violations of divine justice; that is, [the] purpose [or penance] is not to heal or purify the sinful soul but to punish it for having sinned.” Second, penance is a form of satisfaction whereby “punishment is understood as payback.” In this view sin is a form of pleasure and “that is why it must be paid for in the currency of pain.” Third, in a penance system, sin is a form of debt, and the seriousness of the penance must be proportional to the amount of debt the sinner acquired by sinning.

This is, in part, why auricular confession was so important to a Catholic understanding of penance. It was the task of the priest to listen to the confession, decide how serious the sin was, and to then assign punishment. Ideally, the penance as a fine for sin was to be large enough to deter the sinner for committing future sins, but the penance was not too extravagant.

The sacrament of penance was tied to the logic of indulgences, and thus to the idea of purgatory. According to Duffy, an indulgence is a pardon for sin, and “The pardon concerned was remission not of sin, but merely of the penance or temporal punishment believed to be

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171 Debora Shuger, “The Reformation of Penance.” *Huntington Library Quarterly* 71.4 (December 2008), 557-571. I use this article with some hesitation, since James Simpson has argued that Shuger “mischaracterizes pre-Reformation theology of penance; and she deeply underestimates the seriousness with which Reformation soteriological theology undoes its principal pre-Reformation counterpart” (250). For more on this debate see James Simpson, "The Reformation of Scholarship: A Reply to Debora Shuger." *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 42.2 (2012): 249-268.

172 Ibid., 559.
173 Ibid., 559.
174 Ibid., 559.
175 Ibid., 559.
still due to God after a sin had been repented, confessed, and forgiven.”

Penance, in this paradigm, was a remaining debt that had to be resolved in order to restore the sinner’s relationship with God. Duffy says that penance was originally quite severe, “involving arduous and dangerous pilgrimages or lengthy fasting,” but that “pastoral realism led to the gradual evolution of commutation of such severe penances, and the emergence of the system by which a comparatively mild penance, involving prayer, fasting, or almsgiving, was imposed by the priest in confession.” These milder forms of penance left a debt owing to God, and according to Duffy “The unfulfilled balance of a penitent’s debt of penance was believed to be made up from the treasures of merits acquired by Christ and his saints, in a transaction rather resembling the transfer of credit to an overdrawn current account from an abundant deposit account.” Part of the reason that the Reformers were skeptical of the doctrine of penance was that indulgences could be purchased, and part of Luther’s rebellion against the Catholic Church had to do with the process of selling indulgences as a form of fundraising for the rebuilding of St. Peter’s Basilica in Rome. Moreover, Greenblatt notes that such indulgences could be used to help souls in Purgatory get relief from their sufferings and pains. This process created a system where the living could help pay the spiritual debts of the dead, and where those who could afford to acquire more indulgences were correspondingly free to commit more sins.

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177 Ibid., 288.
178 Ibid., 288.
179 For a good account of his history see Alister E. McGrath’s *Christianity’s Dangerous Idea: The Protestant Revolution — A History from the Sixteenth Century to the Twenty-First* (New York: HarperOne, 2007), 45-47.
181 Ibid., 19.
through *sola fide* meant that salvation came not through the buying and selling of indulgences, or through the doing of penance, but through the individual’s faith in Christ.

Since justification came though faith alone, and since there was not a biblical justification for indulgences or purgatory, Beckwith says that “penance was no longer understood be to a sacrament.”\(^\text{182}\) According to Beckwith, “In reformed logic, forgiveness had already happened: there was no possibility that human action itself could provide the ‘matter’ of the sacrament as in the medieval understanding. Furthermore to bind the actions of God to the law of man was an obscenity.”\(^\text{183}\) This should not be taken, however, to mean that penance itself was no longer an issue in Protestant thought. The first thesis in Martin Luther’s Ninety-Five Theses, for example, says “When our Lord and Master, Jesus Christ, said, “Repent,” He called for the entire life of believers to be one of penance.”\(^\text{184}\) Penance is not just for times when one has sinned. For Luther, to be alive was to be in a state of sin and, thus, to live a godly life was to always be in the process of doing penance. A confession, moreover, is not an act of will but a demonstration of Grace.

An important part of early modern confession in England is one’s willingness to openly admit to sin and to demonstrate that such an admission was transformative; although, there are exceptions that allow for the priest to privately give absolution. There was some auricular confession in early modern England. According to Beckwith, while some people may have offered auricular confessions, on the whole “Confession to a minister was ... regarded as exceptional rather than routine, and for

\(^\text{183}\) Ibid., 40.
those in special need, rather than for everyone.” Hooker, for example, argues that
the minister has the authority to take private confession and offer absolution, but that
this should only be done if it is not possible for the sinner to open up about their
transgression to their community. According to Hooker, in these cases “the Church
of England hitherto hath though it the safer way, to refer mens hidden crimes unto
God and themselves only, howbeit not without special caution, for the admonition of
such as come to the holy Sacrament, and the comfort of such as are ready to depart
the world.” An example of this exception can be found in the Communion of the
Sick in the Book of Common Prayer, where the minister is allowed to take a special
confession from sick persons, and to say

Our Lorde Jesus Christ who hath left power [of] hys Churche to absolve all sinners,
which truly repente and beleve in him: of hys great mercie forvege thyne offences,
and by his aucthoritie comitted to me, I absolve thee from al thy sinnes. In the
name of the father and of the sone &c. Amen.

The minister only has power to absolve sinners if they truly repent of their sins, and
this absolution is not done in exchange for penance. Further, the power to absolve
sins belongs properly to Jesus Christ, and it is only by Christ’s authority that the
priest may absolve the sick of their sins. Thus, the issue is not that Claudius’s prayer
is given in private, or without the aid of a priest, but that he has not truly repented.
The audience, then, is asked to pay careful attention to his confession in the same way
that the minister of learned person is asked to pay attention to the confession of the

186 Hooker, Of The Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity, 132.
187 Ibid., 132.
sick or dying. We are asked to listen, closely and carefully, to see if Claudius’s confession contains remorse and the promise of returning all of his attention to Christ. We cannot, moreover, absolve Claudius of his sins because there is no way for us to believe that he has “truly repented.”

The Church of England recognized that some people would fake repenting, but its preference was, obviously, for an “unfeigned confession and acknowledging of our sins unto God.”\textsuperscript{189} According to Targoff, the English reformers inherited from Augustine what she calls “a profound sense of how difficult it was to gauge the sincerity in the act of worshipping God.”\textsuperscript{190} Targoff notes that “Faced with this notion of external devotion as at best opaque, at worst a misdirected or fraudulent performance, English Protestants were challenged to construct a theological justification for the efficacy of publish worship.”\textsuperscript{191} For example, the \textit{Book of Common Prayer} warns that the only people who should receive communion are those who are ready to redress their transgressions against God and their neighbours.\textsuperscript{192} The minister, however, is not to stop those who have not fully repented from taking communion, but the minister is told to warn the congregation that its members should first “examine your lives and conversations by the rule of Goddes commaundements, and wherinsoeuer ye shall perceyve your selfes to have offended either by wil, words, or deed, there bewayle your owne synfull lives, confess your selves to almighty God,

\textsuperscript{189} John Griffiths, ed, “The Second Part of the Homily of Repentance,” in \textit{Certain Sermons or Homilies Appointed to be Read in Churches in the time of the late Queen Elizabeth of Famous Memory; and now thought fit to be reprinted by authority from the King’s most excellent majesty} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1840), 537-538.
\textsuperscript{190} Targoff, \textit{Common Prayer}, 6-7.
\textsuperscript{191} Ibid., 7.
\textsuperscript{192} Cummings, ed, \textit{The Book of Common Prayer}, 132.
with full purpose of amendment of life.” Evocatively, the Book of Common Prayer says that if someone cannot quiet his own conscience, but requiereth further comfort or counsail, then let him come to me [the minister], or some other discrete and leard minister of gods words, and open his grief, that he may receive suche ghostly counseil, advise, and comfort, as his conscience may be releved, and that by the ministry of Gods world, he may receve comfort, and the benefyte of absolution, to the quieting of his conscience, and avoiding of all scruple and doubtfulness.

There is an equivalence drawn here between the minister and any other learned man of the church, insofar as either can counsel, advise, or comfort those troubled by sin. The counsel is “ghostly” because the counselor is able to help the sinner only insofar as he is guided by the Holy Ghost. Thus, it is not the minister or the learned man of God who offers absolution to the sinner, but the Holy Ghost whose spirit guides the conversation. Indeed, Claudius’s inability to bend his knees and pray could be read as a sign that the Holy Ghost is not present to aid him as a sinner, and thus that God knows that Claudius is not yet repentant for what he has done.

To return to Claudius, there is something exciting about having a fictive monarch confess a guilt directly to the audience in an age when the image of the monarch was carefully managed. Thus, where The Book of Common Prayer imagines that the guilty come to be comforted willingly and in hopes of being guided towards repentance and reconciliation with God and their community, what we have here is

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194 Ibid., 132.
more akin to the overhearing of a private auricular confession. Moreover, what marks Claudius’s prayer as likely to be unsuccessful is just as much his lack of repentance as his lack of council and comforters. Claudius is praying alone onstage. He neither has the spirit of the Holy Ghost nor is he surrounded by those who have it. He is isolated and estranged from his community, and in the logic of early modern tragedy, it is this isolation, just as much as his failed attempt at prayer, that marks him for death.

3.2 “Who’s There?” On Hamlet’s Confirmation of Claudius’s Guilt

*Hamlet* investigates the problem of trusting sensory impressions. The first words of the play are “Who’s there?” (1.1.1), and the first real discussion in the play is about whether the Watchers have really seen a Ghost or if the whole thing is “but [their] fantasy” (1.1.23). The idea of looking comes up eleven times in the short scene, and surely the spectacle of seeing the unspeaking Ghost on stage dressed, likely, as a king going off to war, was central in capturing the audience’s attention from the beginning. When he gets his report about the Ghost, Hamlet’s primary concern is not if Horatio’s report is true, but what the Ghost looked like and if Horatio spoke to it (1.2.214). Hamlet says that he will “watch tonight” (1.2.244) so that he may talk with his father, regardless of the consequences: “If it assume my noble father’s person, | I’ll speak to it though hell itself should gape | And bid me hold my peace” (1.2.246-248). Hamlet will not accept just a report from Horatio of his father’s ghostly appearance, even if he seems to trust Horatio and Horatio is able
to answer rather detailed questions about the whole incident. For Hamlet to believe that the spirit really is a spectral embodiment of his father he must speak with the Ghost directly and hear the Ghost tell him who he is and why he has come. He is willing to venture eternal damnation, moreover, to confirm that this spirit really is the Ghost of his late father. The theory of evidence established here matters because it comes up later in the play when Hamlet tries to decide if he ought to kill Claudius after seeing him pray.

When Hamlet sees the Ghost for the first time he is willing to call it “King, father, royal Dane” (1.4.24), but, in order to confirm its identity, Hamlet asks the Ghost to “answer” him (1.4.24). That is, Hamlet seems absolutely willing to play along with the idea that the Ghost is his father under the condition that the illusion will interact with him. The Ghost speaks to Hamlet directly; moreover, it does so under the condition that Hamlet will “Mark” him (1.5.2) and “lend thy serious hearing | To what [he] shall unfold” (1.5.5-6). The precondition of talking to a spirit is not faith, but a willingness to pay attention to what the Ghost is saying and to remember his words. In this way, the Ghost is much like the theatre, insofar as it will only work if its audience is willing to play along and co-create the event. The Ghost, of course, tells Hamlet that he was murdered and that “The serpent that did sting thy father’s life | Now wears his crown” (1.5.39-40) and that Claudius is an “incestuous” and “adulterate beast” (1.5.42).

Hamlet also has his doubts about the Ghost’s provenance. There is no way of knowing where the Ghost came from. Greenblatt argues that the Ghost likely comes
from purgatory, and Hamlet wonders if the Ghost was sent by the Devil to tempt him while he is in a desperate state. For the sake of this thesis, however, we can leave the Ghost’s provenance undetermined. According to Hamlet, there is no way for him to know if the spirit that he has seen is good or ill:

The spirit that I have seen

May be the devil, and the devil hath power

T’assume a pleasing shape; yea, and perhaps

Out of my weakness and my melancholy,

As he is very potent with such spirits,

Abuses me to damn me. (2.2.587-592)

If the devil were trying to tempt Hamlet to sin, then showing him an image of his father, and then having that father swear him to revenge his foul death, would be an effective way to do so. Hamlet is unsure if his father’s Ghost was “a spirit of health or goblin damned” (1.4.19), and until he confirms this he cannot know if the Ghost means him good or ill. To some degree the ethics of acting on the Ghost’s recommendation to kill Claudius comes down to faith. Hamlet must take the Ghost’s word that he is his father’s spirit, he must trust on faith that the Ghost is right about how he died, and Hamlet must trust that the spirit has not been sent from Hell as a means whereby the devil may tempt a desperate man.

After the initial euphoria of the scene, however, Hamlet says that he will have what he calls “grounds | more relative than this” (2.2.592-593), and his primary means of deducing that the Ghost is honest will be watching his uncle’s reaction to

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the play-within-a-play, since “The play’s the thing | Wherein [Hamlet will] catch the conscience of the King” (2.2.593-594). If Claudius reacts to the play, “If he but Blench” (2.2.86), then Hamlet will know that Claudius is guilty, or at least that Claudius has a guilty mind, and Claudius’s confirmation will give him a course of action. Hamlet’s reception theory is similar to Sidney’s theory of play reception. Sidney defines tragedy as a form that “openeth the greatest wounds, and showeth forth the ulcers that are covered with tissue.” As an example of this theory Sidney cites the reaction of “the abominable tyrant Alexander Phææus” to a well made play. According to Sidney, Phææus “had murdered infinite numbers, and some of his own blood” without any pity, but he was moved to tears by seeing “the sweet violence of a tragedy,” so much so that it “mollified his hardened heart.” According to Sidney, Phææus was brought to tears by seeing the theatrical rendering of actions like his own that were pitiful. Hamlet likewise thinks that Claudius will not be transformed by what he sees, but that he will be unable to resist reacting emotionally.

The theory that Claudius will react like Phææus, however, is problematic for two reasons. First, Claudius is concerned that the play has some offense in the argument (3.2.218-219), and he is literally right about this; Hamlet has selected this particular play because he thinks that it is likely to offend his uncle-father. But what is it about the argument of the play that is offensive? At best what it shows is that an audience member can have a mixed and complicated reaction to the theatre. The play

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196 Sidney, An Apology for Poetry, 98.
197 Ibid., 98.
198 Ibid., 98.
199 Ibid., 98.
depicts a murder, or even a murder that resembles the one Claudius committed; at least part of the offense has to be that the play is showing the murder of a ruler at all. How could Hamlet know that Claudius’s reaction was to the play itself? Claudius is a new King and Hamlet, as de Grazia has argued, has been disentitled.\textsuperscript{200} While Claudius has assured Hamlet that he will be next in line for the throne, the play could be taken as a threat against the monarch’s life, not unlike the way that Elizabeth supposedly took the Essex staging of Richard II as a threat against her life. Second, as Hobgood argues, while the theatre has provoked an emotional perturbation for Claudius, and while this is a possible sign of Claudius’s guilt, it is not clear if the reaction is to the play’s argument or to the theatre itself.\textsuperscript{201} According to Hobgood, Hamlet may be misunderstanding how the theatre works to create emotions in the audience and, while Claudius’s guilty mind may help to induce his affective response, “it is not required for his reaction.”\textsuperscript{202} Even a king with a clear consciousness, that is, could have been provoked by the play.

The audience gets final confirmation of Claudius’s guilt when they overhear Claudius trying to pray. Hamlet sees Claudius in a posture of kneeling and then Hamlet assumes that Claudius has repented. He likely does not overhear Claudius’s prayer but Hamlet assumes that Claudius has repented because he confuses what Claudius seems to be doing (repenting) with what Claudius is actually doing (confirming). The scene, then, is dependent on the disjunction between the visual cue and the motive of the action. Hamlet sees the act (kneeling) and the scene (Claudius

\textsuperscript{200} De Grazia, Hamlet without Hamlet, 2.
\textsuperscript{201} Hobgood, Passionate Playgoing, 16.
\textsuperscript{202} Ibid., 20.
with his hands clasped together, possibly looking up at the heavens), and based on Claudius’s reaction to the play-within-a-play, Hamlet thinks that he knows what Claudius has done (prayed for forgiveness) and why he did it (to repent for his sins), but what Hamlet has really observed is a failed confession.

The audience, on the other hand, has just heard Claudius say that he cannot repent, and we have less relative grounds than Hamlet to think that Claudius is guilty. If nothing else, the audience knows that Claudius has not been transformed, or converted, by his admission of guilt. What we have here is a case of dramatic irony created by what I have called the “confirmation function” in the play. The audience simply knows more than the characters on the stage because the audience has witnessed all the events on the stage while the characters only witnessed the scenes in which they participated. Importantly, we hear Claudius say:

Try what repentance can. What can it not?

Yet what can it when one cannot repent? (3.3.65-66)

Claudius cannot repent because he cannot find a “form of prayer | [that] can serve [his] turn” (3.3.51-52). There is no way for him to pray for forgiveness that would not involve him turning away from the crown, his wife, and his ambitious nature. He can put on display what he has done, and he can say why he has done it, but he cannot repent since such an act would involve rejecting sin and returning to God. As he puts it, to pray for repentance would first involve publically admitting that he is wrong to have done what he has done and that he regrets it, but to say such things would be an act of equivocation:

...‘Forgive me my foul murder’?
That cannot be, since I am still possessed

Of those effects for which I did the murder—

My crown, mine own ambition, and my queen.

May one be pardoned and retain th’offence? (3.3.52-56)

Claudius is willing to admit to himself that he has sinned, but he is unwilling to submit himself to publicly give up the effects of sin: his crown, his queen, and his own ambition. Without turning away from his sin, however, the audience can be sure that even if Claudius seems to regret what he has done, he is not repentant. He cannot simply ask God, or the audience, to forgive his murder, since this very request would mean that Claudius must be dispossessed on the effects of his sin. One can, thus, confirm one’s sins and retain the offense, but one cannot be pardoned without first repenting.

Dramatically, the audience is placed in the position of Lady Macbeth’s nurse; we have overheard something that we ought not to know, something that ought to have remained private and repressed, and, now that we know it, there is no way for us not know it. Importantly, confession has the dramaturgical functioning of helping the audiences distinguish between seeming guilt and real feelings of guilt. Before the confession, that is, it is possible for the audience to see that Claudius seems guilty and that there is lots of circumstantial evidence of his guilt; after the confession, however, we can be sure that Claudius has real feelings of regret for what he has done, but that he will not repent his sins. Once the audience knows more about the crime than Hamlet does, the audience is able to judge both if Claudius deserves to die and if Hamlet is justified in committing the murder. Thus, the issue here is not that Claudius
is a reprobate who cannot pray, but that there is no “form of prayer” that “Can serve [his] turn” (3.3.51-52). He cannot be, as he knows, “pardoned and retain th’offense” (5.5.56). He can argue his way out of the crime of regicide within “the corrupted currents of this world” (3.3.57), where the wicked may buy out the law (3.3.59-60). But there is a sharp divide, for Claudius, between earthly justice, where one can buy out the law, and divine justice where one cannot:

There is no shuffling, there the action lies
In his true nature, and we ourselves compelled
Even to the teeth and forehead of our faults
To give in evidence. (3.3.61-64)

Claudius’s idea that there is no shuffling with God matters because he is saying that one cannot act, or seem, with God. God can read the proverbial mind’s construction in the face, and since God can have what Iago calls custody over the heart, the guilty are compelled to give evidence against themselves without equivocation. Claudius’s confirmation of his guilt is as close as an audience can ever get to observing an obscene action “in his true nature.” The audience is placed in a position of a divine judge to whom Claudius has unwillingly given evidence of his faults. It is his very unwillingness to give this evidence, and his assumption of privacy, that makes what he says so oddly trustworthy. Interestingly, by overhearing his confession the audience is placed in something of a Priest-like position. Claudius cannot shuffle with us and we are asked to judge if his confession, and penance are sincere; he has given final evidence against himself, and now that we know what he did, there really is no form of prayer that can make his guilt seem lesser other than his completely repenting
his crime and paying for his sin. The audience, then, can judge this sitting monarch and they can take pleasure in anticipating his eventual death because he has given them evidence of his guilt and his motivations.

Thus, what I am arguing is that the issue of the play is epistemological, insofar as Hamlet’s revenge seems to be delayed until the play itself can reassure the audience that Claudius not only seems but is guilty of murdering his brother. I am using “epistemology” in the same sense that Eric P. Levy uses the term. According to Levy, *Hamlet* engages a series of what he calls “priority sequences” that determine the “the proper order of those truths and moral imperatives which must be established and those which, as axioms or first principles, take unchallengeable precedence. Without such sequence, rational thought and action are impossible and even inconceivable.” Thus, for Levy, the priority sequence “underpins and enables the defining task of epistemology: namely, the passage from ignorance to knowledge and from doubt to certainty,” and this epistemological issue is central to the play because it is set in a world “tormented by ignorance and goaded by the need for knowledge.” However, where Levy’s concern is with the process of Hamlet’s discovery of the truth through his radical doubt of almost everything, my concern is with the audience coming to trust that Claudius not only seems guilty but that he is guilty, an issue that remains ambivalent until the prayer scene.

If the audience and the character are both ambivalent about the origin of the Ghost, it follows that they would both want a kind of secondary confirmation of

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203 Eric P. Levy, “‘Things Standing Thus Unknown’: The Epistemology of Ignorance in *Hamlet*.” *Studies in Philology* 97.2 (Spring 2000), 192-209.
204 Ibid., 192.
205 Ibid., 192.
Claudius’s guilt before they would become impatient for Hamlet to take his revenge. As Kastan notes, while the Ghost’s speech evokes purgatory, “The problem [in the play] is not that religion demands belief; the problem is that Hamlet desires certainty” and this desire for certainty creates an “epistemological crisis at the heart of the play.” Just as Hamlet demands certainty about an event that it would be impossible for him to have certainty about, so too does that audience watching the revenge play expect a degree of assurance of Claudius’s guilt before Hamlet kills his new father and king. In this way, the issue of Hamlet’s delay only becomes pressing after the dramatic irony of the play becomes an issue. This only happens after the audience hears Claudius struggle to confess his sins to God while, at the same time, inadvertently confessing them to the audience. Thus, my argument is that one of the ways Hamlet holds the attention of its audience during Hamlet’s rather prolonged delay is by addressing a question of knowledge that was complicated by the English Reformation. If it were clear, for example, that the Ghost was either Hamlet’s father returning from purgatory or a spirit coming to tempt Hamlet to sin, the play really could end after the first act. Since it is not clear, however, where the Ghost came from or how honest the Ghost is, there is a need for Hamlet to confirm that Claudius killed his father.

In closing, the audience is asked to judge Claudius just as it was asked to judge Faustus, like a priest considering if the offered confession of a sinner is an act of repentance or an act of mere confirmation. Claudius is made to speak objectively not against another, but against himself. Unwittingly, he has been forced to give

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206 Kastan, A Will to Believe, 135.
evidence against himself to the audience, placing them in a rather Priest-like position of power and judgment over the soul of a fictive character. Further, what I have shown in this chapter is that Claudius’s prayer is part of a shifting confessional landscape that has a clear dramaturgical function within the play. In particular, I have argued that the reason the audience can trust Claudius’s confession is that he seems to be trying to speak directly to God. The primary theological issue with the prayer is that Claudius is alone on stage when he tries to pray. I have argued, moreover, that Hamlet is justifiably cautious about confirming his uncle’s guilt before murdering him. In my next chapter turns from characters like Claudius and Faustus who could be taken as members of an implicitly white Christian community if it were not for their sin and general lack of repentance, and turns to a discussion of Aaron and Barabas, two racialized characters who openly confess their transgressions against Christians, but who do not offer anything resembling guilt or repentance.
Chapter Four

“Is Black so Base a Hue?”: On the Racialized Confessions of Shakespeare’s Aaron in *Titus Andronicus* and Marlowe’s Barabas in *The Jew of Malta*

This chapter will discuss the relationship between race and confession in Shakespeare’s *Titus Andronicus* and Marlowe’s *The Jew of Malta*. While I am reading these confessions as belonging to the stage villains, Aaron and Barabas, I am also suggesting that it is not a coincidence that Shakespeare and Marlowe both mark their villains as racialized, amoral outsiders, positions seemingly reinforced by their confessions. These confessions are dramatically interesting because they evoke issues of the confession onstage and the relationship between confession and contrition. In her discussion of acknowledgment and confession in *Cymbeline*, Beckwith begins by asking “[w]hat is it I can confess?” and argues that one can confess many things “but only the things...for which I am accountable.”

Further, for Beckwith, there is a clear relationship between confessing something and demonstrating contrition for something. When I show contrition I am keeping “the reality of someone else's pain, a pain connected to my actions, before me,” and it is in this sense that a confession that involves contrition “must be performed; it is not something that takes place inside the mind.” By confessing something, Beckwith argues, “I have not only revealed something about myself, but committed myself to a different future.” This kind of confession, however, only matters if it is possible for the subject to experience a kind of social or cultural transformation. Aaron’s and Barabas’s pride in their villainous crimes

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208 Ibid., 105, emphasis in original.
209 Ibid., 105.
matters because there is no real possibility for them to be members of a Christian community. As proud outsiders, they seem to take pleasure, and in turn ask the audience to take pleasure, in the idea that they do not have to care about the pain of others and that they do not commit themselves to a different future within a community that will never except them as Christians.

Discourses of race and religion were interdependent in early modern England, and race was one of the means by which Marlowe and Shakespeare made tragic characters seem strange and estranged from their communities. The confessions of these racialized characters are clearly insincere and theatrical, and yet, within the logic of the plays, these confessions are taken as sincere by the characters and, perhaps, by an early modern audience who was predisposed to think the worst of these racialized male characters.\(^\text{210}\) I speak of “race” here with some hesitance, since Ania Loomba and Jonathan Burton have noted that while modern theories of race have been historicized,

most theorists and historians of race still tend to exclude the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries from extended consideration. Often, they invoke premodern times only as a foil for later, more ‘racialized’ periods. Many early modernists concur, arguing that to speak of “race” in the early modern period is to perpetuate an anachronism, because at that time “race” connoted family, class, or lineage rather than the classifications of modern imperial times, and also because the defining features of racial ideologies—the quasi-biological notion that physical characteristics

\(^{210}\) There is a misleading tendency in early modern studies to read race and racialization as if these categories do not apply to discussions of whiteness. For an evocative critical response to this problem see Kim F. Hall’s “Beauty and the Beast of Whiteness: Teaching Race and Gender” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 47.4 (1996) and “‘These bastard signs of fair’: Literary whiteness in Shakespeare’s sonnets,” in *Post-Colonial Shakespeare*, eds. Ania Loomba and Martin Orkin (New York and London: Routledge, 2013).
denoted distinct types of human beings with distinct moral and social features—had not yet come into being.\textsuperscript{211}

Rather than seeing the early modern period as a time before race, however, they suggest that studying race in the early modern period is not anachronistic, but that critics have to attend to how slippery the emerging terms around actually were. For example, Bartels notes that \textit{Othello} emerged before New World slavery and “before England would come to read African subjects categorically in the literary and figurative terms of black and white” but that this was also a period when blackness “was becoming an incriminating sign of racial difference.”\textsuperscript{212} While the relationship between race and religion can be read historically, Bovilsky is evocative when she suggests that “early modern racial logics have much in common with modern and contemporary ones, including most of all those elements that make racial identities unstable and incoherent.”\textsuperscript{213} According to Hall, early modern Christian thought associated blackness with “death and mourning, sin and evil,” and the culture used these connotations to racialize “perceived physical differences.”\textsuperscript{214} Importantly, for Hall and the critics who follow from her work, “the trope of blackness has a broad arsenal of effects in the early modern period, meaning that it is applied not only to dark-skinned Africans but to Native Americans, Indians, Spanish, and even Irish and Welsh groups that needed to be marked as other.”\textsuperscript{215} Furthermore, Smith has shown that the logic of racialization in early modern England was connected to the idea that language was “a vehicle through which individual and group identities are marked, distinguished, and imbued with racial

\textsuperscript{211} Loomba and Burton, “Introduction,” 1-2.
\textsuperscript{212} Bartels, \textit{“Othello and the Moor,”} 140. See also Emily C. Bartels, \textit{Speaking of the Moor: From Alczer to Othello} (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 1-21.
\textsuperscript{213} Bovilsky, \textit{Barbarous Play}, 3
\textsuperscript{214} Hall, \textit{Things of Darkness}, 4-5.
\textsuperscript{215} Ibid., 6-7.
significance in a dynamic social and international framework.” Floyd-Wilson has shown that there is a relationship in the early modern imaginary between “humoral temperance” and the construction of race. Dennis Austin Britton argues that race and religion are inseparable in early modern thought. Smith contends that “A new orthodoxy has emerged as a corrective to the predominate but unsustainable—for the period—sole emphasis on skin colour. Researchers now typically posit that race in the early modern period is the product of a complex amalgam of codes that can be mobilized to ratify group exclusion and marginalization.”

Marlowe is particularly evocative on the relationship between race and religion. According to Bartels, “To enter upon the Marlovian stage is to enter a landscape filled with strangers and strange lands.” Greenblatt argues that Marlowe’s plays encourage “subversive identification with the alien.” As Bartels writes in a later essay, while Marlowe does stage many raced characters like Dido, Tamburlaine, and Barabas, “to single them out at the racial representatives is not only to imply that race applies only to Others” but “it is to take race—which in early modern representations indicates species, lineage, family, disposition as well as identity coded by ethnicity, religion, and colour—as more of a stable,

reliable, or extractable sign of difference than historically it was.”

Rather, she argues that Marlowe’s plays deal with questions of race and religion as what Bartels calls “the unpredictable set of circumstances, actions, and interactions that, in any given moment, come together to produce (if the play is good) an equally unpredictable outcome.”

Scholars such as Bovilsky, Floyd-Wilson, Hendricks and Parker, Hall, and Jean E. Howard have shown the complicated relationship between race and religion on the early modern stage. Furthermore, scholars such as Sujata Iyengar, Joyce Green MacDonald, and

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223 Ibid., 219.
224 Bovilsky, Barbarous Play, 10-11; Floyd-Wilson, English Ethnicity and Race in Early Modern Drama, 2; Hendricks and Parker, eds, Women, Race, and Writing in the Early Modern Period; Hall, Things of Darkness, 3-4; and Jean E. Howard, The stage and social struggle in early modern England. (New York and London: Routledge, 2003). See also Michael Neill, “‘Mulattos,’ ‘Blacks,’ and ‘Indian Moors’: Othello and Early Modern Constructions of Difference.” Shakespeare Quarterly 49.4 (Winter 1998); and Bartels, “Strange and Estranging Spectacles,” 8. Hall’s work has been transformational to the field. According to Hall, while the modern construct of race grows out of the scientific discourse of modernity, a discourse that was used to justify colonization and slavery, she argues that reading early modern England as a time before race “ignores the face that language itself creates differences within social organization and that race was then (as it is not) a social construction that is fundamentally more about power and culture than about biological difference” (6). Neill has suggested that Hall’s work, as well as that of Hendricks, is “doomed to failure” because it falls into an anachronism (361). Neill draws a distinction between work like his and Bartels as more historically and ideologically nuanced. Here, though, I would return to Bartels work on Empire in the plays of Christopher Marlowe, and her articulation that one of the ways that Marlowe holds the attention of the audience is by creating “landscape[s] filled with strangers from strange lands” and that Marlowe addresses characters who have been “alienated from or marginalized within English society” (8). What I am arguing is that this alienation is caused by the intersection of race and religion. Marlowe and Shakespeare are addressing the intersection of race and religion insofar as they are showing the consequences for a Christian culture of having alienated minorities who begin to take pleasure in transgressing against the very (religious) culture that has marginalized them. In particular, what I take from Howard’s seminal text is her argument that “Through their representations of theatricality texts variously participated in the construction of race, class, religious, and gender differences the relations of domination and subordination upheld by those differences” (6-7). For Howard, this does not mean that each text “always served the established power” but that the drama of the age “enacted ideological contestations as much
Peter Erickson and Clark Hulse, have underlined the important role race and gender play in
the early modern imaginary.\textsuperscript{225} The underlying conflict of race in Shakespeare studies has
been if the term “race” can really apply to an early modern context. Critically, I tend to agree
with Hendricks that the use of the term race in pre-1700 cultures “clearly reveals an implicit
semiotic schizophrenia: in this context race signifies this meaning in that context it registers
that meaning yet, in neither context, as these two meaning really elided.”\textsuperscript{226} While Hendricks
allows for the fact that the idea of early modern race was fluid, she argues that there was “a
pre-seventeenth-century notion of race” and that “the idea of race was an integral part of the
fabric of per-modern cultural thought. In fact, race was defined based on now-familiar
assumptions about exclusivity, authority, ethical, and moral character, and, most importantly,
belonging.”\textsuperscript{227} Indeed, part of what this chapter shows is that there is a way in which Aaron
and Barabas both belong to their cultures, insofar as they are products of them, and in which
they can never be accepted as full members of implicitly white Christian or proto-Christian
cultures because of their being marginalized as Others.

What kind of a place, then, is there for the discussion of race and religion within the
turn to religion? When Daniel Swift, for example, says that the early modern prayer book
creates a sense of commonness by excluding dissenters, he is discussing the exclusion of

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\textsuperscript{225} Sujata Iyengar, \textit{Shades of Difference: Mythologies of Skin Color in Early Modern
MacDonald, \textit{Women and race in early modern texts}. (Cambridge: Cambridge University
Press, 2002), 23; and Peter Erickson and Clark Hulse, eds. \textit{Early modern visual culture: Representation, race, and empire in Renaissance England}. (Philadelphia: University of

\textsuperscript{226} Margo Hendricks, “Visions of Color: Spectacle, Spectators, and the Performance of
Race,” in \textit{A Companion to Shakespeare and Performance}, eds. Barbara Hodgdon and W. B.

\textsuperscript{227} Ibid., 512.
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Catholics and radical Protestants and any natural English subject who was unsatisfied with the Elizabethan compromise. But, what of those that Elizabeth and her church did not yet consider fit to be Christians? What would it mean to read the Reformation with an eye to the way that Jews, Blacks, and Turks are excluded from its implicit compromises?

Race was not just a theoretical concern for the English. After the wars with Spain, it would seem, there were more blacks living in England, and England had a small Jewish population. The Elizabethan Government wrote two official letters on “blackamoors” in early modern London, and in both she implies that these raced figures are in need of deportation. The first letter to the Lord Mayor of London asks that the black people of London be turned over to known slaver Sir John Hawkins so that he can arrange to have them swapped as slaves for Englishmen imprisoned by the Spanish. According to the letter it is “Her Majesty[’s] understanding that there are of late diverse blackamoors brought into this realm, of which kind of people there are already here too many, considering how God hath blessed this land with great increase of people of our own nation as any country in the world, whereof many want of service and means to set them work for idleness and to great extremity.” It is, therefore, the Queen’s pleasure that “those kind of people should be sent

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229 James Shapiro, *Shakespeare and the Jews* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 33-88. In particular, I would note Shapiro’s observation that “If Jews were just not that important to English culture, it is hard to make sense of their frequent appearance not only in Tudor and Stuart drama but also in English chronicles, travel narratives, and sermons, let alone in the various works on trade, millenarianism, usury, magic, race, gender, nationalism, and alien status” (88).
231 Ibid., 136.
forth of the land” and given to Hawkins.\textsuperscript{232} Furthermore, according to the letter, the Englishmen being held by the Spanish were Christians and the slaves were not.\textsuperscript{233} Thus, the letter demands that slave-holding Englishmen “shall do charitably and like Christians rather to be served by their own countrymen then with whose kind of people, will yield those in their possession to him.”\textsuperscript{234} The black slaves are discussed here as possessions, things to be owned, traded, and given away, in exchange for and between Protestants and Catholics and also of a different kind than Christians. Here, it is helpful to consider Hendricks’s argument that race is a fluid, transforming concept that gains its power by pretending to universality, such that “Race ensures the idea of commonality by negating or effacing the different interests of a group or individuals.”\textsuperscript{235} For Hendricks, then, race is seemingly transcendent and immutable, and racists have to “invest race with meaning, [and] modern societies must frame visible (and, quite frankly, minor) differences among people in terms of antithesis.”\textsuperscript{236} According to Hall, the black and white binary “might be called the originary language of racial difference in English culture.”\textsuperscript{237} Hall contends that this binary “pre-dates the Renaissance, but during this period it becomes increasingly infused with concerns over skin colour, economics, and gender politics.”\textsuperscript{238} Thus, my point is that Elizabeth justifies treating blacks as property by drawing a seemingly absolute distinction between the English poor and “those kinds of people” who are implicitly unsuited to be or become Englishmen, and this is

\textsuperscript{232} Ibid., 136.\textsuperscript{233} Ibid., 136.\textsuperscript{234} Ibid., 136.\textsuperscript{235} Margo Hendricks, “Surveying ‘race’ in Shakespeare” in \textit{Shakespeare and Race}, eds Catherine M. S. Alexander and Stanley Wells (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 19.\textsuperscript{236} Ibid., 19.\textsuperscript{237} Hall, \textit{Things of Darkness}, 2.\textsuperscript{238} Ibid., 2.
a binary assumption that could only be made if she assumed that her readers would also see physical differences, like skin colour, as having moral significance.

Following up on her concern with the apparently alarming increase of Blacks in London, in 1601 a draft edict was issued in Elizabeth’s name “Licensing Caspar van Senden to Deport Negroes.” This edict distinguishes between the needs of England’s “natural subjects, greatly distressed in these hard times of dearth” and the needs of those discontented over the “great number of Negroes and blackamores.” The idea of the Moor is complicated in early modern thought. According to Bartels, for example, the signifier “Moor” is “unstable and unreadable” because “‘The Moor’ does not have a single or pure, culturally or racially bounded identity.” Further, Bartels argues that “The Moor serves as a site where competing, always provisional axes of identity come dynamically into play, disrupting our ability, if not also our desire, to assign the Moor a color, religion, ethnicity, or any homogenizing trait.” The letter defines Moors through religion, saying that they are unfit to become Englishmen because they have “no understanding of Christ or his Gospel.” What is at issue here is not simply a lack of education; rather, the issue is a question of perceived aptitude. Do “Negroes” have the necessary predisposition to Christianity, and its moral teachings, in the early modern imaginary, or are they somehow implicitly unlikely to understand Christ or his teachings? If they are not able to understand Christ and his Gospel then it follows that they can neither be Englishmen nor become Christians. The Otherness of

239 Queen Elizabeth I of England, “Licensing Caspar van Senden to Deport Negroes” (1601), 158-159.
240 Ibid., 158-159.
241 Bartels, Speaking of the Moor, 6.
242 Ibid., 7.
Moors matters because, in this letter, it justifies selling them into slavery in order to keep England racially and religiously pure.

Aaron’s and Barabas’s confessions specifically do not show contrition and the characters do not commit to a better future. What they do commit to is tormenting hypocritical Christians, the same Christians who would torment them. Here, then, I want to be clear on the distinction I am making between confirmation and conversion. In an early modern sense, to confess in the Evening Prayer in the Book of Common Prayer begins from the presumption that “Whosoever wyll be saved” must “holde the catholyke faythe.” To confess one’s transgression in this sense is to return one’s attention to God and to one’s faith, and thus to reaffirm that one is returning to Christ and Christianity. In this way, all Christian acts of repentance contain an element of returning to one’s faith, but the inverse may be true as well. If the subject who is repenting cannot return to Christ because he does not have the aptitude to be or become Christian, then does the racist logic of the period also imply that these characters cannot repent or are in some meaningful way reprobates? My point, then, is that Aaron and Barabas do not hold the “catholyke faythe” and thus cannot return to it. They do not confess that their actions are a transgression against man and God because they cannot offend a God in whom they do not believe; rather, they simply confirm what they have done and why they have done it. As I discussed in my previous chapter, confirmations put knowledge and faith on display. They show both what a character has done, and what beliefs led them to their actions. What is confirmed in the confessions of Aaron and Barabas is not just that they take pleasure in acts of villainy and destabilization, but that they are not transformed by the act of publically admitting what they have done. They have no shame for

their acts, and there is no implication that they will repent and turn their attention to God. As
Aaron puts it, he does his dreadful deeds against Christians “As willingly as one would kill a
fly” (5.1.142). Barabas instructs his daughter that, when it comes to Christians, they should
“make bar of no policy” (1.2.280). They do not seem concerned with the idea of confessing
as a means of repentance because they do not view their victims as fully human persons
whose pain and suffering matters.

What I find radical about these texts is their dramatic underpinnings. What this
chapter shows is that the confessions of these characters are not altogether honest. They
confess a superflux of evil deeds in dramatic, engaging, and horrific ways that force one to
debate the degree to which these confessions are means to an end. Aaron’s confessions of his
crimes seems designed just as much to shock Lucius as to save his child, implying that the
two ends are interdependent. The content of the confessions of these raced characters is less
important than the form of their confession. Another way of saying this is that these
confessions are different in kind from the confessions of Faustus and Claudius, confessions
given by white characters who are operating within a model of Christian faith.

This chapter will focus on two moments of racialized confession. The first is when
Aaron confesses his villainous deeds against the Andronicus family. In the second is when
Barabas’s and Ithamore’s confess the pleasures they take in tormenting Christians. What
unites these confessions for me is that they do not contain any sense of remorse or
repentance, that they are done for ambiguous reasons, and that they articulate a pleasure in
seeing Christians suffer. To be clear, in my previous chapter, I argued that religious
confessions openly acknowledge sin and contain acts of conversion whereby the attention of
the whole person is turned away from sin and towards God and repentance, but that
confirmations are about putting knowledge and motivations on display without transforming the whole person. In this case, while these characters confirm their sins, they do not repent. There is, however, a difference between white villains like Faustus and Claudius and raced villains like Aaron and Barabas. Faustus and Claudius regret their transgressions but do not repent them; Aaron and Barabas do not regret what they have done and thus they do not repent them. The difference between Aaron and Claudius, for example, is in what the characters turn to after they have confirmed their guilt. Claudius does not really turn his attention to anything substantial after he confirms his guilt. In contrast, there is a sense of conversion in *Titus Andronicus* and *The Jew of Malta*. By conversion I mean that the characters undergo emotional transformations that seem to redirect their orientations towards the world. Thus, if a religious conversion, in the protestant sense, involves a re-turning of ones entire being towards God and Godly things and, conversely, a turning away from sin, then we can read Aaron and Barabas as re-orientating themselves politically and perhaps even spiritually after their conversions. Aaron turns his attention to the care for his child and Barabas turns his attention to the tormenting of Christians.

4.1 “Art thou not Sorry for These Heinous Deeds:” On Aaron’s Sacrificial Confession

Aaron confesses his intentions in the play when he tells the audience that will have his soul is as black as his face. That is, shortly after convincing Titus to cut off his hand in exchange for his son’s life, Aaron confesses to the audience that he has tricked Titus. Aaron will bring back Titus’s sons, just not in the way that Titus understands him. Aaron informs
the audience that he will only bring the heads of Titus’s sons. Aaron seems to take pleasure in the deception itself, stating

O, how this villainy

Doth fat me with the very thought of it!

Let fools do good, and fair men call for grace;

Aaron will have his soul black like his face. (3.1.201-204)

What does it mean to have a black soul? Consider, for example, Hall’s discussion of The Masque of Blackness (1605), and the idea that Queen Anne painted herself black for the masque and then was washed white during the performance as a way of demonstrating that she regained her virtue.²⁴⁵ By becoming white during the production, Hall argues, Anne’s performance in the masque shows that “Blackness is often a mutable and relative quality; in early modern England, it is less a sign of complexion than one of status” since “the blackness that originally marks [Queen Anne] as different also marks her as inferior.”²⁴⁶ Implicitly, by becoming white, Anne regains her status as a virtuous woman. Aaron’s metonymy equates his villainy with his race, implying that he is evil because he is black, but also that he wants to be both literally and metaphorically black, and in this way he can be distinguished from Othello who is literally black but wants to be metaphorically white. Likewise, if the pleasure of The Masque of Blackness is the idea of racial reversal and the revelation that underneath the outward sign of blackness is the virtuous white actor, Aaron can here be taken as saying that his blackness, the outward sign of his villainy, will not wash off, and thus that he cannot convert. Since he is outwardly black, Aaron implies, he may as well have a soul that matches his complexion. Moreover, since he is proud of having a black face, it would be hypocritical

²⁴⁵ Hall, Things of Darkness, 128-140.
²⁴⁶ Ibid., 134-135.
for him then to want to have a fair soul. In saying this, it is also important to keep in mind Dympna Callaghan’s argument that the blackness of characters like Aaron and Othello is a stage effect, and that blackness in Shakespeare is always a representation of blackness.247 That is, race on the early modern stage was signified by “The elaboration of cosmetic practices” like burnt cork, but the meanings of that signifier are culturally created.248 Here is Aaron, perhaps the only white actor in blackface that the audience has ever seen represented on stage, confessing seemingly for himself and for others of his represented race that he really is every bit as evil and scheming as they might imagine him to be, and, what is more, even though Aaron is telling the audience exactly what he is about to do, the audience is powerless to do anything other than watch the events play out with a sense of horror or dread. Aaron is sustained, fattened, by his villainy in the same way that a Christian may be said to be fed by grace, the concern of fair men. By “fair,” Aaron means beautiful or agreeable people but also fairness of colour.249 Fairness, however, can also mean a sense of justice, and in this way it is evocative that Aaron does not seem too concerned about being fair to Christians, but he does want his son to be treated fairly.

The racial phantasy of Titus Andronicus differs substantially from that of The Masque of Blackness because Titus Andronicus does not portray Aaron’s race as reversible. According to Bartels, Aaron is “the Other to outdo and undo all others.”250 There is a sense in the play that his Otherness cannot be incorporated into Rome, or that his presence “may

248 Ibid., 195.
250 Bartels, Speaking of the Moor, 65.
expose the darker side of Rome and, by extension, England” but “as the outsider within, he is always part of the problem, a symptom as much as a sign of catastrophic cultural breakdown.”

For Bartels, cultures of conquest depend, and even thrive, “on the cultural intermixing that is the predictable result. Crisis occurs not because Rome is or becomes unbounded, its assumed sanctity is undone by the presence or exposure of the alien within. Crisis occurs because at an arbitrary moment in history Rome attempts to lay down the law and postulate an idea and ideal of cultural purity as crucial to its core.”

Aaron is not willing to be a member of a culturally diverse society if the price of admission means that its members must always be willing to be washed white to become virtuous.

Aaron’s profession of his black soul becomes complicated in the play when he decides that he will fight to keep his son alive. Aaron’s love for the child seems to imply that there is something fair and virtuous about him. Aaron’s confession of his willful villainy happens because he wants to keep his son alive. The birth of Aaron’s son serves as a kind of conversion moment in the play for Aaron. Before his son is born, Aaron seems to torment others simply for the pleasure of doing so. After his son is born, however, Aaron’s profession seems to be to do anything to keep the child alive. To be clear, I am not saying that Aaron becomes ethical when he becomes a father. Rather, what I see happening here is that Aaron recognizes his black child as a fully human being deserving of life and liberty, and he is willing to fight to protect that being.

In saying that Aaron is transformed by his paternal care and love for his son, it is important to remember here that Aaron’s child is a product of miscegenation that the Nurse, Demetrius, and Chiron all find abhorrent. We are told that Tamora wanted the child killed.

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251 Ibid., 68.
252 Ibid., 68.
before Saturninus learned of him and thus of Tamara’s adultery. While the Nurse would kill Aaron’s child, Aaron recoils, saying “Zounds, ye whore! Is black so base a hue?” (4.2.71), before saying to his child, lovingly, “Sweet blowse, you are a beauteous blossom, sure” (4.2.72). In the context of the scene, it is unclear if Aaron is saying this to further vex the Nurse, Chiron, and Demetrius, who clearly think that the child is, as Demetrius puts it, the “Accursed…offspring of so foul a fiend!” (4.2.79), or if Aaron really does think of his newborn son as a beauteous blossom; perhaps it is both. Either way, in saying that Aaron converts after the birth of his child and changes his profession, I am not saying that he becomes a Christian or that he becomes a particularly moral person. What I am saying is that he changes his focus. His attention shifts from committing acts of villainy to protecting his child.

Aaron seems to love the child as the child is, a beautiful black boy, and he has no desire for the child to become white. He tells his stage audience that his child should be proud of being black since “Coal-black is better than another hue; | In that it scorns to bear another hue” (4.2.99-100). Karen Newman has argued that lines like these are part of a rhetoric of miscegenation, where blackness was seen as something that cannot be overcome through culture or marriage, in the same way that the proverb says that there is no way “to wash an Ethiop white.”253 Blackness will not, for Aaron, mimic or compromise, and it cannot be washed off; more importantly, unlike Othello, Aaron seems to see no reason why anybody would want to even try to wash off their own blackness and to try to pass as white. The image is similar to Macbeth’s speech about Neptune’s ocean in its concern that some stains

cannot be washed away (2.2.56-62). As Aaron notes of his beloved child, “all the water in
the ocean | Can never turn the swan’s black legs to white, | Although she lave them hourly in
the flood” (4.2.101-103). While the visible part of the swan looks white and fair, the
underbelly of the swan will remain black, and this blackness can, at best, only be hidden
from view. It cannot be converted, no matter how much time is spent trying to change it.
While blackness cannot be converted it can be confirmed, and in his confession Aaron can be
taken as confirming that his literal blackness is aligned with an inner moral blackness. When
it comes to his child, the only other black character on the stage, Aaron responds lovingly. If
the child is to be Aaron’s “first-born son and heir” (4.2.92), his inheritance will be a willful
embracing of his hue and, one might imagine, taking pleasure in tormenting those with fair
skin. He will not pretend to be white but will embrace his blackness and, implicitly, he will
teach his son to do the same thing. Aaron’s image, then, is not one of a failed conversion and
internalized racism, but of a confirmation of proto-black pride. He will embrace his
blackness and the cultural assumptions that others will make about him because he is black,
and he will encourage his son to take pride in his blackness.

The audience’s feelings about Aaron’s confessions must have been complicated by
his appearance. Here is it helpful to remember the Peacham drawing, which is perhaps the
only existent drawing of Shakespearian staging.
In the drawing, Aaron is off to the far right, behind Tamora, holding his sword. The image implies a sense of escalation, as Tamora is kneeling in a position of submission to Titus, and the two men behind Titus do not have their swords drawn. Aaron, moreover, is remarkable because his costume seems to highlight his race. He is in a short, potentially Roman, skirt.

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seemingly to show as much of his black legs as possible, and his costume appears to be white, highlighting his blackness. Aaron is represented in this tableau as alone, isolated, and hovering menacingly beside the scene. As Bovilsky argues in *Barbarous Play*, “early modern racial difference is represented [on the early modern stage] as both attractive and frightening.”

Aaron is a source of terror and fascination in the play, both pulling the audience in and repulsing them.

If Aaron is a source of terror and fascination in this scene, then what kinds of emotional responses might his child evoke? According to Bovilsky, to stage race the early modern theatre assumed a “corporate inheritance of particular physical and moral traits and abilities.” When Lucius is concerned that Aaron’s child will be “Too like the sire for ever being good” (5.1.50), or when the nurse speaks of Aaron’s child as “A joyless, dismal, black, and sorrowful issue” (4.2.66) and as a babe “as loathsome as a toad” (4.2.67), a discourse of race that “predictably asserts a relation between offspring and forbearers guaranteed by their metaphorical sharing of physical substances, especially ‘blood’” is evoked. It is these very “sorrowful issues” that Elizabeth argues need to be deported from England for the good of its natural born, white, subjects. Thus, while the audience may feel for the child, the logic of blood and miscegenation evoked by the scene would also imply that the child represents a threat from within to English purity. Lucius, for example, does not assume that even his parenting might make a black child good, and the Nurse implies that there is no way that such a child could ever grow up to be virtuous.

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256 Ibid., 11.
257 Ibid., 11.
The most dramatically striking thing about the confession scene is that Aaron becomes the centre of attention in the play, and in turn his confession changes the complexion of the play. The scene begins with a cacophony of noise as Lucius enters with “an army of Goths with drums and soldiers” (stage direction 5.1). The pounding of feet on the wooden stage when combined with the noise of drums, and perhaps trumpets, would have created a noisy scene and it might have been difficult to pay attention to what was being said. The scene also evokes the earlier entrance of Titus that was to be marked by “drums and trumpets” and “others as many as can be” (1.1). In this play noisy processions are a mark of power. When Aaron is brought on the stage he is bound up, and it seems likely that the Goths would have been calling out racialized names at him, although there is no stage direction that explicitly says that this would have happened. He would not enter to music, but he would surely enter to a vivid soundscape. It would have been, in other words, difficult to pay attention to Aaron’s confession unless the noise stopped as soon as he began speaking, and the actor playing Aaron would have had to use his voice and body as a way of bringing Lucius, the Goths, and the audience to attend to what he has to say. On top of this, there is the prop that is Aaron’s infant child. Would it cry when it is removed from its father? Is it silent? Are the men who take it from Aaron gentle with it? The presence of the child places everything Aaron says in this scene in doubt. Is Aaron confessing what really happened, or is he saying what he has to say to keep his son alive? I am not arguing that Aaron is not evil, or that he is a martyr; rather, I am saying that it matters that Aaron will not begin his confession unless Lucius swears to Aaron that his child shall live (5.1.68), that he will be “nourish[ed] and [brought] up” (5.1.84). Aaron would have Lucius care for his child as an adoptive parent, and in essence he is making his confession conditional on Lucius accepting guardianship of
the child. Such a child, moreover, while not assured of love is assured of freedom from slavery. Without such an assurance Aaron “will discover nought to thee” (5.1.85).

What ultimately saves Aaron’s son’s life is his promise to provide Lucius and the Goths with a wondrous confession. Aaron, pleading with Lucius to let his son live, offers to tell his captors

wondrous things,

That highly may advantage thee to hear.

If thou wilt not, befall what may befall,

I’ll speak no more but ‘Vengeance rot you all!’ (5.1.55-58)

By wondrous Aaron does not mean pleasing, but wild, surprising, and strange. Perhaps Aaron will even say things that will be difficult to believe. The confession creates a state of suspension for the audience and Aaron’s promise is that the confession he will give will be worth the delay. The moment, moreover, focuses the audience in a loud sound soundscape, encouraging them to be quiet because Aaron is about to say something important.

Lucius will only save Aaron’s son if he believes that Aaron’s confession is fulsome. Lucius will see that Aaron’s “child shall live, and [he] will see it nourished” so long as what Aaron says pleases him (5.1.59-60). Aaron’s confession will be many things, but it will not be pleasant for Lucius to listen to. Aaron is toying with two senses of pleasure. Lucius means that he will keep the child alive if Aaron’s confession pleases him in its truthfulness. Aaron, in contrast, frames the issue as one of happiness, implying that the confession will be honest, but that this honesty will not make Lucius happy. Aaron makes this point himself, telling Lucius and the audience,

And if it please thee? Why, assure thee, Lucius,
‘Twill vex thy soul to hear what I shall speak;
For I must talk of murders, rapes, and massacres,
Acts of black night, abominable deeds,
Complots of mischief, treason, villainies,
Ruthful to hear, yet piteously performed,
And this shall all be buried in my death,

Unless thou swear to me my child shall live. (5.1.61-68)

The line “And if it please thee?” asks the spectator to consider the relationships amongst pleasure and horror. While the horror of what Aaron will say may not produce pleasure for Lucius, the story will produce dramatic interest for the spectator. Aaron calls his plots of murders, rapes, and massacres “acts of black night,” almost playfully associating his authorship of these dark deeds with the darkness of his skin. While Aaron is talking directly to Lucius, he seems to implicitly also be talking to the audience. He makes the audience aware and complicit with the pleasures of revenge tragedy. Tragedies, in this usage, can vex the soul with their tales of “black night.”

There is something deeply religious, if amoral, about Aaron’s worldview, even if that worldview is not defined as Christian or Moorish. Aaron is described by Marcus as an “irreligious Moor” and the “Chief architect and plotter of these woes” (5.3.120-121), but his faithlessness confession has a religious dimension. To make this point, the play has Aaron make Lucius swear. Aaron has faith in the power of oaths, and in the way that, for the speaker, such promises make utterances special, even if Aaron also thinks that there is no God. For Aaron, Lucius’s word is insufficient, and yet, as Lucius himself points out, it is unclear what it would mean for him to swear in this case: “Who should I swear by? Thou
believest no god; | That granted, how canst thou believe an oath?” (5.1.71-72). In replying to Lucius, Aaron makes it clear that he sees religion primarily as a means of social control:

What if I do not?—As indeed I do not,
Yet, for I know thou art religious,
And hast a thing within thee called conscience,
With twenty popish tricks and ceremonies,
Which I have seen thee careful to observe,
Therefore I urge thy oath. (5.1.73-78)

Aaron’s reference to “popish tricks” is the only reference to “popishness” in all of Shakespeare. Lukas Erin sees this as a moment when the historical setting of the play gets “fuzzy,” and “Imperial Roam and Reformation England seem to merge.” Thomas Rist suggests that Aaron’s reference might point to the role of ceremony and performance in the Andronicus family, and in particular in the way that they perform rites for the dead, and associate remembrance with sacrifice. Aaron’s reference seems to be an evocation that Lucas, and his family, cares about oaths made to the departed. For example, in 1.1 Titus is concerned that his sons lost in war ought to be able to return to the family tome so that they may “sleep in peace” (1.1.91). Lucius takes this idea further, asking the solders to

Give us the proudest prisoner of the Goths,
That we may hew his limbs, and on a pile

*Ad manes fratrum* sacrifice his flesh

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258 Erne, Lukas Christian. “‘Popish Tricks’ and” a ‘Ruinous Monastery’: *Titus Andronicus* and the Question of Shakespeare’s Catholicism,” in *The Limits of Textuality*, ed Lukas Erne and Guillemette Bolens, Swiss Papers in English Language and Literature 13 (Tubinge: Narr, 2000), 144

Before this earthy prison of their bones,
That so the shadows be not unappeased,
Nor we disturbed with prodigies on earth. (1.1.96-101)

The Latin tag “Ad manes fratrum” and the need to appease the dead so that they will not haunt the living do seem “Catholic” in a broad sense. Likewise, so is Titus’s reply to Tamora’s pleading that he spare her son that his sons “Religiously…ask a sacrifice” (1.1.124). What is implicit in these conversations is the idea of intersession, or a belief that the actions of the living can have any impact on the departed. My point is not that the Andronicus family is Catholic, or proto-Catholic, but that Aaron sees that they care about the duties of the living towards the dead and uses that knowledge to manipulate Lucus into a concession.

Furthermore, to unpack Aaron’s declaration that he is not religious, it is helpful to come back to the Elizabethan assertion that Moors might not be able to understand Christian thought. What Aaron is saying is that he understands how Lucius thinks. For Aaron, the primary function of religion is to teach the habits of thought that create consciousness, habits that are worthwhile because they allow for interpersonal contracts. Aaron therefore knows that Lucius’ oath can be trusted because Lucius is religious. Aaron can be sure that Lucius will keep his word out of fear of the consequences of oath breaking if not for love or pity for Aaron’s black child.

The conflict over Aaron’s faith in the play can be taken as a way of saying that Lucius’s god is not Aaron’s god. Aaron does not need have to have faith in the gods (or a God), he just needs to know that men who have faith feel bound to keep the oaths they make.

While Aaron views Lucius’s religion with contempt, or as little more than popish
ceremonies, he believes that Lucius believes that oaths imply a holy promise between the
speaker and his god.  

However, there is a powerful sense here that Aaron after here is after
more—that he is pursuing what Judith Butler would call the question of the human.

According to Butler, one of the ways that politicised violence works is that it is committed
against those who are thought of as not counting as fully human and deserving of human
decency.  

Aaron will have Lucius swear not just that the child shall live, but that the child
shall be nourished and brought up by Lucius. Aaron’s speech directly asks Lucius “To save
my boy.” The child is to be saved in the sense that he is to be spared, but Aaron is also asking
Lucius to treat his boy as a child who might be saved in the religious sense of the term. That
is, Aaron is not saying that his child can or will be saved, but that he wants Lucius to treat his
child as if it could be saved, and thus as if the child were fully human. Thus, the contrast I am
drawing here is that Aaron agrees to perform inhumanity, or evil, for Lucius, with the
precondition that Lucius acknowledge the humanity of his son. He does not do this to help
Lucius, or even to take pleasure in revealing his villainous actions, but out of love for his
son. Indeed, it is the audience’s faith in Aaron’s love for his child, more than anything else in
this scene, that makes us think that what Aaron is confirming in this scene is interesting and
thus worthy of dramatic attention.

In order for the trick to work, Aaron has to gain Lucius’s trust. He does so by
admitting things that are already known to Lucius, taking pleasure in his villainy. In so

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260 It is evocative that Aaron’s phrase evokes Protestant reformers and their dislike of Popish
Ceremonies. While the play is set well before the Reformation, or for that matter the
establishment of the Pope, one wonders if part of what is being evoked here is that Aaron is
more concerned with effect than substance as, perhaps, a radicalized Protestant minister
might be.

261 Judith Butler, Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence (New York: Verso,
2006), 20.

262 Ibid., 20.
doing, he commands the attention of the audience that already knows everything that he is going to say. He first reveals that “[he] begot [the child] on the Empress” (5.1.87). Lucius is enraged by this, calling Tamora a “most insatiate and luxurious woman!” (5.1.88), but Aaron warns him of getting overworked by such a meagre confession: “Tut, Lucius, this was but a deed of charity | To that which thou shalt hear of me anon” (5.1.89-90). Aaron’s remark serves to create a further alliance between himself and the audience. He intends to shock Lucius just as much as he intends to pass on information. Aaron then confirms his role in Lavinia’s torture and rape in a way that draws further attention to the pleasure he takes in plotting villainy:

’Twas her two sons that murdered Bassianus;

They cut thy sister’s tongue and ravished her,

And cut her hands and trimmed her as thou sawest. (5.1.91-93)

By admitting to these three transgressions—the begetting of his child, the murder of Bassianus, and the “trimming” of Lavinia—Aaron has captured the attention of Lucius and captured the attention of the audience.

There is something both playful and disgusting about Aaron’s confirmation of his wondrous deeds against the Andronicus family. In particular, Aaron is rather playful with his language when he discusses the “trimming” of Lavinia. Consider, for example, his exchange with Lucius:

Lucius: O detestable villain! Call’st thou that trimming?

Aaron: Why, she was washed and cut and trimmed,

And ’twas trim sport for them which had the doing of it.

Lucius: O barbarous, beastly villains like thyself! (5.2.94-97)
I draw attention to Aaron’s cavalier wit not just to point to his pleasure in recounting his deeds but to suggest that the rhetoric serves to confirm, for Lucius, his unrepentant nature – his irredeemability. My point is that as long as Lucius thinks that Aaron is evil he is likely to believe that he is being honest and thus save Aaron’s child. Thus, the scene confirms Aaron’s evil nature, putting his pleasure in villainy on display, while at the same time confirming that Aaron does not feel any guilt for what he did to Lavinia.

Aaron would have his “deeds be witness of [his] worth” (5.2.103) and he now has a captive audience who will listen to his proud confessions of mischief. According to Aaron he has

trained thy brethren to that guileful hole
Where the dead corpse of Bassianus lay;
I wrote the letter that thy father found,
And hid the gold within that letter mentioned,
Confederate with the Queen and her two sons;
And what not done, that thou hast cause to rue,
Wherein I had no stroke of mischief in it?
I played the cheater for thy father’s hand,
And when I had it, drew myself apart,
And almost broke my heart with extreme laughter. (5.2.104-113)

Lucius may not know that Aaron was the mastermind behind his brother’s death, for example, but the audience does, and by confirming these “real” crimes Aaron’s confession of crimes that the audience has not seen him commit and which he does not confirm, seem all the more plausible. According to Bartels, Aaron is the “consummate villain” and
Shakespeare uses Aaron as a means of promoting the darkest visions of the stereotypes against Moors. Further, Aaron’s “malignant differentness is consistently recognized and easily categorized by all, including himself and his allies.” Aaron’s report of his “extreme laughter” seems designed to make Lucius hate him, and his assertion that everything he has done has had a stroke of mischief within it can be taken as him calling himself a scapegoat. That is, the more insistent Aaron is that he is the cause of the fall of the Andronicus family, the more likely it is that Lucius will direct his rage and attention at him, at his deeds, and less likely it is that he will view the child as a potential threat. If Aaron is to have any chance of living through the play, he must at least show some remorse, but for his child to live he needs to become a scapegoat so that Lucius can think that the evil of the state will be purged with Aaron’s death alone. Rather than showing remorse, or fairness, however, Aaron is defiant, doubling down on the pleasures of villainy and marking himself as a worthy scapegoat.

The play shifts to a moral register when Lucius asks Aaron if he is “sorry for these heinous deeds” (5.2.123). Aaron says that his only regret in life is that he cannot do more evil deeds:

Ay, that I had not done a thousand more.

Even now I curse the day—and yet I think

Few come within the compass of my curse—

Wherein I did not some notorious ill:

As kill a man, or else devise his death;

Ravish a maid, or plot the way to do it;

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264 Ibid., 442
Accuse some innocent, and forswear myself;
Set deadly enmity between two friends;
Make poor men’s cattle break their necks;
Set fire on barns and haystacks in the night,
And bid the owners quench them with their tears.
Oft have I dug up dead men from their graves,
And set them upright at their dear friends’ door,
Even when their sorrows almost was forgot,
And on their skins, as on the bark of trees,
Have with my knife carved in Roman letters,
‘Let not your sorrow die, though I am dead.’
But I have done a thousand dreadful things
As willingly as one would kill a fly,
And nothing grieves me heartily indeed,
But that I cannot do ten thousand more. (5.2.124-144)

I have quoted this passage at length because I am trying to show that there is an excess to Aaron’s final confirmation; it holds our attention because there is a dignity in long, eloquent speeches. By “dignity” I mean both that there is a seriousness in the style of the speech, and that Aaron’s speech shows a pride in himself. Aaron seems to think that his crimes are worthy of being marked, and that he ought to command the attention of his audience for quite some time. Further, Aaron admission is in excess of what he needs to confirm at this moment in the play. There is also a sense that Aaron is saying that if he were free he would take pleasure in further tormenting Rome and the Andronicus family as if they were flies. Thus,
the only choice Aaron leaves Lucius is to kill him and save Aaron’s son. Thus the form of what Aaron says here is more important than the content of what he says. Aaron has made a habit of tormenting Romans; in fact, one might say that Aaron practices his habit of villainy in the same way that a Christian makes a habit of being virtuous.

Just after Aaron convinces the audience to mark him, Lucius calls to one of the Goths to “Bring down the devil, for he must not die | So sweet a death as hanging presently” (5.2.145-146). Now that there is no doubt that Aaron represents radical evil and must be sacrificed for the greater good of the community, justice demands that his death should be slower and more painful. Aaron will be set “breast-deep in earth” and famished (5.3.178). His death will be slow, painful, and public, and offstage. It is possible that he would be lowered into the same trap-door that is used to represent character’s falling into hell; thus, his final moments on stage mark him as liminal, somewhere between earth and hell, spending his last moments on stage cursing any good deeds he may have performed in his life: “If one good deed in all my life I did, | I do repent it from my very soul” (5.3.188-189). It is almost as if his evil is too pure, and he needs to spend his last moments in a kind of earthly inverted purgatory so that he can repent himself of any vestiges of good. Again, I say “as if” here because the entire speech seems to be articulated so that his child may live. The audience may anticipate his dying, but they will not get to see it. There is a biological determinism at play here, where being black makes one evil, that Aaron seems to embrace with spectacular flair, and a desire on his part to see the child live. Aaron’s coy question to the Nurse, “Is black so base a hue?” (4.2.71), is answered in this scene, and the answer seems to be, yes. Thus, while it is tempting to read Aaron’s sacrifice as simply a question of love, perhaps something else is going on here. The child is a visible sign of what might be Aaron’s most
outrageous act of evil; could it be that Aaron is working so hard to keep the child alive simply because the child existence itself ensures that his original transgression is perpetuated and that, in turn, his child may grow up to be evil like his father and to torment Romans as his father has done?

4.2 “But Smile to Thyself when Christians Moan:” On Barabas’s Hateful Confessions

I have argued that Aaron’s confirmation is interdependent with his blackness and his atheism (or his profession of it), but that he undergoes a kind of moral conversion after the birth of his son; in this section I am going to argue that Barabas’s hate-filled, counterfeit confessions are also bound up with his identity as a Jew and a moneylender, but that this role of villainy has more to do with his reacting to being cast as a villain by the Christians of Malta than it has to do with his professed faith. Here, I want to start from Barabas’s request for Ithamore to confess himself to him. What I hope to show in this section is that Barabas’s and Ithamore’s admissions are not confessions, but confirmations, as I used the term in the _Hamlet_ chapter. That is, Barabas’s and Ithamore’s admissions put knowledge on display, insofar as they demonstrate not what the characters have done, but that the characters understand how Christians read them, and that they are willing to play the parts that Christians have cast them into.

Barabas asks Ithamore to reveal personal things that would otherwise remain hidden. Some of these things are rather mundane, like his birth and condition, but the question of his profession has political and religious ramifications. Thus, in asking Ithamore what his _profession_ is, Barabas can be taken as asking both what kind of labour is Ithamore able to do
and what Ithamore’s confessional position may be. Ithamore answers Barabas “Faith, sir, my birth is but mean, my name’s Ithamore, my profession what you please” (2.3.166-167). According to the OED, one early modern definition of profession is “[t]he declaration made by a person entering a religious order” (n.1), and adjectivally, someone who has professed is someone who has taken a religious vow (adj.1).²⁶⁵ I am suggesting that this definition is present in the play, along side the more conventional definition of profession as employment or trade, as Christians were not allowed to loan money for interest in Malta, and within the world of the play, Barabas implies that the profits of moneylending are a kind of gift that God gives to the Jews. I am reading “profession” as an index of how a person’s religious profession determines their professional occupation.

Ithamore is a slave because he is black; Barabas is a moneylender because he is Jewish. Marlowe’s *The Jew of Malta* is particularly interested in the relationship between profession (in both senses) and confirmation, and the way that those who profess to more sublime motivations are frequently hypocritical. Barabas and Ithamore are professed villains who have confessed to each other and to the audience their desire to torment Christians, and once these professions are made, the characters seem bound by them. At the very least Barabas and Ithamore can no more stop being villains in this play than they could stop being a Jew and a Turk respectively.²⁶⁶ Shortly after buying Ithamore, Barabas asks him to confess himself when he asks him to “let me know they name, and therewithal | Thy birth, condition, and profession” (2.3.164-165). Here it is helpful to remember Deats and Lisa S. Starks’s

²⁶⁶ It seems likely to me that Ithamore would have been depicted as a “blackamore” and thus that the actor playing Ithamore would have been in blackface.
argument that Barabas is “the surrogate playwright and villain” and that he may be “the first villain as playwright to tread the Renaissance stage, and, as such, the progenitor of an entire clan of villainous interior playwrights.” 267 I think that Barabas’s role here as casting director has to be taken into account in light of Greenblatt’s argument that Barabas is “brought into being by the Christian society around him” since his actions “are always responses to the initiatives of others.” 268 Barabas has been cast as a villain and avenger by the Christian culture around him and he casts a villain’s apprentice who can live up to his reactionary profession.

Barabas proceeds to cast Ithamore in the role of villain’s assistant, a role that Barabas would like Ithamore to play in the revenge plot that is about to unfold. Barabas tells his apprentice,

Hast thou no trade? Then listen to my words,

And I will teach thee that shall stick by thee.

First, be thou void of these affections:

Compassion, love, vain hope, and heartless fear.

Be moved at nothing; see thou pity none,

But to thyself smile when the Christians moan. (2.3.168-173)

The “trade” Barabas is teaching to Ithamore is that of a stage villain, whose role in the plot will be to torment Christians. The role is defined first by negations. The part calls for a character who is devoid of “Christian” emotions like compassion, love, and hope, and who

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267 Sara Munson Deats and Lisa S. Starks, “‘So neatly plotted, and so well performed’: Villain as Playwright in Marlowe’s The Jew of Malta,” in Marlowe: Contemporary Critical Essays, ed. Avraham Oz (New York: Palgrave, 2003), 117.

can live without pity and fear. Such a man would be a stranger to his community, living without strong social or political bonds to others. Furthermore, the payoff of living a life without pity is the pleasure the stage villain is allowed to take when victims suffer. Notice, however, that the smile is “to thyself” and not to the audience. The pleasure is private. These are, in other words, notes on the motivations of a stage villain, rather than a description of the affective turn that Barabas, as a master, is commanding his slave to undertake.

As the scene progresses, Barabas outlines himself as if he were a character in a morality play, highlighting all the stereotypes he can cram into one confessional speech about the evils of Jews. There is no implication that Barabas has actually done any of these things. Rather, the speech highlights a kind of self-fashioning.\(^{269}\) His part will be that of a Jew who is “blest for plaguing” Christians (2.3.200). Yet, what makes his profession plausible is that he frames it as an unrepentant confirmation of evils that he has already committed. These deeds, moreover, are of a type that he implies he will likely commit in the future. According to Barabas, he is a man who likes to

walk abroad a-nights
And kill sick people groaning under walls;
Sometimes I go about and poison wells;
And now and then, to cherish Christian thieves,
I am content to lose some of my crowns,
That I may, walking in my gallery,
See ’em go pinioned along by my door.
Being young, I studied physic, and began

To practise first upon the Italian;
There I enriched the priests with burials,
And always kept the sexton’s arms in use
With digging graves and ringing dead men’s knells.
And after that was I an engineer,
And in the wars ’twixt France and Germany,
Under pretense of helping Charles the Fifth,
Slew friend and enemy with my stratagems.
Then after that was I an usurer,
And with exhorting, cozening, forfeiting,
And tricks belonging unto brokery,
I filled the gaols with bankrupts in a year,
And with young orphans planted hospitals,
And every moon made some or other mad,
And now and then one hang himself for grief,
Pinning upon his breast a long great scroll
How I with interest tormented him. (2.3.175-199)

Just as I suggested that Aaron’s speech is excessive and unspecific, Barabas’s speech is excessive and that the two speeches speak to a similar dramaturgical technique. Likewise, just as there is a kind of dignity in Aaron’s elongated confirmation, so too would I argue that the length of Barabas’s admission is important. In particular, the idea that he “Sometimes” goes out to poison wells implies that he has done this more than once, and perhaps even that this is something that he does frequently. Likewise, the idea that he “filled the gaols with
bankrupts in a year” implies that, as a moneylender, he is far more concerned with issuing
bad loans to Christians just to see them in jail than he is with making money off of his loans.
Likewise, the idea that the jails are filled could be read as implying that the only reason
Barabas does not issue more loans that he knows his borrowers can not pay is because he
knows that there is no more room in the jail. What the confession implies, moreover, is that
Barabas has been playing the part of villain his entire adult life, a role that he has been cast in
by a Christian society, but one that he has learned to take pleasure in performing.

There is also something deeply egotistical about Barabas’s confession. Barabas uses
the first person pronoun “I” eight times in this confession, making clear that the deeds are his
own. He confesses six different crimes against Christians, each one progressively more
complex and involved than the last. The coordinating conjunction and is used ten times in the
speech. Repeating and over and over again gives the impression that the speech is additive,
almost like Barabas is improvising the whole thing, but also giving the impression that this
speech may only be the highlights of his sins against Christians. The speech, we might say, is
a resume of his desire to harm others. The “and then I did this” structure of the speech also
makes it less believable for the audience while, at the same time, because he is confessing to
doing crimes that are stereotypically “Jewish” in early modern thought, there is a sense that
what he is doing here is confirming what a racist audience might already believe a Jew is
likely to do. Again, just as I argued above that Aaron makes a habit of tormenting Romans,
here we could say that Barabas makes a habit of tormenting Christians. The repetition of
events, and their regularity, thus, matter more than the details of any specific act of torment.

Marlowe has Barabas inviting Ithamore to confess his crimes, crimes that perhaps he
has not actually committed. Ithamore is newly cast as a stage villain, however, and he seems
unable to gain the same kind of audience reaction that Barabas’s speech is sure to have received, perhaps because he is still new to the role of habitually tormenting Christians. According to Ithamore, a slave, he has had a high degree of freedom to torment Christians:

Faith, master,

In setting Christian villages on fire,

Chaining of eunuchs, binding galley slaves.

One time I was an ostler in an inn,

And in the night-time secretly would I steal

To travellers’ chambers and there cut their throats.

Once at Jerusalem, where the pilgrims kneeled,

I strewed powder on the marble stones,

And therewithal their knees would rankle, so

That I have laughed a-good to see the cripples

Go limping home to Christendom on stilts. (2.3.203-213).

While the speech does not have the rhetorical power of Barabas’s, Ithamore has nevertheless passes his audition, when Barabas says, “Why, this is something” (2.3.214). The “something” is, on a meta-dramatic level, the incitement of the hatred of his audience. He is becoming what Sara Ahmed calls a body to be “encountered as [an] object of hate.”270 From this point on in the play they will be, as Barabas puts it, “villains both” (2.3.215) and both will share a bond over their joint hatred of Christians (2.3.216). Moreover, while I think that the confession is dramatic, it matters that Ithamore converts to his master’s profession and takes up the role of tormenting Christians for pleasure. While we cannot know if Ithamore

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takes Barabas at his word in this confession, what we can know is that Ithamore finds Barabas’s confession inspiring enough to become his co-conspirator.

These confessions are not revelations of “real” crimes that the characters have committed against Christians, but merely an articulation that they both know that Christians see them as immoral characters capable of committing crimes like these. If anything, by confessing to each other in a parody of common prayer, what Ithamore and Barabas do is confirm that they have a fellow feeling of contempt for Christians. The reason I read 2.3 as a theatrical confirmation for effect is that Marlowe has already made Barabas confess an obviously ridiculous, but theatrically engaging, Jewish conspiracy to the audience in 1.1. According to Barabas, while he is surrounded with wealth, it is “a trouble” “to count this trash” (1.1.7). He has the misfortune of having “Infinite riches in a little room” (1.1.37), and he is stuck waiting for yet more ships from Egypt, Alexandria, and the Mediterranean Sea that will bring him even more riches. He takes this wealth in passing, reading it as nothing more that “the blessing promised to the Jews, | And herein was old Abram’s happiness” (1.1.103-104). While the scene does not give a stage direction, one imagines Barabas waving towards all the gold, jewels, and other trash surrounding him. While he “must confess” that the wealthy Jews of Jairim, Greece, Bairseth, Portugal, Malta, Italy, and France, “come not to be kings” (1.1.127), he also notes that these Jews are all “wealthier far than any Christian” (1.1.126). All he wants from Christians, furthermore, is “peaceful rule” (1.1.132) so that he, and the other international cast of wealthy Jews, can perpetually accumulate more and more wealth. Barabas’s confession asks the audience to confirm Barabas’s villainy and to hate him for it.
Barabas confesses that he thinks that anti-Semitism is nothing more than Christian jealousy in ways that allows him to cast himself as the embodiment of the audience’s collective anxieties about Jews and Jewish wealth in Europe:

Who hateth me but for my happiness?
Or who is honoured now but for his wealth?
Rather had I, a Jew, be hated thus
Than pitied in a Christian poverty;
For I can see no fruits in all their faith
But malice, falsehood, and excessive pride,
Which methinks fits not their profession. (1.1.110-116)

If Christian profession is best understood as believers saying that they are modest and forgiving, Barabas can be taken as saying that their actions do not fit their profession. By “profession” here Barabas means that he finds Christians to be malicious, false, and to have an excessive pride. Much of what is going on in this speech is, according to James Shapiro, about “identifying Jews as aliens.” For Shapiro, “Barabas is, after all, an alien merchant residing in the ‘Port-Town’ of Malta who happily engrosses commodities into his own hands,” and as Shapiro further notes, London theatergoers were already uneasy about “the economic strength of resident aliens” and how this strength might impact their own economic well being. What Barabas seems to be confessing here is that living among the Christians has not changed his profession. He was a villain before he saw the hypocrisy of Christians, and the fact that they do not openly acknowledge their hypocrisy makes him think that there

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272 Ibid., 184, 187.
are no fruits in their faith and thus no reason to convert to their profession. Importantly, this argument is not founded on his belief in Judaism, but in his seeing the rewards of Jewish merchants. As the play makes clear, this wealth is not distributed equally among the Jewish people of Malta. While Barabas has the wealth of the city, his fellow Jews seem to be comparatively poor.

In fact, one might argue that Marlowe draws our attention to Barabas and his money, and his cutting critiques of Christian hypocrisy, as a means of getting the audience to both admire and hate him. As Ahmed notes of hate, it is “an intense emotion; it involves a feeling of ‘againstness’ that is always, in the phenomenological sense, intentional. Hate is always hatred of something or somebody, although that something or somebody does not necessarily pre-exist the emotion.”273 Further, for Ahmed, “hate transforms this or that other into an object whose expulsion or incorporation is needed, an expulsion or incorporation that requires the conservation of the object itself in order to be sustained.”274 In Barabas’s first speech to the audience, the play, dramaturgically, tries to create both dramatic interest around the isolated Barabas while, at the same time, allowing the audience to hate Barabas while getting them to consider their reasons for hating the infamous rich Jew of Malta. What I am suggesting is that the confessions of Aaron, Barabas, and Ithamore confirm them as raced figures who are unable to convert to Christianity, who are likely to plague Christians if allowed to live amongst them, and thus who must be purged from the body politic for the good of the whole. What draws the implicitly white and Christian audience’s attention to these characters’ confessions, moreover, is that even if they are exaggerated, they are plausible because they tap in to preconceived stereotypes of “negros” and “blackamores.”

274 Ibid., 51.
Likewise, the reason that Barabas’s confession works is that the audience already thinks that it is possible that Jews are malicious. The reason why Ithamore can improvise his crimes is because he knows what Barabas, and implicitly, the audience expects to hear because the crimes he confesses are stereotypes of things that a Turk might do.

In closing, then, I want to come back to the triangulation in *Jew of Malta* among race, profession, and confession. What I have shown is that Barabas’s and Aaron’s profession is the tormenting of Christians, and that they openly and gleefully confess their profession to the implicitly Christian audience. What creates dramatic attention around Barabas’s and Aaron’s confessions is their guiltless confirmation of what they have done or what they plan to do, or their willingness to embrace what Christians think of them. These characters have been marginalized by a Christian society that implicitly does not see them as fully human, and their revenge on those cultures is to torment them from within. In this way, if they cannot become professed Christians, then their profession becomes the tormenting of Christians.

What seems to be off the table in *The Jew of Malta* and *Titus Andronicus*, however, is the possibility that these characters could peacefully exist within a cosmopolitan and multicultural society so long as that culture defines them as less than fully human due to their race and religion. There is something inherently excessive about these characters, and their long, dignified confessions have a way of taking up all of the attention in their respective plays. Such characters do not imply that they want to integrate into Christian communities so much as they want to bend and transform those communities to meet their respective wills.

There is no way for Aaron to become part of the white English Christian community because he has no desire to become white and there is nothing he can do to stop being black, and his child is a forceful reminder that he and his boy will never be seen as white, even if his child
is high born and mixed race. Likewise, when the state is justifying taxing the “strangers” to the city (1.2.59), Barabas asks if all of the strangers will be taxed “equally” or fairly, to which he is told that the Jews will be taxed “like infidels” (1.2.62), and that the state has suffered these strangers “hateful lives, | Who stand accursed in the sight of heaven” (1.2.63-64). Rather than striving for inclusion and conversion and repenting their “blackness” or “hateful lives,” these men confirm their Otherness and work to subvert and punish others who are included within the commons.

In this way, Shakespeare and Marlowe seem ambivalent on the relationship among villainy, race, and religion. Are these characters evil because they are Others, or do they become evil because they have been marginalized? Likewise, do these characters need to die as a kind of scapegoat sacrifice whereby Aaron stands in for the transgressions of Moors and Barabas the transgressions of Jews, or is there something particular about them such that their deaths are responses to their particular crimes? Thus, what I am arguing is that profession and confirmation do the same work in The Jew of Malta. By confirming that he is a rich Jew, Barabas also confirms that he lives up to the audience’s stereotypes of early modern Jews, something that he reinforces and embraces in his confirmation of his wicked deeds. Moreover, I am arguing that Aaron’s confirmation of his tormenting of Romans also serves as a way of confirming his profession. He does wicked things, the play implies, because he is black, and because he does not view those that he harms as fully human, and he will teach his child to do similar things. Moreover, I am arguing that the racist logic of these plays conforms to the ways that Elizabeth I discusses the relationship between race and religion. For example, in her discussions of Egyptians she calls them “strangers born” who are “transported into this realm of England,” but who cannot remain in England because they
spend their time “counterfeiting, transforming, or disguising themselves by their apparel, speech, or other behaviour.” While Elizabeth’s discussion of Egyptians is clearly racist, the language she uses makes the Egyptians sound like actors, and the logic that she uses for the danger of the Egyptians is similar to that used by antitheatricalists. What matters to me is that Elizabeth sees the counterfeiting behaviours of Egyptians as inherent to the way that Egyptians live and thus sees them as people who are more likely to sow disunity among the English than to convert to Christianity. As discussed above, when Elizabeth discusses Blacks and Turks, she speaks of them as subjects who are unable, rather than, unwilling, to convert. For Elizabeth, blacks are mostly “infidels having no understanding of Christ or his Gospel.” My point is that Aaron and Barabas confirm for the audience that much of this is “true.” They are strangers, even if they are born within Christendom. They are willing to counterfeit and transform. They enjoy tormenting Christians and sowing discontent. They act as if they have no understanding of Christ or his gospels. However, Marlowe and Shakespeare both reverse the gaze. They force the audience to ask if these men are evil because of something they inherited racially, or if they have become evil because they are treating Christians the way that they have been treated by Christians.

276 Elizabeth I, “Licensing Caspar van Senden to Deport Negroes” (1601), 158-159.
Chapter Five

“I Have Ta’en Too Little Care of This:” On Repentance and Repetition in Shakespeare’s *King Lear*

This chapter will treat acts of model devotion like praying, preaching, and eulogizing in Shakespeare’s *King Lear* within what Andrew Pettegree calls the “culture of persuasion” in post-Reformation England.²⁷⁷ Lear produces dramatic attention by improvising at moments when the audience might expect him to follow a set and studied form. While this method is dramatically interesting, it is not particularly persuasive. In making this claim, my work is following from Pettegree’s argument that, for the first generation of the Reformation, the decision to adhere to the new teaching involved painful conscious choices, but that as the Protestant church became more established the process became complex and local.²⁷⁸ That is, commitment to the Reformation for second-generation converts happened, according to Pettegree, at the local level and followed what he calls a “tiered hierarchy of commitment” from awareness, to identification, to understanding, and ending with activism.²⁷⁹ In this model, the Reformation does not stick because of Protestant ideas like Justification or due to anti-Catholic sentiment, but because individuals within church communities become activists for reform as they came to better understand its ideas. Thus, religious choice was still

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²⁷⁷ There are two texts of Shakespeare’s *King Lear*, the Quarto of 1608 entitled *The History of King Lear*, and the substantially different Folio text of 1623, entitled *The Tragedy of King Lear*. These texts are often conflated, and the Norton Shakespeare takes the unique steep of including Quarto, Folio, and a Conflated text. For the sake of this chapter I am using the Folio text, although I have consulted the Quarto. I am using Folio because it is more robust around the scenes I care most about. Andrew Pettegree, *Reformation and the Culture of Persuasion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

²⁷⁸ Ibid., 1-6.

²⁷⁹ Ibid., 6.
personal, for Pettegree, but it was not private. Rather, people came to share the ideas of the Reformation not primarily through reading, but through discussing its ideas with their friends and neighbours and the community slowly converging towards conversion. Further, for Pettegree, preaching “played an important role in the wider information culture of premodern society. In a world where most information continued to be conveyed by word of mouth, few could doubt that preaching represented one of the primary means of communication to the wider public.”

As Torrance Kirby and P. G. Stanwood argue, for example, pulpits like St Paul’s were “at the center of events which transformed England’s religious identities, and through this transformation contributed substantially to the emergence of a public arena of discourse animated by a ‘culture of persuasion.’”

It would be a mistake, however, to assume that these public arenas of discourse in early modern England were free of political and religious censorship, and the primary debates around preaching in early modern England involved a disagreement about how much freedom a preacher ought to have to improvise. Rather, they were heavily controlled, if not censored, by the state. Consider, for example, Puritan John Field’s rebuke to the Act of Uniformity and the Book of Common Prayer, “A View of Popish Abuses,” in which he expresses his concern that the preaching during the English Reformation consisted of little more than reading state approved documents. Further, for Field, “Reading is not feeding,

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280 Ibid., 6-7.
281 Ibid., 10.
but it is as evil as playing upon a stage, and worse too. For players learn their parts without
[a] book.”284 According to Jeffrey Knapp, for many Elizabethans, “the new public theatres
and the newly purified church were enemies in a war that the theatre seemed to be
winning.”285 While the reformed clergy attacked the stage and its patrons, “Other
Elizabethans put more of the blame on the preachers,” and “many parishioners loathed their
preachers (especially their puritan preachers) precisely for the new religion they were
preaching. But to a remarkable extent the hostility of parishioner to preacher appears to have
been fueled by a hatred of preaching per se.”286 With this, Knapp argues, came a direct call to
reform preaching to remove the “‘dumb dogs’ who could do little more than read prepared
services,” but there was also a call for preachers to become more like players, and to care
more about blending instruction with delight.287 While an engaging preaching style could
have helped the newly reformed church win the entertainment war with the new public
theatres, such a strategy could have encouraged inexperienced preachers, perhaps unschooled
in Reformation theology and the subtlety of the Elizabethan compromise, to get major ideas
of the English Reformation wrong, spreading misinformation and undermining the careful
culture of national persuasion that the English church was establishing. Moreover, if the
primary way of getting news to the people of England was through public preaching, then the
state was justified in worrying that people in the habit of improvising might put a spin on the
message that the state was trying to convey to the people. Common worship may be boring,

284 Ibid., 98.
286 Ibid., 30.
287 Ibid., 30-31.
but this boredom was a relatively small price to pay for national unity and consistent messaging.

The distinction that Field draws between reading and feeding is productive for this chapter because it helps us understand the role of improvisation in *King Lear* and, in turn, why Lear’s style of persuasion fails to convince the other characters on the stage. Field wants preachers to be able to improvise, to say what they feel, and to be spiritually and emotionally responsive to the needs of their congregation. What Shakespeare shows in *King Lear* is that improvised speech may be more engaging than speaking from a script or a set text, but that improvisation can also have tragic consequences and it can encourage disunity. Consider, for example, the final lines of the play, spoken by Albany in Quarto and Edgar in Folio, “The weight of this sad time we must obey, | Speak what we feel, not what we ought to say” (5.3.298-299). *King Lear* puts forward two kinds of auditions. Sometimes these

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288 While a discussion of *Henry the Fourth Part One* is beyond the scope of my dissertation, I would like to note that there are similarities between the use of improvisation in *King Lear* and Hal and Falstaff’s performance of a “play extempore” (2.4.281) in a London tavern. The scene in question turns on the issue of whether it is best to speak what one feels or to speak what one ought to say. The line in question comes after a tense back and forth between Falstaff and Hal over Falstaff’s supposed heroism, and Falstaff uses the idea of the improvised play to distract Hal, who has poked holes in his story and has shown what Hal calls Falstaff’s “open and apparent shame” (2.4.261). The play itself is a kind of role playing game, and it takes a dark turn when Hal decided to play his father and chastise Falstaff, who is playing Hal, for spending time with Falstaff, “That old white-bearded Satan” (2.4.457). Hal is cutting in his critique of Falstaff while playing the role of his father, telling his friend that from the perspective of his father, Falstaff is nothing more than “a devil [that] haunts thee in the likeness of an old fat man, a turn of man is they companion” whose craft is villainy and who is worthy of nothing (2.4.440-453). Thus, by playing the role of the King, Hal is able to confess his contempt for Falstaff while hiding that contempt under the guise of theatre and, in turn, he forces Falstaff to defend himself as Hal. In particular, it is evocative that Hal’s banishment of Falstaff at the end of the improvised play foreshadows the real banishment Falstaff will suffer at the end of *The Second Part of King Henry the Fourth* (5.5.47-70). While Falstaff proposes the improvised play as a pastime or distraction, Hal seems to see that playing can be overtly political, and that words said in jest in a play can have real political consequences. Improvisation in Shakespeare, then, seems to have implicit affective and political consequences, since it frees characters to speak what they feel.
auditions are straightforward and seem rehearsed, with characters saying what they are supposed to say. Sometimes these auditions are improvised, with characters speaking what they feel but perhaps what they ought not to say. The former can be boring, while improvisation is interesting from a dramatic perspective. Lear’s primary mode of communication is improvisation, a mode that works well for him from a dramatic point of view—he is interesting to be certain—but his tendency to improvise encourages the audience to attend to him as they would a shipwreck. In contrast, the *Book of Common Prayer* advocated for a rehearsed audition. Such a preaching, while potentially boring and unconvincing, helps to maintain order. Shakespeare’s *King Lear* is ambivalent on the issue of religious improvisation, showing the audience both its potential tragic consequences and its ability to hold and maintain the attention of the audience. Moreover, one of the things that enables the play to be ambiguous about issues of religious improvisation, as well as to issues of transcendence and the afterlife, is that the play is set in a pagan era.

Lear’s actions towards his daughters do not persuade those around him; Lear has to learn how to persuade since there has been, to this point, no need for a man with absolute power to persuade those who serve his will. When persuasion becomes an issue for Lear, his actions have an improvisational character to them, or at very least they do not seem to be acts of careful study. Here, I am thinking of the term repetition not as the act of repeating something over and over again to commit it to memory (n.1.a), but in the sense of repetition as something studied or rehearsed (n.3.b).  

Likewise, while the term improvisation comes from the eighteenth century, there was an early modern idea that one could act

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“improvisedly” or “without forethought, imprudently, precipitately.” When the Fool says that Lear acts unwisely, he is saying that Lear’s actions seem to be impulsive rather than calculated. Thus, the contrast King Lear draws is between those whose actions are wise and studied and those who act impulsively and without forethought. Improvised actions may not persuasive or effective in the play’s world, but they do create dramatic attention.

Lear’s improvised actions are interesting to me because they occur at moments that are religiously charged. For example, in the Book of Common Prayer, confirmations and eulogies are moments of careful, studied speech, and in both cases the priest has to consider both the event, and the effect that witnessing the event will have on the congregation. A good priest, in this sense, is wise, careful, and skillful. However, being wise, careful, and studied can also be boring. It can stifle the inspiration of the Spirit, what Field calls feeding, both for the person giving the confirmation or the eulogy, and there were many Protestants who wanted to see the requirements that the priest follow the Prayer Book exactly slightly relaxed, if not done away with. What King Lear shows us, from a cultural and religious point-of-view, is that doing away with common forms, and the careful expectations those forms produce, can have tragic consequences.

This chapter will have three sections discussing three different but interdependent religiously charged acts: confirmation, sermons, and eulogies. Failed modes of address

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291 This chapter is not particularly invested in the potential atheism or paganism of the play. While it seems possible to argue here that Lear cannot resolve the issue of earthly suffering because he is not speaking from a paradigm that would understand Christ’s sacrifice as redeeming of earthly suffering, such an argument assumes too much about the souls of characters to ever be convincingly proven. Moreover, while the setting of the play is implicitly pagan, and thus the play could be read as a pagan allegory, the paganism of the
Lear uses in this play are all, in some way, liturgical or derived from liturgical genres and/or patterns. An overarching concern of this chapter is Lear’s liturgical development from a focus on his own needs and personal sufferings, to a concern with the suffering of others. The first section argues that Lear’s concern with confirmation is procedural, and when the love trial ends with a confirmation it does not build bonds of faith and loyalty between Lear and his daughters. The second section this chapter discusses Lear’s ministry to Gloucester, and its blending of sense and nonsense. Finally, this chapter will end with a discussion of Lear’s eulogy for Cordelia. Lear’s use of these forms is dramatically engaging because they echo practices from the *Book of Common Prayer*, but Lear goes off-script in unwise but dramatically engaging ways. Lear produces dramatic attention by improvising at moments when the audience might expect him to follow a rather set and studied form.

What I want to show here is that *King Lear* points to a method of keeping the audience’s attention that is based on novelty and the expression of excessive emotions; in contrast, the *Book of Common Prayer* privileges creating habits of devotion, whereby the entire congregation can anticipate what is going to happen (or should happen) and knows exactly why it is going to happen. Lear, and to a lesser degree Cordelia, tend to speak what they feel, and this emotional openness both endears them to the audience and leads to their tragic fates. In contrast, Regan and Goneril speak what they ought to say, and this method allows them to make political gains, but perhaps alienates them from the audience. Regan and Goneril’s equivocal confirmations demonstrate that they seem to love their king and father. Likewise, the key liturgical debate was whether preachers ought to speak their minds

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play is depicted in decidedly Christian terms and infused with the cultural anxieties of the Reformation. Thus, it seems likely to me that a primarily Christian early modern audience would have seen the form of Lear’s preaching, for example, as a direct comment on the role of preaching in a Christian tradition even if the content of Lear’s preaching was pagan.
or if they ought to follow an order of common prayer. By speaking what he feels, a preacher might endear himself to the congregation for his emotional honesty, but such a ministry would not necessarily produce the habits of thought necessary to make England a Protestant nation. Both methods can build an engaged relationship between the audience and the performer, but what *King Lear* shows, in part, are the kinds of familial, political, and religious dangers that can come from saying what one feels without considering what one ought to say.

Perhaps more than any other of Marlowe’s and Shakespeare’s tragedies, *King Lear* makes the audience acutely aware of the importance of habit and repetition. Habit and repetition were central to protestant English Reformation theology because habit and repetition help to forge affective bonds. As Alan Jacobs notes, “*The Book of Common Prayer* came into being as an instrument of social and political control,” the prayer book encouraged social control through repetition and reoccurrence, something that most religious texts do in many different denominations and faiths. For Shuger, early modern religious beliefs, ideas, and values are underwritten by religious habits of thought. The Reformation, for Shuger, allowed these habits of thought to enter into a state of flux. One of the ways that Protestant reformers tried to maintain social, political, and religious order was by instating clear, common, and repeatable structures of common worship. In the preface to the *Book of Common Prayer*, for example, the people of England are invited to listen to common prayers and liturgies regularly because doing so may produce a common love for the new

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294 Ibid., 9-10.
religion.\textsuperscript{295} This love will not come from listening to any one sermon, or participating in any
one prayer, but through regular repetitions of godly activities. As Targoff notes, the Church
of England had faith in the transformative power of repetition, such that “[a]lthough
established churchmen recognized the potential for externally convincing but internally
empty acts of devotion, they tended to minimize the threat that such dissembling posed either
to the dissemblers themselves or to the congregation of eye-witnesses.”\textsuperscript{296} Targoff argues that
one of the reasons that public dissembling was not a threat to English orthodoxy is that there
was a faith in the efficacy of habit, and for a religious habit to be formed repetition was
considered more important than authenticity.\textsuperscript{297} This belief in habit, for Targoff, helps to
explain why “the religious establishment could simultaneously seem uninterested in private
belief and yet demonstrate repeatedly its desire to subsume private devotion within the public
liturgy of the church. What appears to be a simple request for an untaxing and potentially
unmeaningful participation in a weekly service turns out to be a strategy to transform the
worshipper’s soul.”\textsuperscript{298} The \textit{Book of Common Prayer} implies that the English compromise is
built on a faith in the transformative nature of repeated public devotion for changing the
commons and the nation.

According to the \textit{Book of Common Prayer}, there will be a “great advancement of
godliness” in the nation by having the liturgy read out the entire Bible once a year, and that
this repetition will both stir the clergy to godliness and inflame the people with a love of true
religion, at least in part because it will be habitual.\textsuperscript{299} The clergy of the church will learn the

\begin{footnotes}
\item[296] Targoff, \textit{Common Prayer}, 4
\item[297] Ibid., 4.
\item[298] Ibid., 4.
\end{footnotes}
part of being the ones to “exhort others by wholesome doctrine,”\textsuperscript{300}  a doctrine that they will come to learn and admire through repeating it, and that the audience will come to care for through hearing it over and over again. Moreover, since the clergy will be repeating both the liturgy and the homilies on a regular schedule, they will, one might suppose, become better reciters of the liturgy and the homilies and their audience will become better listeners. Likewise, while the new religion might seem strange to the congregation the first few times that they hear it, over time the rhythm and theology of the new religion are to be anticipated and comforting. In this way, one of the more important elements of the \textit{Book of Common Prayer} is that it establishes a common liturgical calendar. This enables the \textit{Book of Common Prayer} to minimize, if not eliminate, the danger of having a “great diversity in sayings and synging in churches within the realm.”\textsuperscript{301}  If the whole realm has “but one use,” then there is a sense both that the entire realm is praying together, in common, but also that each church within the realm is repeating relatively the same doctrine.\textsuperscript{302}  As Swift has noted, church rites were “dramatic events” and for thinkers like Prynne, the reading of a liturgy or a homily made the pastor little better than an actor, indeed in some ways worse since many actors could give more lively readings than a pastor might.\textsuperscript{303}

The trade-off of this system, and the one that brings us back to the theatre, is that it privileges the pleasures of anticipation over the pleasures of surprise that might be found in a church that allowed for more diversity and improvisation. \textit{The Book of Common Prayer} privileges a wise discourse around the sacramental and the liturgical over an impassioned one. Habit, repetition, and anticipation are all central parts of early modern English religious

\textsuperscript{300} Ibid., 4.
\textsuperscript{301} Ibid., 5.
\textsuperscript{302} Ibid., 5.
\textsuperscript{303} Swift, \textit{Shakespeare’s Common Prayers}, 53-54.
life. What is so evocative about Lear’s use of religious discourse is that he privileges passion over preparation and this leads to tragic, but dramatically engaging, results. My larger point is that we can read *King Lear* as a kind of commentary on the *Book of Common Prayer* only insofar as the play dramatizes the way that improvisation can be theatrically engaging if socially destructive.

5.1 “Who Shall We Say Doth Love Us Most:” On Failed Confirmation in the Love Trial

My reading of the love trial is informed by, and critical of, Stanley Cavell’s and Harry Berger’s readings, in particular, because I think that both of them miss the relationship among love, habit, and improvisation in this scene.³⁰⁴ For Cavell, the love trial represents a bribe, where Lear wants “(1) false love and (2) a public expression of love” in exchange for a dowry.³⁰⁵ Lear’s primary desire is to look like a loved man, and this ploy might have worked if not for Cordelia’s threatening “to expose both his plan for returning false love with no love, and [her exposing] the necessity for that plan—his terror of being loved, of needing love.”³⁰⁶ Berger, in contrast, notes that Lear retains the power to decide whose expression(s) of love best please him, and “their expressions of love are compromised in advance by the nature of his request, since he is asking them to show how amorous they are, not so much for him as for his land.”³⁰⁷ Further, Lear retains the power in the transaction: “if they want to strip him of his power, they will have to pay for it by risking a humiliating posture—sitting up and

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³⁰⁵ Cavell, *Disowning Knowledge*, 62.
³⁰⁶ Ibid., 62.
begging, crowing for cheese. And the bargain he offers is so unequal—all that land and power for a little rhetorical fluff—that they will suffer the wound of his vigorous charity for the years to come.”\textsuperscript{308} The singularity of this transaction is what is at issue. No singular act of devotion can replace years of repeated affection. Moreover, Lear seems to trust that the most honest articulation of love for him would be unstudied, or improvised.

In this section, I am going to read the love trial in \textit{King Lear} as similar to a failed Catechism or Confirmation. In doing so, I am going to distinguish between improvised and rehearsed religious speech acts. An improvised speech act, in my usage, is spontaneous and flexible, and it can be adapted to the needs of a particular audience. A rehearsed religious speech act, in contrast, is careful and clear, but such acts can also seem cold and unfeeling. What we see in this scene is a binary, where Lear is an improviser who speaks what he feels rather than what he ought to say, allowing the spirit of the moment to move him. In contrast, Regan and Goneril seem to be more rehearsed, so that they carefully consider what ought to be said and perhaps repress what they want to say. Cordelia is torn between saying what she ought to say, like her sisters, and saying what she wants to say and improvising like her father. Being caught between these two rhetorical modes leads her to the tragic consequences of the scene and her inability to persuade either her sisters or her father of the justness of her actions. Improvised acts are more dramatically engaging in this play, but more rehearsed lines seem to be more politically successful.

In the love trial scene, where Lear gives his kingdom to his daughters in exchange for their spontaneous expressions of affection, what he is asking for is public, official, and final confirmation that his daughters love him (1.1.35-121). I am reading the love trial as a

\textsuperscript{308} Ibid., 30.
thematizing confirmation because Lear uses the love trial to get his daughters to publicly 
swear continual love and affection for their father and king. In this scene Lear is making 
sure, or confirming, that his daughters love him, and in turn that his daughters’ identity and 
relationships to their communities can be best understood in terms of their love for their 
father. What is missing from the scene, and what makes this a failed moment of 
confirmation, is the sense that Lear has taught his daughters to make a habit of loving him.309 
The Book of Common Prayer is clear that a child should not come to be confirmed “Until 
suche tyme as he can saye the Cathechisme and be confirmed.”310 The child is to memorize 
all of the answers to the Confirmation first and, once he has demonstrated that he has done 
so, he can be confirmed. The Confirmation, thus, does not encourage improvisation because 
the child is assumed to already have Christian godparents who are preparing him for a life of 
godliness, and the Confirmation is but a visible sign, performed as much for the edification 
of the community as for the child being confirmed. Lear removes this custodial relationship. 
He asks his daughters to confirm that they love him without first teaching them how to do so 
or ensuring that they do. Lear confuses a confirmation as a sign of love with love itself, and 
the audience is left to witness the aftermath of a failed confirmation. To be clear, the 
confirmation does not fail because Cordelia does not love Lear. The confirmation fails 
because Lear clearly has never taught Cordelia what he would want from a public declaration

309 It is evocative that in both Hamlet and King Lear moments of confirmation lead to 
irrevocable actions. Hamlet kills Claudius after he confirms his guilt. Lear disowns his 
daughter after he confirms that she does not love him. It is also evocative that in both cases 
what is confirmed is actually a mistake. Hamlet misunderstands what Claudius is doing when 
he sees Claudius praying; Lear mistakes stage fright for an actual lack of love. Thus, within 
Shakespeare’s tragic imaginary, confirmation does not necessarily lead characters to the 
truth. In point of fact, it seems just as likely that a character will read the signs of a 
confirmation wrong as it is that they will get the confirmation right.
310 Cummings, ed, The Book of Common Prayer, 156.
of love and she seems unable to anticipate his needs as well as her sisters’ political desires. Such a failure makes for an unhappy situation, and it encourages audience attention by creating anticipation that the scene will end tragically.

While it is common for critics to read Lear as a despairing, disappointed, unwise man, the play has distinct reversal where Lear shifts from having the authority of a monarch to being a character who must struggle—like everyone else—to gain the attention of others and to persuade them. At the outset of the story, Lear seems hopeful of his future and the promise of his future happiness in the care of his beloved daughter, Cordelia. Lear turns to religious speech acts as a means of getting others to pay attention to his sufferings only after he has lost his hope in his future. When Lear expresses his “darker purpose” (1.1.34) to divide the land between his three daughters based on who “we say doth love us most” (1.1.49) he is asking for public confirmations of love so that he can “Unburdened crawl toward death” (1.1.39). Lear wants a happy retirement, and he gives up his kingdom in exchange for public confirmations of love from his daughters. By asking his daughters to say that they love him, Lear is hoping to confirm his daughters’ love, but he is not asking them to do anything to show that they love him, nor is he producing habits of love. Lear assumes that his daughters love him, and that the confirmation is merely perfunctory.

Lear will give each of his daughters a kingdom after they spontaneously confirm their love and continued attention for him. As Lear puts the case to his daughters:

Tell me, my daughters—

Since now we will divest us both of rule,

Interest of territory, cares of state—

Which of you shall we say doth love us most,
The “now” of the above passage matters. Now that Lear is going to divest himself of rule he sees a moment, however fleeting, in which he can finally ask his daughters to confirm their love for him. Moreover, because the request is coming now, as in immediately, his daughters have no opportunity to prepare themselves so that they may merit the largest bounty. Lear, in other words, is asking for an improvised performance from actors who have not had time to rehearse. Lear must have divided the map before the scene began if he is to give Cordelia “A third more opulent than your sisters” (1.1.85-86). Thus, Lear uses the love trial to confirm the merit of his daughters based on how well they perform confirming loving him.

Public displays of affection evoke what Targoff calls the division between the inside and outside in early modern devotional thought and the problem of equivocation.\textsuperscript{311} As Targoff argues, “what is strikingly, and mistakenly, absent from our accounts of the Elizabethan settlement is…the belief that external practices might not only reflect but also potentially transform the internal self.”\textsuperscript{312} Can a singular, false public confession of love for a father be transformational? If not, might the repetition of confirming your love produce habits of loving the king? Lear is not just asking if his daughters love him. Lear asks his daughters to perform loving him, publicly, before their potential husbands and the court, in the hopes that such a confession is efficacious. Such transformation, however, only happen with time and repetition. The singularity of the request is odd. Lear determines who loves him from a singular instance, one which renders all past actions irrelevant and places Lear’s

\textsuperscript{311} Targoff, \textit{Common Prayer}, 2.
\textsuperscript{312} Ibid., 3.
hope for future happiness in trust that his love trial is the right way to determine his daughters’ affections.

Goneril and Regan equivocally confirm their love for Lear, and in doing so, they say that they love and worship their father without making any specific commitments about what they intend to do for their father. Their confirmations, then, are not spontaneous improvisations but skillful acts of equivocation. Goneril says that she loves her father “more than words can wield the matter” (1.1.53). Her love for her father is

Dearer than eyesight, space, and liberty,

Beyond what can be valued, rich or rare,

No less than life, with grace, health, beauty, honour.

As much as a child e’re loved, or father found;

A love that makes breath poor and speech unable.

Beyond all manner of so much I love you. (1.1.54-59)

Regan extends her sister’s profession of love, almost to a point of absurdity, declaring:

I find she names my very deed of love—

Only she comes too short, that I profess

Myself an enemy to all other joys

Which the most precious square of sense possesses,

And find I am alone felicitate

In your dear highness’ love. (1.1.69-74)

The idea that Regan is alone felicitate in her father’s love and that she is “an enemy to all other joys” implies that she values her father above her husband and the gods. Such a show of love is easy to make once. Lear asks for no evidence of love, and as such he can do
nothing but take his daughter’s words confirming their affections. Importantly, Lear does not look for any evidence of habits of love. It is as if Lear thinks that, by having his daughters confirm their love for him once, he can be assured that they always have loved him and always will love him.

Coming back to my earlier discussion of performance act theory, it matters to this scene that Goneril and Regan seem confident in playing Lear’s game, but that Cordelia does not, and that Cordelia speaks about her concerns directly to the audience, but Goneril and Regan do not. According to Escolme, one of the ways that a performer/audience relationship can be created is through direct address, a dramatic tool that can make the audience feel “partially responsible” for the figure a character becomes while performing for the audience. We feel some degree of sympathy, if not responsibility, for Cordelia, but because Goneril and Regan do not confess to us similar misgivings about their father’s request, the audience is not asked to form the same kind of emotional bond with them. Cordelia, for example, speaks for the first time in the play after Goneril’s speech directly to the audience when she says to us, “What shall Cordelia speak? Love and be silent” (1.1.60). Cordelia does not have a script that she can fall back on to and, unlike her sisters, she seems uncomfortable improvising a script and trying to anticipate what her father wants to hear. Thus, the play evokes a tragic pleasure, common to the theatre, that at a moment of intense pressure an actor/character will not know what to say, or will forget their lines. This theme is reinforced in Cordelia’s aside after Regan’s speech when she says

Then poor Cordelia—

And yet not so, since I am sure my love’s

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313 Escolme, Talking to the Audience, 4.
More ponderous than my tongue. (1.1.74-76)

Cordelia’s use of “ponderous” here is evocative. According to the OED, for something to be ponderous it must have a sense of weight or size.\(^{314}\) Cordelia is saying that her love for her father is too weighty to be put into words on the spot, without time to prepare, and that her sisters are able to put their love for Lear into words without time for rehearsal because their feelings are not as weighty as Cordelia’s are. The audience pays attention to Cordelia, then, not because we hope that she will be able to please her father, but because we know that she cannot. Cordelia’s unsatisfying—but completely theatrically engaging—improvisation enrages Lear because he misreads her inability to perform under pressure as her confirming to him that she never loved him at all. The sense of shock produced here comes, again, from asking a daughter to improvise her response and, in turn, being left to improvise one’s response to the response just given.

When it is Cordelia’s turn to confirm her love for her father, she has literally nothing to say (1.1.85; 1.1.87). Cordelia’s nothing, however, ought not to be taken as her saying that she does not love her father. Cordelia’s “nothing” represents a kind of truth for her. Cordelia has a clear, demonstrative and unshakable hold on the truthfulness of her “Nothing” (1.1.85; 1.1.87). She is not, that is, saying that she does not love her father, but that her love cannot be put into words, or that words are insufficient to express what she feels. The issue is that she has not expressed why she cannot express her feelings for her father, and while the audience in the theatre knows that she loves him, the man she is speaking to on stage seems confused by her blunt response. The dramatic irony of the scene, however, matters. As mentioned

above, Cordelia has been talking directly to the audience during the love trial, building a relationship with its members, and letting the audience know that the issue is not that she does not love her father, but that she does not know what to say. The dramatic irony matters because Lear’s misreading of Cordelia’s response is perfectly understandable without it. For example, when Lear pushes Cordelia to “Speak again” (1.1.90), she says

Unhappy that I am, I cannot heave
My heart into my mouth. I love your majesty
According to my bond, no more nor less. (1.1.89-91)

The bond is personal, and perhaps interpersonal. She loves her father as he is her father and her king. Lear is not looking for an honest confirmation. He is looking for excess, and he hints at such in his response, coaching her that she should “Mend [her] speech a little | Lest you may mar your fortunes” (1.1.92-93). Lear’s is offering a quid pro quo. If Cordelia would be willing to flatter him a little more—or just not embarrass him by being cold at a moment when he wants tenderness—he will give her the “third more opulent than [her] sisters” (1.1.84). If she will not, however, she will end up with nothing.

Cordelia’s response is not to placate her father by turning to a seemingly spontaneous outpouring of emotional excess like her sisters, but to further unpack what she means by saying that she loves her father according to her bond. What is perhaps most troubling about her reply is not its honesty, but that she openly admits that she plans to love her husband after her bond is transferred from Lear to whomever she shall marry:

Good my lord,
You have begot me, bred me, loved me.
I return those duties back as are right fit—
Obey you, love you, and most honour you.

Why have my sisters husbands if they say

They love you all? Haply when I shall wed

That lord whose hand must take my plight shall carry

Half my love with him, half my care and duty.

Sure, I shall never marry like my sisters. (1.1.84-92)

In *The History of King Lear*, Cordelia’s speech is continued, slightly, to say “To love my father all” (sc 1.93). They love you all? The question implies skepticism on Cordelia’s part. She does not think that her sisters love her father absolutely and exclusively, and it is unclear if she is extending this affective critique of her sisters’ equivocal confirmations to suggest that they may not love their husbands or Lear at all. The first part of Cordelia’s set speech picks up on Lear’s prompt, but she gets off track when she turns to a discussion of her sisters and their attitudes towards matrimony. Again, the issue is that she seems to misunderstand the moment. Above all, Lear wants all of her attention to be on him, and on her love for him, and she turns spontaneously from a discussion of how she ought to love and obey her father to a discussion of how she will be a better wife than her sisters. If the key to improvisation is understanding the needs of the audience, Cordelia reveals that she does not understand that her speech, above all, needs to convince Lear that she loves him and will willingly pay attention to him after he gives up his crown.

By asking why her sisters will bother to have husbands if all of their love is for Lear, she is saying to her father that her sisters’ declarations of love were little more than skillful acts of equivocation. Cordelia, in contrast, stresses her honesty, confirming for her father and the audience that she will give at least half of her love to her husband once she marries. What
Lear takes from this speech is that Cordelia loves him according to her bond and that once she is married she will love him less. Where Lear responded to her first two attempts at confirming her love for him by prompting her towards a more satisfying answer, here he only asks “But goes this with thy heart?” (1.1.102). Cordelia shows herself to be poor at reading the emotional needs of her father in her improvised response, insofar as she does not seem to see that Lear’s “But” implies disappointment. Lear is trying to find a way to get his daughter out of the situation she has dug herself into while affirming his need to have his daughter spontaneously affirm her love for him. Cordelia is speaking of Lear here as her father and not as her King. But as Paul W. Kahn argues in his discussion of the relationship between law and love in the play, “A king cannot announce that he has not been serious about the process of law whenever he does not like the outcome.”CORDelia has confirmed that she loves her father according to their bond and that she will love him less after she is married. He does not have to like the answer, but if he decided to give her “A third [of the kingdom] more opulent than [her] sisters” (1.1.84) now he would have to undermine his own authority to have decided the question of succession through a love trial in the first place.

My point, then, is not that the play would have gone differently if Cordelia had been better prepared for the love trial, but rather that the love trial shows that it is unwise for Lear to ask his daughters to publicly confirm their love for him without first telling them what he needed them to say. Lear wants to know “Which of you shall we say doth love us most” (1.1.49), but what he finds out from the love trial is simply which of his daughters is best at learning a text by heart while seeming to speak from the heart. Goneril and Regan say what

is expected of them and confirm the orthodoxy of the court that Lear needs them to confirm. Moreover, they are skilled equivocators who make it seem as if they have learned their speech by rout rather than improvising it on the spot. There is, however, no reason to believe Goneril and Regan, and the fact that they are asked to confirm their love only once should lead us to suspect that they have not formed habits of love for their father as much as they have learned what they ought to say to seem as if they love their father. Cordelia seems to be caught off guard by the request for recitation and improvises. The results of this improvisation produce a dramatically engaging back and forth between Lear and Cordelia, but this improvisation also leads to Cordelia’s banishment and foreshadows Lear’s tragic isolation. Lear is not looking for the daughter who loves him most, but for the one who is he going to be able to say loves him most on the spot and under pressure. Cordelia is the daughter who may love her father the most, but she is the one who is least able to articulate her feelings for her father in a way that he will find pleasing.

5.2 “Mark, I Will Preach to Thee:” On Ministry and Attention

Both Edgar and Lear take radical steps to break Gloucester out of his despair. Edgar brings his father to a false cliff to convince his father that he tried to jump, and that his remaining alive proves that “Thy life’s a miracle” (4.5.55). Edgar’s plan is foolish, but it is carried out with some planning and wisdom. Edgar, for example, tells the audience in a direct address “Why I do trifle thus with his despair | Is done to cure it” (4.5.33-34). To some degree, Edgar’s plan seems to work. Before Gloucester thinks that he falls over the cliffs, he says while kneeling “O you mighty gods, | This world I do renounce, and in your sights |
Shake patiently my great affliction off!” (4.5.34-36). After the fall, Gloucester tells Edgar that “Henceforth I’ll bear | Affliction till it do cry out itself | ‘Enough, enough,’ and die” (4.6.75-77). It is after this that Lear enters the scene and ministers to Gloucester. While Edgar seems concerned with the well being of his father, Lear does not seem to have a plan, and he speaks in a blending of sense and nonsense. It is as if he does not think about the impact his words might have on his subject because he is still too consumed with his own suffering. In what follows, I am going to read Lear’s offer to preach to Gloucester, a man he identifies as being in a state of despair, and I will look at how Lear’s sermon fails. While Lear’s words are engaging, they are unwise, insofar as Lear does not think about how what he is saying will affect others. The audience is drawn to what Lear says in this scene because he is not being careful with his wording and thus he might say or do anything.

When Lear happens upon a blinded, defeated Gloucester at the foot of the Cliffs of Dover, Lear seems to want to comfort his friend, and begins to counsel him in a way that looks like ministry (4.5.80-183). Lear’s ministry is interesting because it blends sense and nonsense, or what Edgar calls “[r]eason in madness” (4.5.165), and it is based on a kind of mutual empathy. Consider, for example, Lear’s line “[i]f thou wilt weep my fortunes, take my eyes” (4.5.166). Lear’s line reminds Gloucester of his blindness. Likewise, when Gloucester would kiss Lear’s hand as an act of submission (4.5.125), Lear redirects him, telling him “Let me wipe it first, it smells of mortality” (4.5.126). Lear is, as Gloucester puts is, a “ruined piece of nature” (4.5.126), but it is Lear’s debased state that enables him to preach to Gloucester as an equal. Lear says that he will articulate the purpose of his and Gloucester’s earthly suffering but Lear’s sermon does not point to any kind of metaphysical system that might redeem earthly suffering. Rather, Lear’s short sermon to Gloucester
addresses suffering itself without proposing that it will lead to divine reward. Moreover, Lear’s sermon is given without any consideration to the impact it might have on Gloucester; it is as if Lear gets caught up in his own rage during the sermon and, rather than trying to make Gloucester feel better, or put his earthly sufferings in a larger perspective, Lear encourages his auditor—and the audience watching the play—to think of the problem of earthly suffering in terms of Lear’s rage.

In asking Gloucester to *mark* him, Lear seems to be saying that he will manufacture a moral from the sufferings that he and Gloucester are enduring if Gloucester pays close attention to what he is about to say. Lear’s request to be *marked* seems odd, until it is placed into the context of early modern sermons. In the sermons of Hugh Latimer, for instance, “mark” is used to draw attention to times when the preacher wants his audience to pay particular attention to a close reading he is giving of a Biblical passage. For example, during the Second Sermon before Edward VI, Latimer notes of Deut. 1:17, “Mark this saying, thou proud judge. The devil will bring this sentence at the day of doom. Hell will be full of these judges if they do not repent and amend. They are worse than the wicked judge that Christ speaketh of that neither feared God not the world.” In the First Sermon on the Lord’s Prayer, Latimer is discussing I John 3:9 and says, “But mark here. Scripture speaketh not of impenitent sinners. Christ suffered not for them; his death remedieth not their sins. For they be the bondmen of the devil and his slaves, and therefore Christ’s benefits pertain not to them.”

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317 Ibid., 88.
318 Ibid., 163.
Yet, while Latimer acknowledges his audience for marking a small moral or theological lesson about scripture, Lear uses the rhetorical trope to subvert the expectation that preaching should offer meaning. Rather than telling Gloucester how to make meaning out of his suffering, Lear asks for Gloucester’s attention in order to tell him that earthly suffering is pointless because there is no meaning to be discovered on this “great stage of fools.” For Lear,

When we are born, we cry that we are come
To this great stage of fools. This is a good block.

It were a delicate stratagem to shoe
A troop of horse with felt. I’ll put it in proof

And when I have stolen upon these son-in-laws,
Then kill, kill, kill, kill, kill, kill! (4.5.172-177)

Lear’s sermon seems like it will expand on the idea that we are born into suffering, but he loses track of his argument when he finds “a good block” (4.5.173). The good block here could be a reference to the foundations of the sermon itself, or it could be a physical block that has distracted Lear. Lear might be saying that the idea that men are born crying when they enter the stage of fools is a good one with which to begin his sermon, or he might be saying that he has found a platform from which to preach that pleases him. He seems to have nothing more to say on the topic of human sufferings that ought to be marked, and he descends into improvised nonsense that does a better job of conveying his feelings of rage than it does in giving Gloucester some hope that the suffering men experience by being born to a stage of fools is worthwhile. Lear’s descent into nonsense matters because it shows us that the entire sermon was improvised. He may have had a good block, or foundation, for
what he wanted to say about suffering, but he has nowhere to go because he does not have a set text.

Returning to my focus on attention and dramaturgy in this dissertation, Lear’s request that Gloucester mark what he is saying turns Gloucester into a kind of auditor who is listening to Lear’s improvised direct address while, at the same time, making the theatre audience suddenly self-conscious of their collective experience. Lear’s sermon is directed to Gloucester who, if anything, becomes more isolated by what Lear says. Gloucester’s response to Lear’s offer to preach directly to him is a lament: “Alack, alack the day!” (4.5.171). The interjection *alack* functions like *amen* during a liturgy, but it is an interjection that is used to express pity or regret.\(^{319}\) By saying *alack* Gloucester seems to lament the very idea that Lear has fallen so far that he would now preach directly to him. The liturgy of the *Book of Common Prayer* frequently uses a call and response format, and in “A Commination Against Sinners,” the congregation is told that it “shoulde answere to every sentence. Amen. To the intent that you being admonished of the great [indignation] of God against sinners.”\(^{320}\) Rather than saying *amen* and affirming the injustice of being born into a world of suffering, Gloucester says *alack* and implies that what he feels is not affirmation but grief, pity, or regret over what he is seeing and hearing.\(^{321}\) While this is happening, moreover, the audience is placed in an odd position. Normally, when a character wants attention in a Shakespearean tragedy, they break the fourth wall and speak directly to the audience, hailing its members all

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as a group who are about to be given important information. Here the audience sees an inversion of the Shakespearean direct address, where one character offers to address another character directly, as if the two of them were alone on the stage. The audience is in the same position as Edgar during Lear’s sermon, insofar as it is watching a sermon that is not, necessarily intended for it. However, while I think that Lear is not necessarily addressing the audience directly in this sermon, there is something about the nonsense of the sermon that makes us mark him with the same kind of intensity we might mark a character who is speaking directly to the audience. If anything, the disconnect between the sermon that one might expect Lear to give and the improvised nonsense he provides instead demands the attention of the audience far more than a conventional direct address ever could because he improvises his sermon rather than delivering a set text.

Shortly after Lear’s sermon the Gentleman enters the stage to rescue him, and it is thirty lines before we know how the sermon has affected Gloucester. Gloucester repents for trying to kill himself and he is willing to continue enduring his suffering because he knows that Lear’s suffering is greater:

You ever gentle gods, take my breath from me.

Let not my worser spirit tempt me again

To die before you please. (4.5.209-211)

Coming back to the larger theme of dramatic attention in this chapter, Lear obtains the result he wanted from his improvised sermon, but that result comes from the spectacle of his aspect. That is, Gloucester does not reference Lear’s sermon in his prayer, but what he does reference directly is the Lear’s madness (4.5.271).

As he puts it later in the scene,
The King is mad. How stiff is my vile sense,
That I stand up and have ingenious feeling
Of my huge sorrows! Better I were distraught,
So should my thoughts be severed from my griefs,
And woes by wrong imaginations lose
The knowledge of themselves. (4.5.271-276)

The most urgent thing is Gloucester’s open acknowledgement of the madness of the king. The key word here, however, is “distraught.” Gloucester is not forming a habit of perseverance, nor has he learned anything from Lear’s sermon that might help him the next time that he is in a state of despair. The phrase “Better I were distraught” could be taken as Gloucester saying that it would be better if he, like Lear, had a distracted mind, where his thoughts could be severed from his griefs. There is nothing wise, then, in Lear’s sermon, even if it was effective in distracting Gloucester from his woes. What the scene establishes, and what will become important for the discussion of Cordelia’s eulogy below, is the question of persuasion. Lear’s excessive emotional outbursts are dramatically engaging, but they do not inspire other characters to lasting change.

5.3 “Howl:” On Lear’s Eulogy for Cordelia

When Lear enters the stage with Cordelia in his aged, weakened arms, he takes on a role similar to that of a priest presiding over the burial of the dead. He will tell those he has called to attention over the body of the departed how to make sense of the absurdity of death but, unlike a priest, Lear has no interest in mediating the emotional turmoil caused by her
death or helping the bereaved to cope with their loss. The Book of Common Prayer uses the liturgy for the dead as a means of providing closure between the living and the dead; whereas, Lear tries to use his eulogy for Cordelia as a means of reversing death itself and bringing back his beloved departed. Lear is an engaging priest-like figure in this scene because the semblance of affective self-fashioning is absent from the way he addresses Cordelia’s tragic, violent death. His presentation is raw, selfish, and seemingly unfiltered. It is emotionally honest but, again, unwise.

Lear knows that Cordelia is as dead as the earth, but that does not mean that he understands the irreversibility of the process of death. To see the radicalness of Lear’s eulogy over Cordelia’s body, it is helpful to place it into the context of the Book of Common Prayer’s “Ordination for The Burial for the Dead.” According to the text, man “hathe but a shorte tyme to lyve, and it full of miserye.” The Book of Common Prayer cites Job, and the idea that “The Lorde giveth, and the Lorde taketh awaye. Even as it hath pleased the Lorde, so mommeth thynges to passe.” Death is an ever present reality: “[i]n the middest of lyfe we be in death.” The task of the bereaved is acceptance of death and of the idea that power over life and death is the dominion of God and God alone:

For as muche as it hath pleased almighty God of his great mercy to take unto hym selfe the Soule of out deare brother, here departed, we therefore committe hys body to the grounde, earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust, in sure and certain hope of resurrection to eternall lyfe.

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323 Ibid., 171.
324 Ibid., 171.
325 Ibid., 171.
326 Ibid., 172.
Central to the “Burial for the Dead” is a turn in the attention of the bereaved from the body of the departed and towards God’s mercy and their hope for the salvation of the departed. The key idea here is hope. Because the priest does not have an implied special access to God he cannot pronounce that the departed will be saved, nor does he imply that the bereaved can do anything for the dead. What the bereaved can do, however, is to reflect on the nature of hope itself.

In the Book of Common Prayer, the body, without a soul, is nothing more than an object to be recycled. A key point of the “Order” is to separate the social relationship between the living and the dead. The dead body is now little more than dust, and by committing the dead body to the earth, the bereaved are trading their relationship with the body of the departed for a hope for their resurrection. In contrast, right after Lear acknowledges that Cordelia’s soul is in heaven’s vault and that her body is as dead as earth, he pauses and asks for a looking-glass so that he can see “If that her breath will mist or stain the stone” (5.3.236). Lear wants to have a continuing relationship with his daughter, but for Lear this relationship depends on her continued embodied existence. It is as if Lear looks at the death of his daughter as a thing-in-itself for just a moment and then he realizes that he cannot endure her passing without hope of her resurrection. To deal with this realization, Lear begins to look for vital signs, or any implications that Cordelia might not actually be dead. Further, he pins all of his hopes of future happiness on Cordelia’s still being alive: “This feather stirs. She lives. If it be so, | It is a chance which does redeem all sorrows | That ever I have felt” (5.3.239-241). Lear is clear here that returning to life will not redeem Cordelia’s suffering, but that it may redeem the suffering that he has endured. The redemption, moreover, will be an earthly redemption and not a spiritual one.
It is the spectacle of what Arthur Kirsch calls the “immeasurable pain” of Cordelia’s death that captures and holds our attention. 327 We are drawn to Lear not because we think that we can reverse Cordelia’s death through a collective display of grief, but because Lear’s pain seems so real that we cannot turn away from him while he is suffering. When calling those on stage to attention and mourning over Cordelia’s body, Lear attempts to get others—perhaps both those on the stage and in the audience—to howl with him as a means of reversing death itself:

Howl, howl, howl, howl! O, you are men of stones.

Had I your tongues and eyes, I’d use them so

That heaven’s vault should crack. She’s gone for ever.

I know when one is dead and when one lives.

She’s dead as earth. (5.3.231-235).

Lear’s expression of loss is unmitigated, and his epizeuxis “Howl, howl, howl, howl!” reinforces that there is nothing more to say in the face of the anguish of his despair than to cry out in pain. As Katharine Goodland argues, the power of Lear’s mourning “makes us mute and powerless witnesses to death and mourning, unmitigated.” 328 Lear does not attempt, like Othello, to mitigate the power of his grief over the loss of his beloved by mediating his feelings about her death or by implying that her death had a higher meaning. David Anderson notes that one of the ways that violence is sanctified in King Lear is through aestheticizing it,

328 Katharine Goodland, Female Mourning in Medieval and Renaissance English Drama: From the Raising of Lazarus to King Lear. (Surrey: Ashgate, 2006), 201.
but aesthetics give way here to a kind of raw affective self-presentation. Lear is not offering meaning for Cordelia’s death, nor is he offering a consoling story that she will unambiguously exist in heaven. Cordelia is simply gone from Lear forever and it is the realization of the irreversibility of her absence that the audience is being asked to witness. It is this lack of mitigation that makes Cordelia’s death scene so commanding. The affective power of Lear’s mourning in this scene is overwhelming, especially given all that the audience has had to endure up to this point in the play. Because of this, Lear seems unable, or unwilling, to turn his attention from the earthly fact of Cordelia’s death and toward some kind of hope for future happiness. It is as if the darkness of sorrow of death consumes Lear. Goodland argues that the scene leaves Lear “Exhausted by convulsions of passion, joy, and grief,” a collection of affects that will eventually lead to his death from a broken heart. The reason that Lear cannot provide comfort and distraction for the other characters on the stage is that he no longer has any distractions; he is so totally focused on his suffering and his hope that his daughter is still alive that he lacks empathy for those listening to him.

Lear’s call for the audience and the characters to howl is moving, but it is not clear that it produces its intended result. Evocatively, Lear’s eulogy over the body of his dead daughter does not produce howls of despair from his audience, but it does focus the attention of those on stage on his suffering. Kent asks, upon enduring the sight of Lear’s despair, “Is this the promised end?” (5.3.237). Edgar follows up on Kent’s question by asking “Or image of that horror?” (5.3.238). The promised end here is a kind of earthly Hell, in Dante’s sense of Hell as being a place where those who are admitted must “Abandon every hope” (3.9).

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330 Goodland, Female Mourning, 202.
Lear is, as Kent puts it, an image of the horror of absolute despair; he looks upon Cordelia’s death as a thing-in-itself without any underlying hope. Without her, Lear has no hope of future happiness and all of his sufferings become meaningless. Tripping on the end of Kent’s and Edgar’s questions about the theological meaning of what they have scene, Albany simply hopes for Lear to “Fall, and cease” (5.3.238). Albany can be read as saying that Lear’s suffering is excessive and that it would be a mercy for Lear to die rather than to continue enduring such an overwhelming suffering. But, perhaps, Albany’s sentiment that Lear should fall and cease may be an expression of the sentiment of an audience who has been made to endure so much already. Notice, however, what is not being said. The attention of the characters on the stage is not on Cordelia and her death, but on Lear and his immeasurable pain. If the point of Lear’s eulogy was to get everyone in attendance to act as a collective and howl for Cordelia’s resurrection, it is telling that the attention of the characters have turned away from Cordelia, whose body is still on the stage, and towards Lear.

Lear’s attention is not on Cordelia’s salvation, but on how her vitality may redeem his earthly sufferings. What it might redeem is the suffering of a bereaved father who hopes for nothing more than for hope itself. When that hope is taken from him, Lear lashes out at all of those who might have done something to help him in a fit of despair:

A plague upon you, murderers, traitors all.

I might have saved her; now she’s gone for ever—

Cordelia, Cordelia, stay a little. (5.3.243-245)

There is, once again, something troublingly unwise about Lear’s sentiment here. He is calling the characters on the stage murderers and traitors, the same characters that he says can save his daughter by howling. In the *Book of Common Prayer*, the minister is asked to thank God
on behalf of the bereaved, “with whom do live the spirites of them that departed hence in the lord,” for delivering the departed from “the burthen of the flesh” and from “thys synneful worlde.”

In contrast, Lear’s eulogy is concerned with whether he could have prevented his child’s death and with passing blame onto others as well.

The theme of the potential reversibility of death is important to King Lear. When Lear is woken from his slumber and reunited with his daughter he is, at first, displeased because he thinks that he has been resurrected and it would have been better for Cordelia to leave him in the grave:

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. (4.6.38-41)

Lear’s suffering is so great that he sees it wrong to deny him the respite of death. Yet, when Cordelia dies, he would have everyone on stage work with him to return her to the world of the living. This kind of purgatorial imagery reoccurs when Edgar would have Lear look up before he dies, and Kent, in a rage, chides Edgar for bothering a dying and suffering man:

Vex not his ghost; O, let him pass. He hates him
That would upon the rack of this tough world
Stretch him out longer. (5.3.288-290)

Kent’s idea of hatred is an evocative one in this context. Edgar implies that it would be an act of hatred to bring Lear’s ghost back from the dead to endure any more suffering.

Furthermore, it would be an act of hatred to ask the audience to endure any more of Lear’s

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suffering. Images of Lear stretched out on the rack bound to wheel of fire indirectly evoke discussions of purgatory and of martyrdom. Greenblatt reads Lear as being in a kind of earthly Hell or Purgatory, and for Lear “these realms of misery are not … located in the otherworldly they are here and now, his waking reality.” J. S. W. Helt argues that souls in purgatory “deserved to be remembered by the living because the dead depended on the community of the living to relieve them of their suffering.” Purgatory kept the dead in the lives of the living and allows the living to pay attention to needs of the dead. As Peter Marshall argues, “[i]n the early stages of the Reformation in England the validity of the Church’s teaching on purgatory rapidly emerged as a major focus of controversy,” and English Protestants had a “deep-seated theological rejection of purgatory.” Hell, for Marshall, replaced purgatory in Protestant moralistic and polemical thought “as an instrument of social control.” In King Lear, in contrast, there is a radical divide between the living and the dead. The living can, like Kent, join the dead, but they cannot provide the dead with comfort or ease their suffering.

Lear’s realization in his eulogy that Cordelia is “dead as earth” reminds the audience that the only way Lear can maintain a relationship with his daughter is if he can resurrect her. Implicitly, Lear takes up the idea from the “Order” of returning to the body to the ground. During the “Order” the priest is to say “we therefore comitte hys bodye to the grounde,

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333 Greenblatt, Hamlet in Purgatory, 186.
336 Ibid., 159.
earthe to earthe, ashes to ashes, dust to dust, in sure and certain hope of resurrection to eternall lyfe.“\textsuperscript{337} The \textit{Book of Common Prayer} rejects the idea of embodied resurrection, imagining that the soul sheds the body in the same way that the seed of the wheat sheds the shaft. \textsuperscript{338} There are two manners of bodies, the celestial and the terrestrial, and “the glory of the celestial is one, and the glory of the terrestrial is another.”\textsuperscript{339} The terrestrial body is, for the Reformed Church, something with which the bereaved ought not concern themselves. In contrast, all of Lear’s hope and attention in this scene is fixated on the terrestrial body of Cordelia. Again, my point here is not that Lear ought not to mourn his daughter, or that he ought to be political about her death, but that Lear seems incapable of seeing past these moments to plan the next thing because he is improvising.

Burying the dead is not intended to have any transformational effect for the departed, but it is intended as a moment where the bereaved can contemplate the shame of their sins, the state of their souls, and repent. That is, the burial service in the \textit{Book of Common Prayer} uses death to turn the attention of the mourners away from the departed and towards their own salvation. It is this turn that Lear seems unable to effect. The \textit{Book of Common Prayer} burial service is far more for the benefit of the living than for the remembrance of the dead. The discussion of sin and salvation in the Order are intended for those who “slepe and sinne” and have “not the knowledge of God.”\textsuperscript{340} In this way, attending to the burial of the dead was about transforming the living. Duffy notes that stories about purgatory were intended to expose the divine consequences of sin, and “such horrors [were] not simply intended to

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{337} Cummings, ed, \textit{The Book of Common Prayer}, 172.
  \item \textsuperscript{338} Ibid., 173.
  \item \textsuperscript{339} Ibid., 173.
  \item \textsuperscript{340} Ibid., 172.
\end{itemize}
harrow and terrify but to convert and chas
ten.”\textsuperscript{341} For the \textit{Book of Common Prayer}, in contrast, the attention paid to the burial of the dead is done to shame the sinner: “I speak this [the sermon about sin] to your shame.”\textsuperscript{342} The sinner, upon reflecting on the death of another, is intended to reflect on the status of his own soul, its readiness for death, and to feel shame for his lack of godliness. The Order intends to turn the attention of the bereaved from the departed to the shameful sins of the living. Lear offers no hope of future salvation for those watching him mourn his daughter unless their howling can resurrect her, and his attitude of despair circulates through his audience. Lear, importantly, does not repent his sins in the face of witnessing his daughter’s death, and while he accuses others of being murders and traitors, the repentance he asks for is for them to howl for the dead.

Lear’s metaphor of “heaven’s vault” (5.3.233) implies that Cordelia’s soul is locked away, in heaven, and that it is madness to pray for her to return to an uncertain world. If Cordelia is in heaven’s vault she is saved, and yet for Lear the important issue is that he could have saved her earthly body, if not for the murderers and traitors who prevented him from doing so. Indeed, if the scene offers any hope of salvation it is that Lear thinks that Cordelia may be alive: “Do you see this? Look on her. Look, her lips. | Look there, look there” (5.3.285-286). Lear’s last words draw attention to Cordelia’s body, her lips in particular, and his hope that he sees her breath. Lear dies hoping that his daughter may yet be alive.

Lear draws the spectator’s attention towards contemplating the meaning and emotional impact of death. Consider, for example, Lear’s realization that Cordelia has been killed:

\textsuperscript{341} Duffy, \textit{The Stripping of the Altars}, 339.
\textsuperscript{342} Cummings, ed, \textit{The Book of Common Prayer}, 172.
And my poor fool is hanged. No, no, no life?
Why should a dog, a horse, a rat have life,
And thou no breath at all? Thou’lt come no more,
Never, never, never, never, never. (5.3.280-283)

While Lear’s “never” may be a way of acknowledging that Cordelia will never live again, the repetition of never once again separates meaning from feeling. That is, by saying “never” five times in a row the word begins to lose its signification as an adverb, but it starts to carry an affective implication of finality and despair. Moreover, while never is not nothing, the line could be read as picking up on the earlier conversations about the meaning of nothingness.

Earlier in the play, the Fool pushes Lear on the issue of nothingness, asking him “Can you make no use of nothing, | nuncle?” (1.4.116-117). Lear says that “nothing can be made out of nothing” (1.4.118), but it is not clear that this is true within the world of the play. Lear rejects his daughter because she says nothing. The Fool notes that Lear’s titles will come to nothing because he has no more lands and collects no more rents. Lear’s sermon to Gloucester is a kind of nonsense, or nothingness. And Cordelia’s lifeless body may never live again, but the audience knows that there are things that Lear could have done that might have provided for a more hopeful ending – and ending in keeping with the hopeful projections of the Protestant eulogy as a form.

Lear’s reaction to Cordelia’s death has a demoralizing impact on the characters on stage. Albany notes that the “present business | Is to general woe” (5.3.293-294), but he still looks for someone to “Rule in this realm, and the gored state sustain” (5.3.295). Sustaining the realm would bring both political and affective order back to the kingdom, and at the end of the play even this level of closure is denied to the audience. As Kahn argues in Law and
Love: The Trials of King Lear, “the end of the play creates a feeling of a lack of control—nothing is going as it should.”\textsuperscript{343} Kent refuses to take the crown, saying that he has to die now that Lear is dead: “I have a journey, sir, shortly to go: | My master calls me; I must not say no” (5.3.296-297). Edgar does not even respond to the suggestion that he should take the crown. Instead, Edgar stresses that now is not a time to deal with obligations of state: “The weight of this sad time we must obey, | Speak what we feel, not what we ought to say” (5.3.298-299). Much of the play has been about Lear unwisely improvising rather than speaking as he should as king. The lack of control at the end of the play is, in a way, more dramatically engaging than repetition and order ever could be. It is not that politics are not engaging to watch—seeing characters say what they feel becomes fascinating for the audience—but political actors have to be careful in their self-fashioning, always ensuring that they measure their actions for fear of unintended consequences.

I want, then, to end this chapter by picking back up on Kahn’s metaphor of control, suggesting a relationship between control and confirmation. Lear’s repeated, failed, and frustrated religious speech acts give the impression of a man living in a world that is out of control, but also of a man who is not in control of his words and emotions. In contrast, the other characters in the play retain their power for as long as they do because they say what ought to be said rather than what they feel. If Lear represents the zealous preacher, then we have an unresolved paradox. While Lear cannot persuade others on the stage with his religious rhetoric to do his bidding, the audience spends a lot of time paying close and careful attention to his emotionally charged words. In contrast, the audience does not spend the same amount of time attending to Regan’s and Goneril’s equivocations. I think this is because

\textsuperscript{343} Kahn, Law and Love: The Trials of King Lear, 142.
equivocal religious speech is intended to be inoffensive and utterly forgettable, seeming to say everything and nothing all at once. In contrast, Lear offers a kind of speech that is memorable because it is impassioned, even though it fails to convince.

In his prayer for the poor in 3.4, Lear confesses that he has taken too little care of the plight of the poor and suffering. It is, I admit, idiosyncratic to read this as a moment of prayer. After all, the subject matter is more akin to political philosophy than to a devotional issue. But, I think it matters that Lear says to the others on stage that he wants to be left alone, telling them when they are reluctant to leave him “I’ll pray, and then I’ll sleep” (3.4.27). While wandering on stage with Kent and his Fool during the “The tyranny of the open night’s too rough | For nature to endure” (3.4.2-3) sequence, Lear consents to enter into a hovel to escape the elements and preserve his aging, delicate body. Lear is distracted during the storm before he enters the hovel, saying that he can only focus on “filial ingratitude” (3.4.14) despite the torrent of indiscriminate rain pouring down on his royal body, noting that he seeks “leave to ponder | On things would hurt me more” (3.4.24-25). Lear reflects on the plight of the poor and homeless while confessing his inadequacies as a monarch to the theatre audience:

Poor naked wretches, wheresoe’r you are,
That bide the pelting of this pitiless storm,
How shall your houseless heads and unfed sides,
Your looped and windowed raggedness, defend you
From seasons such as these? O, I have ta’en
Too little care of this. Take physic, pomp,

Moreover, the stage direction given in the Arden Shakespeare has Lear kneeling befroe he given these lines (652), although there seems to be no justification in either the Folio or Quarto edition of the text for this instruction.
Expose thyself to feel what wretches feel,
That thou mayst shake the superflux to them
And show the heavens more just. (3.4.28-36)

In some ways this moment is similar to Claudius at prayer, in that the lead character draws
the attention of the audience in by promising to let them witness a monarch praying, and, just
like Claudius at prayer, the prayer itself never happens. However, where Claudius cannot
pray because he cannot find a form of prayer that will serve his turn, Lear becomes distracted
by his feelings for the poor. What Lear’s prayer draws attention to, then, is not the poor, or
the duties and obligations of a Christian nation towards the poor, but of his personal failings
as a ruler and as such it becomes a kind of confirmation of what the audience knows to be
true. It was Lear’s task to show the heavens more just and, in that task, Lear has failed. If,
however, the task of this scene is to show that Lear is a man whose emotions are always, to
some extent, exposed, then the scene is wildly successful. Exposing his emotions does
nothing to bring him out from the elements or to feed the poor. By exposing himself, Lear,
like Cordelia, builds a dramatic relationship with the audience, but he also shows that such
relationships do not change anything. The poor and Lear are just as exposed to the elements
after the prayer as they were before. Cordelia is just as disinherited after she qualifies her
nothing as she was before she said anything.
Chapter Six

“What you know, you know:” A Coda On Absent Confirmations in

Shakespeare’s Othello

Lurking in the subtext of my dissertation is Erich Auerbach’s argument that “the Christian figural view of human life” was incommensurate with tragedy.\footnote{Erich Auerbach, Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Thought, trans. Willard R. Trask, intro. Edward Said (Princeton: Princeton University Press, [1953] 2003), 317.} He argues that all of human existence in a Christian worldview became secondary to a singularly untragic event: the rise, death, and subsequent resurrection of Christ. Auerbach argues that Shakespeare, and I would add Marlowe, had to endow their heroes with a sense of personal meaning in order to give their plays a sense of tragic size.\footnote{Ibid., 324.} At the same time, I am also implying that Marlowe’s and Shakespeare’s tragedies reject the “mirror” didactic tragic tradition, whereby the faults of powerful men are reflected back to the audience as lessons about how one ought to live. Hamlet’s life and death have a sense of tragic size, as does Faustus’s life, not because of who they are, or what they represent, but because the audience is made to pay close and careful attention to their hopes, desires, and spiritual and psychological torments. Marlowe tries to convince his viewer that it is worth paying attention to the fall of a relatively unimportant and potentially fallen man, just as Shakespeare tries to convince us that Hamlet views the life of his fool as worthy of being mourned. My point is that Marlowe and Shakespeare did not achieve this by secularizing the theatre, but by being selective about the moments in which tragedy would evoke a sense of religious energy. I have also been interested in the ways in which identity and religion are interdependent in
Marlowe’s and Shakespeare’s plays. Aaron’s and Barabas’s villainy is confirmed in a way that blends early modern concerns with non-Christian raced men with a more traditional stage villain, while still implying that the hopes, plots, and sufferings of non-Christian raced men are worthy of sustained dramatic attention.

In this coda, I return to the interface between religion and race and to Othello in order to read Othello’s admission of his murder of Desdemona (5.2.337-354) as a raced confirmation. In this dissertation I have argued that confirmations put knowledge on display and that confessions place repentance on display. Othello admits to his sins just like Claudius and Faustus, for example, but he never admits that his sins are sins and takes responsibility for what he has done. The contrast is with Iago, who says that “Heaven is [his] judge” and that he does what he does not for “love and duty” but “for [his own] peculiar end” (1.1.59-60). Iago, of course, never quite says what this end is, but he does say that his actions “doth demonstrate | The native act and figure of my heart” and that he is “not what I am” (1.1.61-62, 65). For Iago, we should be judged by our actions, not our intentions, and Iago’s evocation of God in Exodus 3:14 implies that he is in complete control of what is going on. Othello, in contrast, argues in his confirmation of Desdemona’s murder that his actions do not demonstrate the figure of his heart. Thus, where the audience might feel confident that it knows what Faustus, Claudius, Aaron, Barabas, and Lear think and feel because they express themselves in a failed religious register, Othello is a play filled with doubts, gaps, and absences. We are not sure how to judge Iago because he never unambiguously articulates his reasons for plotting against Othello. We are not sure how to judge Othello because it is unclear if his being “perplexed in the extreme” (5.2.345) ought to mitigate his guilt if he does not openly confess and confirm what he has done.
Othello is sure of his being honorable, and that his transgression is not his fault. According to Beckwith, two of the conditions of forgiveness in early modern thought are having the characters go through a conversion whereby “past actions are seen in a transformed light, and one whose authorizing vision will necessitate and enable a change in the whole person” and requiring the characters who forgive to have “faith and hope in the future.”

Thus, when Othello confirms his actions he does not see them in a “transformed light” but tries to transform the light that others see his actions through. If Othello has hope for the future it is not that he will go to Heaven for repenting his sins, but that others might speak of him as an honorable man. The ideal contrast, then, is between Othello and Macbeth. Macbeth is fixated on his inability to pray, or to ask God to forgive him for what he has done. The desire to repent implies that Macbeth knows that his actions have alienated him from God, and that this alienation was the price that he had to pay for earthly gain. Claudius, likewise, can be read as implying that he wants to be forgiven for his actions, but not if that forgiveness comes at the price of giving up his crown. Othello does not kill Desdemona for a crown, and thus he is not in the position of Macbeth or Claudius who murder for political advancement. Nor, we might argue, is Othello in the position of Faustus, who transgresses against God for earthly knowledge and power. Rather, what Othello cares about is his reputation and there is no way for Othello to both repent his rank sins and to retain the pretense that he acted honorably.

I bring up this issue of motivations here because it helps us to read Othello’s utterly unsatisfying confirmation of his own role in Desdemona’s murder. Othello’s concern in his confirmation of Desdemona’s murder, however, is not to confirm what

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he has done, or why he does it; instead it is to craft how others will see him and how they will report about what he has done. In this way, his confession is less fulsome than those of stage villains like Aaron and Barabas, insofar as they embrace their crimes and the pleasures they take in them. According to Othello, when those on stage, and perhaps in the audience, report on his role in the play then they should speak of him as a man more sinned against than sinner:

    then must you speak

    Of one that loved not wisely, but too well;
    Of one not easily jealous, but being wrought,
    Perplexed in the extreme; of one whose hand,
    Like the base Indian, threw a pearl away
    Richer than all his tribe; of one whose subdued eyes,
    Albeit unused to the melting mood,
    Drops tears as fast as the Arabian trees
    Their medicinable gum. (5.2.342-350)

Othello’s final confirmation is a means of proving that he loves Desdemona, despite the fact that he has murdered her. The image of the “base Indian” throwing away a pearl is evocative. In this case the transgression happens out of ignorance. Othello does not, however, kill Desdemona out of ignorance. He kills her out of anger after she refuses to confess. In fact, paradoxically, what Othello is saying is that his willingness to kill Desdemona is a confirmation of his feelings for her. He loves her “too well” and this is what makes him kill her. Contrast this with Aaron, Claudius, or even Faustus, who have done wicked things, but who tell the audience why they do what they do. Othello, in contrast, does not seem to know
himself but he does seem sure about how he wishes to be read by others.

Thus, Othello’s inability to provide a satisfying confirmation of his guilt matters not because it shows that he is unrepentant, but because it shows that he is more interested in being seen as the victim of circumstance than he is with admitting that what he has done is wrong. In this way, it is evocative that after stabbing himself and placing what Lodivico calls a “bloody period” at the end of the plot (5.2.356), Othello joins Desdemona in bed and says “I kissed thee ere I killed thee—no way but this: | Killing myself, to die upon a kiss” (5.2.357-358). Othello’s dying concern is creating what Lodovico calls “the tragic loading of this bed” (5.2.362). He does not repent what he has done, but rather creates a tableau of himself as a lover, dying beside his wife. The issue, then, is not one of forgiveness but one of memory. Othello is concerned with being remembered as an honorable lover and not as a dishonorable murderer. Thus, his concern is not with repenting and transforming his being, but with confirming for the characters on stage that he is the honorable and loving husband that he has fashioned himself to be and not the rampaging murderer that he has become.

When a character confirms something in Marlowe or Shakespeare they discuss their actions and their motivations without offering to change their ways or to repent, in the sense of turning or returning to God. Thus, what distinguishes a confirmation from a confession, on the early modern stage, is the absence of repentance or conversion. Characters who repent also convert, turning or returning their attention to God and directing the attention of the audience towards the future. I do not read Othello as confessing, then, because his acts do not imply futurity, but I do think that his act confirms both what he has done and, importantly, that he knows that what he has done is wrong. Othello does not turn himself away from sin and toward God when he confirms his crimes to the audience. Othello not only avoids taking
full responsibility for his murder of Desdemona, but he stabs himself shortly after he confirms his crime in an act of despair.

Othello’s confirmation, then, is not repentant and therefore he is not confessing as much as he is confirming his guilt to the audience and trying to get them to see him differently. Consider, for example, Othello’s call for attention: “Soft you, a word or two before you go: | I have done the state some service, and they know’t— | No more of that” (5.2.337-339). Othello’s address is not to God, or in the form of a prayer, but to the men on stage from Venice who will return home to report what has happened in Cyprus. Furthermore, by reminding the men that he has done some service for the state, he is asking them to consider his service as a mitigating factor. Thus, the issue here is not that Othello repents what he has done, but that he regrets that the men from Venice will remember his murdering his wife and that they might forget his service to the state. I am arguing that Othello’s confession works in the same way as Claudius’s prayer, insofar as it displays his guilt and his lack of repentance. But, where the audience needed confirmation of Claudius’s guilt, we have no such need in Othello. We saw Othello murder his wife. Thus, what holds the audience’s attention in this scene is not the confirmation of Othello’s actions but his confirmation of his motivations and, in turn, his lack of personal responsibility for the severity of what he has done. In contrast, when Othello is asked by Lodovico “Where is this rash and most unfortunate man?” (5.2.281), he replies “That’s he that was Othello: here I am” (5.2.282). It is as if Othello does not recognize that he is the same person who murdered his wife.
Othello’s downfall is that he cares more about what people think of him than he does about repenting for his sins, an issue that is complicated by Othello’s status as a Moor. According to Jonathan Gil Harris, while Shakespeare does not use race to imply skin colour, Shakespeare is “possessed of a strong colour consciousness—or, more specifically, a black-and-white-consciousness.” Building on the work of Auerbach, the central dramatic issue in *Othello* is that Shakespeare is drawing attention to the suffering of a Christian man who happens to be Moor. Since I am reading Othello’s final “confession” as a kind of confirmation, I am also evoking the issue of his conversion to Christianity. I follow Julia Reinhard Lupton in arguing that Othello is a baptized Christian (2.3.328) who has converted from Islam. Like Bartels, however, I think it is important to note that Othello is a converted Moor, and that the Moor “was characterized alternatively and sometimes simultaneously in contradictory extremes, as noble or monstrous, civil or savage.” What made the Moor so paradoxical and threatening to the English was his ability to pass as civilized, to be “too like the English—behavior that might undermine England’s claim to a natural dominance and superiority.” The situation here is akin to what Homi K. Bhabha calls the movement from mimicry, the idea of “a difference that is almost nothing but not quite,” to what he calls menace, or the idea of “a difference

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351 Ibid., 435.
that is almost total but not quite.” Othello is a Christian and a citizen of Venice and he has a white wife from a good family, and yet he is “not quite/not white,” something that becomes more pressing for the white characters in the play whenever Othello transgresses. I think what Othello is asking when he asks to be spoken of as he is (5.2.341) is to be spoken of with “nothing extenuate, | Nor set down aught in malice” (5.2.341-342). But, it is possible for a mimic to be read objectively after he has demonstrated that he is a menace?

Othello wants to be spoken of “as [he] is” because he does not want to be read as a racialized stage villain. In the terms of Maus, Othello wants to be judged by his personal inwardness, or that which he has within him that passes show, but the play also implies that Othello’s inwardness is illegible because of his blackness. If Aaron articulates a kind of proto-black pride that embraces a unity between his inner blackness and his black aspect, Othello might be read as anticipating Martin Luther King Jr’s desire for men to be judged by the content of their character and not the color of their skin. But the other characters are unwilling to read Othello’s character outside of a raced logic once he transgresses. Consider Brabantio’s reading of Othello. When accusing Othello of eloping with his daughter and bewitching her, Brabantio says, “O thou foul thief, where hast thou stowed my daughter? | Damned as thou art, thou hast enchanted her” (1.2.62-63). The reference to Othello’s damnation is a reference to his appearance. He is black, like the devil, and therefore for

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353 Ibid., 131
354 Maus, *Inwardness*, 3. Also, Maus has a chapter on *Othello* (104-127).
Brabantio he is damned.\textsuperscript{355} Even if Othello has been baptized as a Christian and done enough military service to be a citizen of Venice, for Brabantio the only way that his daughter could be seduced by a black man is by his stealing her and stowing her away from her father. Brabantio is not the only character that moralizes Othello’s actions by reflecting on his race. Shortly after murdering Desdemona, Othello speaks with Emilia, telling her that Desdemona is little more than “a liar gone to burning hell” and that he “killed her” (5.2.129-130). Emilia tells Othello, “O, the more angel she, and you the blacker devil” (5.2.131). Othello is a devil for Emilia both because of what he has done, murdered the innocent Desdemona, but also because of how he looks, like a blackened devil. Desdemona, in contrast, becomes a martyr in Emilia’s reading, ascending to heaven because she has been murdered by a black devil. The sense of race that Othello wants to be read with, then, is the opposite of Aaron. Where Aaron is fattened by the thought of doing evil things, and says that he would have his “soul black like his face” (3.1.204), Othello would be spoken of in terms of his inward virtues, his service to the state, and the way that his crime is excusable because it was committed out of passion. What we see in Brabantio’s and Emilia’s reactions to Othello is the logical extension of Elizabeth I’s letters on slavery. Othello is only able to be scanned as a Christian while he is serving others or being honourable. When Othello transgresses he is read as evil, and his transgressions serve to demonstrate to the other characters on the stage that his outward actions evidence an inner sinfulness.

that was always-already present. Even if Othello is inwardly honourable, he is still read like Aaron, as if his soul were as black as his face.

Thus, in this coda, I am reading what we can think of as an absent presence. Othello and Iago are different from the other characters I have studied in this dissertation insofar as they do not openly confirm their transgressions. Iago does not pray. Othello confirms for the audience that he has done what we saw him do, but he does not take moral responsibility for his actions. For example, before he commits to murdering his wife, Othello asks Desdemona to pray and to confirm her sins. Desdemona, however, does not repent because she has nothing to repent—her only sin is loving Othello (5.2.41). The play conflates a religious language of sin with a juridical language of perjury in the final scene. Othello accuses Desdemona of committing perjury on her “death-bed” (5.2.53), telling her that she is to die presently and to

\begin{verbatim}
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: thou art to die. (5.2.55-58)
\end{verbatim}

Othello’s point seems to be that there is nothing Desdemona can say, nor any oath that she can take, that will cause him to have mercy on her, but if she confesses herself to him then God might have mercy on her. Indeed, the oddity here is Othello’s reference to “freely.” Othello will murder Desdemona, and he seems to be saying that since she knows that he is going to kill her then she is free to openly confirm her sins to Othello. Without such freedom, Othello seems to be saying, she might equivocate
and deny or omit some of her transgressions. What is left, he implies, is to freely confirm her sins, with him in the room, ostensibly so that he can kill her body without killing her soul (5.2.32). Thus, Othello does not want Desdemona to pray and to repent what she has done, but to confirm her crimes to him. Indeed, when Desdemona says that she wants “But half an hour” so that she may say “one prayer,” Othello tells her that is it “too late” (5.2.84-85). Othello, however, does not have any faith that Desdemona can or will repent of her sins, and thus he will kill her immediately after she confesses so that she does not have the opportunity to sin again. Her death is horrific and unnatural precisely because she dies innocently at the hand of a man who is seemingly sure that she is guilty. She has been given a chance to repent, to confess herself to God, Othello, and the audience, and when she says that she has nothing to confess we believe her. Indeed, her lack of a confession serves, we might say, to mark Othello’s act as a murder rather than a sacrifice, and it makes what he does unforgivable in the same way that Claudius’s confirmation of his guilt makes Hamlet’s vengeance against him seem justifiable.

When Othello accuses Desdemona of adultery directly, he confirms her innocence and therefore his own guilt. Desdemona’s confirmation that she loves Othello enables pity, and the audience, unlike Othello, is always convinced of her innocence. Consider, for example, Othello’s question to Desdemona, “Have you prayed tonight, Desdemona?” (5.2.24). Othello reads Desdemona as being like Aaron and Barabas, as a character who has willfully harmed him, who will gladly harm others, and who will now confirm her crimes just before she dies. The crime, we might say, does not have to be “revealed” because Othello already “knows” that
Desdemona is guilty; rather, the issue here is that Othello needs Desdemona to confirm what she has done so that his murdering her will not be seen as his metaphorical blackness manifesting itself in an act of rage against his “alabaster” wife (5.2.5). Othello wants the audience to see that he is right, that Desdemona is guilty and that she deserves to be marked for death. The tableau enables pity, and it allows Othello to transfer some of the pity that those watching feel for Desdemona onto himself. They are both victims and the root cause of their deaths, Othello’s image seems to imply, is not his actions but Iago’s manipulations.

Othello’s follow up command confirms that the prayer he is asking for is a confessional confirmation that will justify what he is about to do. Othello asks, “If you bethink yourself of any crime | Unreconciled as yet to heaven and grace, | Solicit for it straight” (5.2.26-28). Othello is sure that Desdemona has committed a crime against heaven and grace by cheating on him with Cassio, and he implies that her solicitation to heaven and grace should be made before him, since he is the one who will carry out the punishments for Desdemona’s crime. The sense of confirmation here is in contrast to Hamlet, who does not want to kill Claudius after he prays because he fears that doing so will be to kill him “When he is fit and seasoned for his passage” (3.3.86).

In this way, it is evocative that Othello stabs Iago but that Othello does not kill Iago without first having Iago confirm his role in the plot, something Iago is understandably hesitant to do. Again, the issue here seems to be more that Othello wants to be seen as honourable. He will murder Iago, but only after Iago has given a solemn confession that explains what he did and why he did it. The issue of Iago’s
motives becomes pressing at the end of the play when Othello asks Cassio if he will ask “that demi-devil | Why he hath thus ensnared my soul and body” (5.2.299-300). Iago refuses to speak, saying:

Demand me nothing: what you know, you know;

From this time forth I never will speak a word. (5.2.301-302)

The actors onstage and the audience know what has happened, but Iago will not say not why he has done what he has done, and thus he will not confirm his acts or his motivations in the way that previous, raced, stage villains like Aaron and Barabas do. What does it mean when Iago refuses to confess? While it is clear to the audience that Iago has been caught, that he will be killed, and their last remaining pleasure is the villain’s confessional revelation of why he did what he did, Iago denies the audience this closure. The scene is reminiscent of Aaron’s confirmation of his crimes to Lucius. However, where Lucius has the ability to keep Aaron’s child alive if Aaron’s confession pleases him, Othello has nothing to offer Iago. There is no reason, then, for Iago to confirm his crimes. Iago is a villain, but unlike Shakespeare’s Aaron or Marlowe’s Barabas, Iago denies the audience a glorious confirmation, where he will announce his crimes, explain his motivations, and perhaps declare that his only regret in life is that he cannot further torment Othello.

Since Iago will not confirm his role in the plot, Othello is put in an uncomfortable position. He cannot kill Iago without confirmation, considering that the last time he killed someone based on circumstantial evidence he was quite wrong. By refusing to confirm his crimes, Iago lives until the end of the play. Thus, an utterly unsatisfying compromise is reached in the play when Gratiano assures us that
“Torments will ope [Iago’s] lips” (5.2.304). These torments will happen off-stage, long after the play is completed. But, more importantly for my argument, so too will Iago’s confession. The audience can judge his actions, but such a judgment will always be incomplete and unsatisfying without confirming the motivation(s) for those actions.

In closing, then, this dissertation has argued that the early modern church and the early modern theatre were both concerned with capturing the attention of their audiences, and that Marlowe and Shakespeare generated interest and attention in their tragedies by staging ambiguous, interrupted, failed, or parodic confessions, prayers, and sermons. I have, moreover, been interested in the dramatic and affective consequences of these failures and the way that the sincerity of the characters commands the audience’s attention. Faustus’s inability to focus on his salvation often comes to a crisis at moments where he is offered a theatrical distraction. Claudius’s failed prayer confirms his guilt. Lear’s vain oaths and curses against his daughters show how isolated and powerless he becomes after casting off the cares of state. Othello’s confirmation shows that the desire to be seen a virtuous and Christian, or to be scanned as white, can stand at odds with the obligation not just to confirm what one has done but to repent one’s actions and return to God. Iago, in contrast, seemingly does not care what the other characters, and the audience, think of him, implying that his actions speak for themselves and need no justification or confirmation. Herein, then, lies the difference between Othello and the other characters I study in this dissertation. Othello seems to think that a prologue to his actions will change how the characters on stage and the audience see what he has done. What he offers is a tragic version of what Theseus rejects in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. That is, when the play of the mechanicals is done, the players offer to give an
epilogue, to which Theseus replies “No epilogue, I pray you; for your play needs no excuse. Never excuse; for when the players are all dead there need none to be blamed” (5.1.347-349). Othello, that is, seems torn between rejecting himself (5.2.282) and justifying the honorableness of his murder (5.2.293), because he knows that someone needs to be blamed and he does not want the blame to fall on him. Iago, in contrast, seemingly knows that nothing he says will stop Othello and the others from reading him as a “demi-devil” (5.2.299), and there is no need to blame anyone because the actions of the play speak for themselves.

But why, then, does the theatricalization of devotional forms enable the audience to mark the show? For me the answer comes back to defamiliarization and identification. Shakespeare and Marlowe do not use the theatricalization of devotional forms to make theological arguments, but their use of these forms could be seen as part of a larger case that there is something inherently theatrical about religion, a truth that would have been easier to observe for an audience that saw the nation go through multiple official changes in the state’s religion over the various English Reformations. With each of these changes would have come a change in the way that worship was performed, and each of these changes would have made the congregation aware of religious practices that they once performed as a kind of habit or habituation. This is why the prayers, sermons, and confessions I am studying in this dissertation are consistently failures. At moments of crisis in a tragedy the characters seem unable to fall back on habits of faith. The anxieties produced by seeing this, I am arguing, must have produced dramatic attention in an audience who could have identified with the character’s anxieties. If Claudius is unable to find a form of prayer that will serve his turn, how will I do so in a moment of crisis? If Desdemona is unable to show Othello that
she is innocent by piously praying and demonstrating her innocence, then what hope do other innocent women have in a world where prayer can be distrusted? I am not saying that members of the audience are likely to have committed regicide or adultery, but that many of them must have wondered if they could find a form of prayer to ask forgiveness for their own sins. If Marlowe’s and Shakespeare’s uses of prayer point to a larger theological argument, it is that the habits of faith in early modern England were made to feel strange, and that these strange forms were unlikely to provide complete comfort at moments of extreme emotional or political distress.
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