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Such Terrible Impression: William Shakespeare's Dramatic Theology of Sin

DISSERTATION

submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in English

by

Phillip Aijian

Dissertation Committee:
Associate Professor, Rebecca Helfer
Professor Julia Lupton, Co-Chair
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2018

DEDICATION

For Janelle—my beloved wife and dearest friend. Your constant inspiration, encouragement, and occasional cajoling were essential to not only writing this dissertation but, indeed, for the entire enterprise of the PhD. The success and honor belong more to you than anyone else.

I love you so much.

For my beautiful children, Malcolm and Evelyn, who patiently bore with my divided attention.

I love you.

And to my parents, who gave me a life full of books, stories, and art, kindling a life of faith and imagination.

*Blessed is the man against whom the LORD counts no iniquity,
and in whose spirit there is no deceit.
For when I kept silent, my bones wasted away*

Psalm 32:2-3

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CURRICULUM VITAE

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Such Terrible Impression: William Shakespeare's Dramatic Theology

By

Phillip S. Aijian

Doctor of Philosophy in English

University of California, Irvine, 2018

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Much recent Shakespeare scholarship has maintained the assumptions of New Historicism when considering questions of religion, with the result that religion continues to be treated as politics in disguise, and very little attention is given to the dimension of personal experience. This dissertation argues that though politics and religion often intertwine in early modernism, Shakespeare and his contemporaries regarded the possibility of authentic religious experience with credulous sobriety. Drawing upon the Protestant Reformed theology of figures like Martin Luther and John Calvin, and Elizabethan devotional texts like the *Book of Common Prayer*, Shakespeare's drama stages individual experiences of sin as authenticating marker for religious experience. Viewed through these sources, sin emerges as a phenomenon of despair, terror, and horror that can overwhelm individuals often characterized by self-deception. Sin exists and occurs not merely as a spiritual or moral event, but as a force capable of afflicting an individual, their community, and even their environment. Further, my investigation of sin in Shakespeare's plays to posit the idea of a moral ecology in order to account for the complicated interpolations of personal and communal guilt where sin results both from commission of wickedness and the neglect of moral responsibility. Shakespeare stages sin and its attending consequences as

impediments human flourishing. With a view to his history plays in particular, the figure of King Henry V emerges as a portrait of human flourishing. Where villains like Richard III and Macbeth encounter the horror of their sin and experience despair or self-justification, Henry's acknowledgement of his troubled legacy instead leads to grace, victory, and peace.

PREFACE

During the 2016 American presidential campaign, Donald Trump visited Liberty university—one of the largest evangelical universities in the United States—and made a speech in which he referred to the Pauline epistle, 2 Corinthians, as “Two Corinthians” instead of “Second Corinthians.” His blunder of mispronunciation drew immediate and apparently uniform laughter from the students in attendance and confirming for many commentators Trump’s failure to clear the rather low hurdle of correctly naming one of the books of the Bible.¹ Trump went on to both defend the pronunciation by citing his Scottish grandmother for the precedent as well as blaming Tony Perkins, the president of the Christian charity group, Family Research Council, for providing him faulty information.² This episode became somewhat proverbial in the midst of ongoing debates about the legitimacy of Donald Trump’s Christian faith, as well as troubling the moral authority of the evangelical base that helped elect him.

Debate over how to certify faith and other aspects of religious experience as authentic animated Shakespeare’s milieu as they animate our own. Shakespeare poses the problem, for example, in the character of George, Duke of Clarence, from his early history play, *Richard III*. Clarence’s experience invites audiences not only to perceive faith as merely sincere or counterfeit, but to consider religious experience as a spectrum whose intensity ranges from the powerful and overwhelming to the merely nominal. What are we to make of the fact that Clarence identifies himself as a “Christian faithful man” (*Richard III* 1.4.4) but then describes a nightmare in which he descends into hell? He confesses to his jailer: “I have done these things, /

¹ Bradner, “Trump Blames Tony Perkins for 2 Corinthians.”

² Perkins provided notes to Trump which included the biblical reference which he had written as “2 Corinthians.”

That now give evidence against my soul” (1.4.66-67)? Clarence identifies as a Christian but laments the experience of a guilt so profound, apparently motivated by heinous sins, that he fears the real possibility of eternal damnation. How are we to distinguish between the quality of his faith as a “faithful man” and that of someone like Henry V, who likewise struggles with the burden of sin and guilt, but who ultimately finds redemption, victory, and a cleansed conscience? The academic community has a responsibility to take such questions and distinctions seriously for the way they shape our understanding of Shakespeare and also for the way such distinctions can help clarify our own often bewildering present. The interest in questions of religion, religious experience, and the markers of its authenticity has by no means diminished but is often underserved by current scholarship.

This disparity between audience and literature was recently clarified on my way to a conference in Texas. On my way to the gate, I stopped at a bookstore and was surprised to find Stephen Greenblatt’s most recent book *The Rise and Fall of Adam and Eve* stacked among the more expected New York Times’ best-sellers. In his book, Greenblatt allows for denominational variances in Christianity but describes them all as “orthodox.” The term appears nearly twenty times in the course of his book, sometimes applied to specific branches of the church, like the “Ethiopian Orthodox Church,” but at other times applied more generally as with “orthodox theologians.”³ The Oxford English Dictionary describes “orthodox” as “in accordance with what is accepted or authoritatively established as the true view or right practice,” but the very fact of denominations can only indicate the *refusal* to accept certain views or practices as authoritative. I side with Marilynne Robinson’s complaint that Greenblatt’s use of this term represents a

³ Greenblatt, *The Rise and Fall of Adam and Eve*, 23, 255.

sloppiness in argument that verges on irresponsible. She explains how John Milton, for example, vexes Greenblatt's view of "orthodoxy."

Scholars without a specialty in religious history are understandably reluctant to immerse themselves in all the varieties and phases of Christianity, so the pious are often all assumed to be "orthodox," as Greenblatt frequently refers to them. But Milton was among the robust and diverse part of the English population called "dissenters" or "nonconformists." He insisted on the sanctity of the individual's response to Scripture, a freedom of conscience that could never legitimately be coerced, or conformed to any orthodoxy, even willingly...*The Rise and Fall of Adam and Eve* is an ambitious attempt at an important cultural history. It is cursory, and, to the degree that its treatment of these influential texts and movements is uninformed, it is not a help in understanding them.⁴

Though critical, Robinson seems sympathetic to the apprehension that non-religious scholars are apt to feel when confronting the intricacies of religious doctrine and expression. This seems a curious dispensation to offer Greenblatt, whose long career has attended to religious expression in early modernism. One feels he ought to know better. And indeed he may, and the motivation to reduce all religious experience to "orthodoxy" may have been borne out of a view to a non-academic readership. Though published through his longtime partner W.W. Norton, the book seems aimed at a much more general audience. But I was frustrated thinking of the many travelers for whom his use of the word "orthodoxy" would suffice in the place of genuine critical thinking at a time when its need is so demonstrably urgent.

In his 1988 book *Shakespearean Negotiation*, Greenblatt beheld an Elizabethan England boiling over with religious controversy and asked: "What is sacred? Who defines and polices its boundaries? How can society distinguish between legitimate and illegitimate claims to sacred authority?"⁵ These questions still matter for academic *and* general audiences in clarifying our perceptions of early modern England as well as our own vexed landscapes of faith and religion. This dissertation takes these questions and landscapes seriously. I aim to clarify them by

⁴ Robinson, "The Truth and Fiction of Adam and Eve."

⁵ Greenblatt, *Shakespearean Negotiation*, 95-96.

exploring the ways in which Shakespeare helps us understand faith and sacredness by showing us their opposites: doubt, profanity, horror and sin.

In my first chapter, I provide an overview of the ways that current Shakespeare scholarship still struggles to recognize and understand religious experience as a distinct category of phenomena. In large part because of the secularization thesis which remains one of the enduring features of New Historicism, religion is often branded as political theater in disguise. In contrast, I argue for religious experience as distinct and irreducible, focusing especially on the phenomena of sin and the overwhelmed conscience as an authenticating marker of individual religious experience. I examine early modern theological and phenomenological resources from Reformed England to demonstrate the relationship between the experience of sin and moral knowledge. I also demonstrate how these discourses understood sin to unite elements of individual experience (physical, psychological, relational) with an emphasis on moral knowledge while shifting that individual's standing in their community. I discuss sin's ability to degenerate and degrade these dimensions of individual experience as well as relationships within the broader community and environment—in part by developing the notion of what I call a moral ecosystem. The "Confession of Sin" from the *Book of Common Prayer*, for example, invites (and perhaps obliges) individuals to regard their experiences of sin in the light of moral knowledge and self-deception. The prayer's theology resonates with works like Luther's "Lectures on Galatians," Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, and the later meditations of John Donne. Additionally, Biblical commentaries, such as the one published with the 1599 Geneva Bible, amplified the phenomenological attributes of sin and the conscience. An increasing emphasis on the role of the conscience in justifying or accusing an individual in the light of God's judgment tracks closely with Protestant resistance to Catholic forms of

sacramental mediation.⁶ The ongoing popularity of the proverb that “a conscience is a thousand witnesses” attests to Protestant attempts to compensate for the banishment of Catholic structures emphasize the conscience as an interior—but not inferior—moral voice. Still, in spite of their work emphasizing its sufficiency to provide moral conviction, theologians like Calvin also confront the reality that not everyone feels guilt in the same ways, or in ways that necessarily correspond to the severity of their transgressions. Thus, early modern theologies of sin make concessions to the non-formulaic and unpredictable nature of sin as a religious experience even as they emphasize the strength of the conscience.⁷

In my second chapter, I examine the convergences of the conscience and phenomenologies of sin in *Richard III*. The history plays offer a natural genre in which to perceive Shakespeare’s theology because of the extent to which succession provides the principle conflict that motivates the plays.⁸ Questions of succession, especially in plays like *Richard II*, assume religious and theological dimensions to the extent that a king’s reign and majesty are understood as ontologically guaranteed by God.⁹ With questions of succession (and its

⁶ In *The Grammar of Forgiveness*, Sarah Beckwith is particularly attentive to the increased epistemological strains placed on Protestant Christians with the banishment of the familiar Catholic mediation of rites like confession, the Eucharist, and penance. “For just over three hundred years the language of forgiveness had been adjudicated by priests in the cure of souls and linked to compulsory annual confession to a local parish priest at Easter. Forgiveness was declared on God’s behalf by his authorized officers...What ensued was not the tidy replacement of one doctrine or practice by another, but a long conversation and conflict about the conventions of forgiveness.” 2-3.

⁷ Brian Cummings has argued that early modern theology also allowed for a significant amount of contingency and chance, pointing to the central role of the *Book of Common Prayer* in registering (and forming) early modern English expectations about the role of luck and fortune in divine providence: “In the Collects after the Offertory at Communion in the Elizabethan *Book of Common Prayer*, often also said at Morning and Evening Prayer, salvation itself is imagined in the context of life’s ‘chances:’” See *Mortal Thoughts*, 210.

⁸ Brian Cox observes that, “The problems in both tetralogies originates in the same problem: the succession of a child. Henry VI succeeded at an age of nine months, and Richard II at age of nine years.” *Seeming Knowledge*, 136.

⁹ Political philosophers like Thomas Elyot, for example, contribute significantly to the “divine right of kings” in works like *The Boke of the Governour* (1531) by arguing that regents were appointed by God to manifest his majesty, and God’s appointment of kings demonstrates a critical example bringing stability to human history. Additionally, Ruth Kelso understands this majesty to function hierarchically: “Under [the king]...must be a body of lesser authorities to assist him in the administration of justice. This body included dependent princes...in whom was vested something of the divine authority of the king. Refusal to recognize the necessity of this ruling class, or attempts to push one’s way up from the bottom of it, was obviously subversive to the state, and more than that, a flying in the face of God’s decree.” *The Doctrine of the English Gentleman in the Sixteenth Century*, 13.

violations) in the background, *Richard III* virtually explodes with Shakespeare's dramatic exploration of the relationship between the conscience, self-deception, and the phenomenology of sin. Throughout the play, characters like Richard and his brother Clarence flounder through swamps of self-deception. They persistently avoid confronting the prospect of their culpability in spite of their seemingly Christian behavior that would suggest their awareness of Christian morality.¹⁰ Shakespeare's theology of sin emerges most poignantly in two scenes: with Clarence's dream shortly before he's murdered, and in Richard's haunting before battle with Richmond. In these scenes, characters experience epiphanies that stand in for neglected consciences. These epiphanies announce to Richard and Clarence their moral position in dreadful and overwhelmingly phenomenological terms. Spiritual deterioration gives way to emotional, psychological, and physical deterioration. Shakespeare also explores a theology of sin through minor characters like Lady Anne. Unlike Richard and Clarence—who have violent histories and “obvious” sins—Lady Anne appears largely passive and harmless. Yet through her, Shakespeare considers sins of omission. He stages her failure to resist Richard's seduction with the phenomenological excesses that, especially in this play, also declare and consider the failure of conscience.

In my third chapter, I demonstrate that whereas *Richard III* overflows with phenomenological fireworks that attest to the possibilities of individual experience with sin, *Richard II* considers sin in terms that are simultaneously more muted and yet more nuanced. From beginning to end, the play stages a fixation with the morally dubious practice of flattery. I demonstrate how Shakespeare's investigation of flattery stages a comparison between sins of commission and sins of *omission*; guilt attends not only the act of deception, but the withholding

¹⁰ Ken Jackson and Arthur Marotti observe that Richard “curiously prays to St. Paul” though, as I explore in Chapter Two, I regard St. Paul's invocation as more of an oath than supplication.

of truth, particularly from kings. Attending to the issue of flattery, which has been described as a “social vice,”¹¹ I demonstrate how *Richard II* stages a moral ecosystem that collapses easy distinctions between personal and communal sins. The interdependence of these categories helps explain the difficulty in parsing Richard’s individual guilty as a rash and tyrannical monarch from the destructive influence of his courtiers Bushy, Bagot, and Greene. Whereas Gaunt’s criticism of Richard’s court assigns the crown’s undoing and blame to the king, Northumberland and his co-conspirators assume they have both the agency and the mandate to unburden themselves of Richard’s rule. But more importantly, Northumberland’s rhetoric betrays the belief that they can *choose* to confer the conditions of kingship—or, rather, conditions of *a* form of kingship—on Bolingbroke. In shifting from “shake off our slavish yoke” to “Imp out our drooping country’s wing,” Northumberland signals the possibility of redefining his rebellion not merely as resistance to Richard but replacing him in order that they “might make high majesty look like itself.” Shakespeare further implies sin’s infectious spread from Richard’s monarchy to Bolingbroke’s through the homophonic suggestion of the phrase “our sceptre’s gilt” where “gilt” also suggests “guilt.” “Our sceptre’s guilt” returns us to one of the play’s thematic concerns with determining where to assign culpability in understanding Richard’s misrule and deposition. I argue that Gaunt’s connection of Richard’s court to the waste of England’s land asserts an understanding of sin and guilt that operates ecologically; a moral universe characterized by the possibilities of shared, collective offense.

In my fourth chapter, I transition from Shakespeare’s histories, which come early in his dramatic career, to *Macbeth* which offers an opportunity to assess later visions of his dramatic

¹¹ Yuval Eylon and David Heyd argue that unlike “traditional” vices (lust, gluttony, greed) where the practice of the vice principally corrupts the practitioner, flattery constitutes an “*inter-personal*” vice because of the ways that it corrupts the practitioners by inducing the “flatteree” to collude in the construction of deception. See “Flattery.”

theology. Similar to his exploration of self-deception and moral knowledge in *Richard III*, *Macbeth* seems to burst with the supernatural and phenomenological detritus of the conscience afflicted by sin. In a landscape populated by witches and mythical characters like Hecate, we find Macbeth and his wife haunted by other spectral figures like the ghost of Banquo, and the “dagger of the mind.”¹² But even as these sights and experiences astonish and horrify him, both Macbeth and Lady Macbeth engage in the willful destruction and degradation of their senses. Shakespeare renders their aversion to moral knowledge through attempts to avoid the witness of heaven and their peers even as they fear their own power of witness and the judgment of the conscience. Shakespeare’s staging of self-deception tied to the Macbeths’ desensitization accrues all the more dramatic force to the extent that problems of perception and sense were conventionally modes of transgression and attack associated with witches. Shakespeare’s inclusion of witches introduces audiences to expected figures of hostility and evil only for them to assume comparatively passive roles. The play refuses to villainize the witches in customary fashion, evacuating them of their traditional forms of agency in order to emphasize Macbeth and Lady Macbeth’s own agency and culpability. Here as in previous chapters, my exploration of sin and its phenomenology demonstrates Shakespeare’s adoption and innovation upon theological discourse, especially from the Reformed tradition. In the aftermath of murder, Macbeth and Lady Macbeth display the same symptoms of sin that Shakespeare establishes in his histories: self-deception followed by increasingly erratic and powerful experiences of dread, guilt, and fear. In *Macbeth*, Shakespeare invites us to consider the porous borders between spirit and body. The doomed couple’s experience of sin, while *perceived* in phenomenological terms, appears to

¹² Cinematic productions of *Macbeth* have experimented with various ways of staging Macbeth’s interaction with these ghostly figures. The Canadian series, *Slings and Arrows*, emphasizes the psychological toll of Macbeth’s sin by removing Banquo’s ghost and the dagger entirely so that the audience knows of their presence only, as it were, by the shadows they cast upon Macbeth, alone in perceiving them.

auditors like the doctor and Seyton as primarily psychological. Yet with the loss of sleep, loss of control over the senses, and Lady Macbeth's sudden death, Shakespeare suggests that sin is far more than a metaphysical dilemma.

In my epilogue, I briefly consider *Henry V*, whose prayer before going to battle upon the fields of Agincourt stages a unique moment of acknowledgment. As the son of a usurper, Henry seriously wrestles not only with the legitimacy of his claim to the French throne, but also with his legitimacy as the English king. In his confrontation with an embattled and potentially illegitimate legacy, however, Henry makes no attempt to avert his moral gaze from the difficulty of his position. His ultimate request for God's pardon attains to a right knowledge of self that Luther describes as in his vision of faith, and thus perhaps serves as Shakespearean portrait of flourishing human life.

Chapter One: Bewayle the Intolerable Burden: Sin and Early Modern Religious Experience

In the last thirty years, much early modern criticism has focused on ways that the Reformation, in giving rise to the split between Catholic and Protestant expressions of faith, came to critically define the debates and definitions of previously stable terms and ideas: church, sacrament, worship, prayer, atonement. The difficulty in defining religious experience and faith is one to which critics like Ken Jackson and Arthur Marotti have been sensitive. In 2004, for example, they complained that in 1993 the Group for Early Modern Cultural Studies excluded religion from its theoretical interests “even though the Marxist Critic Frederic Jamerson has acknowledged religion as the ‘master code’ of early modern culture...historians and literary scholars who have discussed religious material in the political analyses of early modern texts and history approach religion *and* politics as religion *as* politics.”¹³ They urged the recognition of religion not just in the discussion of national theater (Protestant England versus Continental Catholicism, for example) but in terms of the deeply individual and interiorized spiritual experience of individuals. Such considerations, they alleged, were largely absent in current criticism.

Marotti and Jackson perhaps correctly perceived that the clarification of religious experience as a discrete phenomenon would face difficulty from the secularization thesis. Critics have tended to treat the Reformation as a process which pushed toward a modernity where the religious materials and expressions that had characterized Catholic piety were sanitized and displaced wholesale onto the political realm. Andrew Moore, for example, frames the project of

¹³ Jackson and Marotti, “The Turn to Religion in Early Modern English Studies,” 167-168.

his recent book in ways that assume many of the political and religious conclusions of New Historicism:

I do not deny that Shakespeare has a profound interest, and even an investment, in morality and in divinity. However, when we examine his works, religion and virtue (whether Christian or classical) are rarely presented as *solutions* to political crises. It is important to remember that Christianity was arguably *the primary political problem* of Shakespeare's day.¹⁴

Moore goes on to list significant political upheavals like the schism of the Church of England from Rome and the conflict between Catholic and Protestant piety in England in the succession of Edward VI, Mary I, and Elizabeth I's monarchies. I don't deny that religious investments significantly motivate the political conflicts that Moore highlights; religion and politics *were* often inextricably related in Shakespeare's epoch. Devotional texts like the *Book of Common Prayer* were endorsed by Queen Elizabeth's government, which went so far as to establish laws ensuring its availability at the bargain price of "three shillings and three pence bound in sheepskin."¹⁵ Eagerness to foster national piety seems to have been a royal pastime. Even as the endorsement of the *Book of Common Prayer* encouraged devotion, however, the throne also hastened to limit the extent to which its citizens might grow distracted or unruly by delving into subjects whose theology might prove too provocative. John Stachniewski observes: "Charles I in 1628 forbade all but bishops and deans 'at the least' to preach on 'the deep points of predestination, election, reprobation, or universality, efficacy, resistibility, or irresistibility of God's grace'."¹⁶ State efforts to manage public and private devotion can hardly have been more comprehensive in Shakespeare's epoch.

¹⁴ Moore, *Shakespeare Between Machiavelli and Hobbes*, 11.

¹⁵ Swift, *Shakespeare's Common Prayers*, 30.

¹⁶ Stachniewski, *The Persecutory Imagination*, 27.

Politics and religion often overlapped in ways that led to both national and international conflict, and religious practices—particularly those that took place in public—could inspire significant distrust and suspicion. Still, Moore’s formulation of “religion and virtue...as *solutions* to political crises” understands religion as a form of tribalism whose moral and metaphysical distinctives primarily *aim* at positive and constructive solutions to political problems (whether social, national, or international) but which ultimately prove insufficient to the task. This account almost entirely excludes the realm of individual experience; Moore only suggests it with his passing reference to “virtue” which acknowledges the attempts (and failures) of a person’s moral efforts. Religion here is accounted as politics with the mask of piety. This assessment perceives the narratives of religion in terms of human agency and proves insufficient in decoding religious or spiritual experiences—particularly those originating in sin and guilt—which defy comprehension and arise with unexpected power, overwhelming an individual’s conscience.

I highlight sin because early modern religious experience everywhere encountered the specter of the guilty conscience connected to iniquity and its consequences. This dissertation argues that in Shakespeare’s dramatic theology, sin begins as a crisis of moral knowledge that pits the conscience against self-deception. Drawing upon Anglican and Calvinist discourse, Shakespeare often stages and highlights these crises in moments of phenomenological immanence that overwhelm the individual with experiences of doubt, confusion, and terror that attest to a burdened and neglected conscience, and which only sometimes result in true repentance. I call this a dramatic theology insofar as theater resists exposition in favor of narrative unfolding. As David Kastan puts it, Shakespeare’s plays “are not motivated by...considerations of doctrine or of Church government. They were not written to give form to

a conception of holiness or to promote some polemical position in the fractious world of post-Reformation England.”¹⁷ To Kastan’s refutations of Shakespeare’s partisan motivations, we might also add that belief and faith are, in of themselves, types of performance. In her 2011 book, *Shakespeare and the Grammar of Forgiveness*, Sarah Beckwith writes of faith in the gospel of John: “The Johannine resurrection narrative takes it as axiomatic that the resurrected Christ appears only to those who believe. Indeed, John never uses a noun for the term ‘faith,’ but only a verb: faith is not something that you have but *something you do*.”¹⁸ We can easily make the same kind of claims for characters in *Richard III*; we cannot know their faith or convictions *except* by their actions, or refusals to act.

Thus, my dissertation argues that much criticism largely neglects to consider those experiences related to sin: dread, terror, anxiety, and self-deception. More than systems of belief whose values prove insufficient to solving political problems, I explore the ways that early-modern drama and theology document sin as an unaccountably transgressive force whose operations surpass and overwhelm both individuals and communities, even modifying the nature and behavior of physical objects or spaces. Even when he’s not using theological language, Shakespeare presents sin as a pathological force which spreads like an infection from person to community; from one political dynasty to another. Moreover, his drama demonstrates that sin can be understood not only in terms of action, but also in terms of *inaction*—what a person or their community fail to do. My dissertation explores some of these religious components through the lens of early modern Protestant Reformed theology, emphasizing the bonds that exist between mind, spirit, and body not just at the heights of ecstasy, but in the depths of despair and confusion. It is my argument that Shakespeare’s drama demonstrates how crises of the

¹⁷ Kastan, *A Will to Believe: Shakespeare and Religion*, 4.

¹⁸ Beckwith, *Shakespeare and the Grammar of Forgiveness*, 144.

conscience could validate religious experience as genuine in a time when there was good reason for many people to doubt the certitude of speakers who laid claim to those kinds of authorities or experience.

Shakespeare's plays juxtapose multiple portraits of religion, resulting in a polyphonic drama that, while suspicious and critical of religious institutions and power, nevertheless makes room for the possibility of authentic religious experience and piety. Shakespeare's plays stage moments of individual encounters with the divine which evacuate the ability of the individual to counterfeit power. Indeed, these divine encounters often seem to arise almost in response to ways in which characters or institutions have appropriated and subverted religious language, iconography, and titles in order to achieve political ends. Shakespeare's drama carefully renders these subversions of the holy as explicitly Machiavellian, but he just as carefully signals the *authenticity* of religious experience with moments that utterly humiliate and defeat that Machiavellian mode. Shakespeare stages these moments of defeat by confronting his ambitious characters with overwhelming and spontaneous experiences of terror, discomfort, and despair that express themselves in the mind, body, and spirit as the consequences of sin. I regard this distinction between Machiavellian "religion" and its authentic opposite as crucial to the extent that current scholarship asserts that religion in Shakespeare ultimately terminates in politics.

Even as Shakespeare demonstrates the culpability of individual characters, however, his drama also combines personal guilt with communal complicity. Characters like Richard of Gloucester, Richard II, and Macbeth never exhibit their vicious behaviors in moral vacuums. Shakespeare locates their sins, perversions, and desires in larger moral ecosystems that variously enable or disable the possibilities of moral and immoral action. Later in this chapter, I develop the idea of a moral ecosystem in order to explore the way that Shakespeare stages individual religious

experience, interpolating personal *and* communal agencies. In this, Shakespeare's representation of the complex relationship between individual and communal sin reflects conventions of Reformed theology (as seen in Calvin, for example). Much criticism in the last forty years has struggled to recognize the symbiotic relationship between individual agency and the larger social conditions that combine and *result* in evil action. Moore's assessment of theological practices submitted to political pressures repeats older arguments made by critics like Harry Berger Jr. about individual actions dictated by political and social structures. By suggesting that his murder of Duncan and claim of the throne result from a "rotteness" in Scotland that mechanically repeats cycles of honor, ambition, reward, and murder Berger implicitly relieves Macbeth from any significant personal responsibility. I insist, to the contrary, that while Berger's account identifies conditions in Scotland that facilitate Macbeth's criminality, these conditions only encourage his depravity. The inspiration to evil and the guilt such evil acquires once actualized, originate in Macbeth and his wife. We must not conclude that the debts and substance of individual guilt do not exist because we cannot isolate and comprehend their quality apart from the system and environment in which they occur and operate.

This dissertation presents an account of religion in Shakespeare that demonstrates the interdependence of the personal and social modes of religious experience as well as the private and the political. Shakespeare's drama stages these modes side by side, portraying sin and its consequences as markers of authenticity while characters like Richard III reveal themselves as Machiavellians when they assume that religious power is simply one of rhetoric and appearances. In the midst of political schemes whose success critically depends on the counterfeiting of religion, Richard's actions reveal the atheistic assumption that God won't suddenly appear with a terrible reckoning. Richard acts with a moral exceptionality based upon

the precise belief in the power of religious language and spectacle but—just as equally—also in the functional belief in the absence, or carelessness, of the God from whom that power originates. In this way, Shakespeare’s drama suggests that though religious affections, convictions, and behavior can be feigned, religious experience and power is not *only* something feigned. The spontaneous, unexpected awakening of the conscience with an unaccountable surfeit of sin, in its many expressions, anticipate that while religion *can* be feigned, and characters may achieve short term successes by co-opting the appearance of divine power, these incursions into God’s country come at a heavy price. Though my dissertation focuses chiefly on the way that Shakespeare stages the realities and experiences of sin, I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge that for Shakespeare’s theological sources like Luther and Calvin, discussions of sin must lead to the possibilities of faith and salvation.

In approaching Shakespeare’s work with an eye to his dramatic theology, I seek to comprehend the terms in which he renders the extremes and possibilities of human experience. If Shakespeare takes seriously the possibility of human sin as the power to deform, malign, isolate, dull, and ultimately destroy a life, he also views these conditions and experiences as impediments to human flourishing. Few of Shakespeare’s characters, especially in his histories, ever achieve sustained holistic health in these terms. As I argued earlier, the rarity of such flourishing occurs all too often as a fact of improper belief about the self. Shakespeare’s characters, from Richard of Gloucester to Macbeth, refuse to acknowledge their motives, disown their agencies, and deceive themselves about the conditions of their culpability; the obligations which they owe to their community and ignore. All the destruction and wickedness that follow proceed from this inability to regard their condition soberly and honestly. Yet such

acknowledgment lies precisely at the heart of Protestant visions of faith. Contemporary scholar of Reformed theology Brian Gerrish asserts:

Faith, for Luther, is nothing but the reflex of God's self-disclosure in Christ. It is confidence only because it perceives God as he is, that is, as he shows himself in his Word. A man thinks correctly about God when he believes God's Word, and the Word of the gospel is this: 'Take heart, my son, your sins are forgiven' (Matt.9:2). Because the confidence of the heart thus rests entirely on instruction by the Word, Luther can say that he is righteous by faith *or by knowledge*.¹⁹

According to Gerrish, Luther views faith, in its ideal, the most effective component in achieving God's vision for human flourishing. In perceiving God correctly, a man perceives himself correctly—both acquainted with the severity of his failures and shortcomings but simultaneously convinced that his sins have been forgiven and that he has been justified. It is in this vision of faith, in which man perceives God looking upon him with mercy, that the impulses toward self-deception, self-justification, or despair vanish. God's loving gaze renders them unnecessary to manage the misery that results when a soul regards its sinful state honestly, and having been rendered unnecessary, they become less likely to perpetuate further sinful behavior. Hence Gerrish's attention to Luther's conviction that righteousness, as the condition for human flourishing, depends on right knowledge. This knowledge in Shakespeare's plays proves elusive, but not utterly absent.

In exploring Shakespeare's dramatic theology, my methodological approach depends significantly on historical phenomenology, which proves a valuable lens through which to view issues of religious experience. By historical phenomenology, I mean that arguments about the subjective experiences of individuals in a specific time and place must attend to the ways in

¹⁹ Gerrish, *The Old Protestantism and the New*, 86. My thanks to Victoria Silver for acquainting me with this source.

which those individuals characterize those experiences. I concur with Kevin Kearney and James Curran, for example, who write:

feeling and smelling are not historical artifacts in the same way that we might argue a book, a building, or even an event is since feeling and sensing are embodied, subjective processes. They resist objectification because they are always, in part, inside us, even as they also depend upon social and material environments to occur. Historical phenomenology, therefore, embraces the dynamism and *nebulousness* of feeling and sensation by thinking in terms of ecologies rather than artifacts, experiences rather than objects, and by abandoning neat distinctions between persons and things.²⁰

In its embrace of nebulousness, sensation, and experience, historical phenomenology is especially suited to my investigation of Shakespeare's dramatic theology, and to the experience of sin in particular. This is, firstly, because Reformed theologians like Luther and Calvin describe sin's operations in ways that make the individual's body and conscience themselves artifacts of sin. Nebulousness, too, helpfully clarifies the usefulness of historical phenomenology to my project because of the way that both Reformed theology and Shakespeare represent religious experience as occurring without clear borders or limitations. The *Book of Common Prayer* discusses sin in its effects upon the body, the memory, and the relationships between individual and self. Likewise, this imprecision features in the unpredictable range of intensities that accompany different encounters with sin.

Jennifer Waldron, for example, has sought to complicate the binary perception of Catholic/enchanted versus Protestant/secular by arguing that Protestants were more interested in re-casting rather than abandoning that sense of enchantment. She argues that early modern Protestant discourses visualized the human body as a site of the sacred, mediating between the apparent polarities of the rich Catholic aesthetic and the Protestant iconoclasm. Waldron highlights the way that Protestant polemic shifts the sense of the sacred and "enchanted" from

²⁰ Curran and Kearney, "Introduction," 354.

the dead and dumb artifices of the Catholic Church to the physical bodies of believers, insisting on “liveliness” as a requisite for affording an object any kind of veneration or respect. She writes: “This conceptual range is one of the most important benefits of considering religious dispositions toward bodily experience under the rubric of historical phenomenology: just as early modern understandings of the body as a ‘psychophysiological’ structure differed greatly from ours, so too did early modern articulations of the body’s role in religious ritual and its interrelations with spiritual states of being.”²¹

Where New Historicism argues that early modern plays display a secularization in the movement from Catholic to Protestant cultural capital, Waldron argues that the shift of power has simply been misunderstood; what has changed are not the kinds of values celebrated, but the *modes* through which those values are celebrated:

The key problem was not the carnal density of Catholic trinkets, nor that of the “signs and shapes” that hung in the air during the Mass, but instead the fact that their human creation or consecration rendered them empty and useless as a means of reaching God. The body often served as a bulwark against these unnatural human creations. English Protestants of all stripes pitted the liveliness of the body against both material and mental “idols” in their accounts of the correct way to perform the sacraments...²²

Historical phenomenology here thus helps develop a critical sensitivity to arguments and language that emphasize the liveliness of the body and the bodily as the new sites for valid expressions of religious experience in ways that other critical lenses have had difficulty in recognizing or classifying. These Protestant reformulations aimed at evacuating Catholic authority from the consecration of sacraments, recasting the Christian body as the *original* sacred site along with the spaces and communities those bodies inhabited. Protestant theologians repudiated Catholic authority and their economy of dead relics, reasserting the believer’s living

²¹ Waldron, *Reformations of the Body*, 8.

²² *Ibid.*, 163.

body as sufficiently sacramental. They founded such arguments on the Pauline theology of passages like 1 Corinthians 6:19: “Know ye not, that your body is the temple of the holy Ghost, *which is* in you, whom ye have of God? And ye are not your own.”

Jennifer Rust has registered similar oppositions as Waldron to the secularization thesis, also along sacramental lines. She points to Reformed celebrations of the Eucharist as an event and experience that results in *disjunction* of the political and theological rather than the replacement of one by the other: “the figure of the mystical body more often than not signifies the *misalignment* of theological and political orders, the point at which underlying theological forms of life turn projections of political power awry.”²³ Rust and Waldron’s attention to Reformed Protestant practice of the sacraments (in addition to de-sacralizing others, like last rites) may project new critical horizons for perceiving early modern religious experience in post-New Historicist discourse. I also draw on the phenomenological methodology of Julia Reinhard Lupton, who argues that religious actions like blessings and curses in *Macbeth* are individual and corporate attempts to negotiate “what it means to inhabit bodies and live in worlds we never fully possess or control.”²⁴ Lupton’s investigation of these religious speech acts helps clarify how Shakespeare’s characters struggle to acknowledge the limitations imposed by bodies and landscapes. In *Macbeth*, especially, both Scotland’s terrain as well as Macbeth and Lady Macbeth’s own bodies transform into sites of suspicion which the use of prayers and curses attempt to manage. I argue that the question of sin in Shakespeare’s dramatic theology must be answered with an eye to the individual and the personal located *within* community and environment—their moral ecosystem.²⁵ Historical phenomenology offers a lens through which to

²³ Rust, *The Body in Mystery*, Xi.

²⁴ Lupton, *Shakespeare Dwelling*, 103.

²⁵ Berger’s “On the Continuity of the Henriad” also articulates a focus on the personal aspect of religion as essential in his reading of the Henriad: “My response to these controversies—and this is the other reason why I think the

view early modern expectations of sin as more than just a spiritual pathogen, but as a force that could afflict body, object, and environment. Shakespeare's drama presents us with characters who embody faith (and doubt) in the possibilities of sin through the union (and disjunction) of action and belief.

While my investigation of Shakespeare's dramatic theology privileges historic phenomenology to help disclose the subjectivity of individual sin, I also draw on some contemporary phenomenology, which likewise attends to the power of religious experience to overwhelm the individual, and which has recently been brought to bear on Shakespeare studies. Ken Jackson has argued: "Phenomenology's struggle with religion and theology illuminates Shakespeare and, alternately, Shakespeare's vexed religious gestures illuminate phenomenology."²⁶ Focusing on *Henry VIII*, Jackson frames his phenomenological approach to Shakespeare's "vexed religious gestures" primarily through the lens of Jean-Luc Marion's notion of the "saturated phenomenon."²⁷ In Jackson's understanding, the principle of the "saturated phenomenon" holds that encounters with God and other religious experiences are marked by overabundance or "saturation" that overwhelm the individual faculties of sense. "We miss what is given not because of 'its' transcendence, but because of its excessive immanence, its saturation."²⁸ To employ a comparison, Jackson's distinction between transcendence and immanence proposes, via Marion, a phenomenology in which the "I" in religious experience operates less as a man who observes birds and wonders what it might be like to fly than it does a man both sensibly and literally overwhelmed by a flood.

disenchantment story needs to be changed—is to treat with utmost seriousness the importance Harry's question, 'May I with right and conscience make this claim?' has *for him*." 230.

²⁶ Jackson, "Phenomenology and God," 470.

²⁷ See Marion's 1996 essay, "The Saturated Phenomenon."

²⁸ Jackson, 476.

For Marion, the subjectivity of the “I” essentially reduces all phenomena to “shadows” of their original form because of the limitations of human senses:

the more phenomena give themselves in sensibility, the more also grows the silent number of all the phenomena that cannot and need not claim to give themselves in sensibility...In order that any phenomenon might be inscribed within a horizon (and there find its condition of possibility), it is necessary that that horizon be delimited (it is its definition), and therefore that the phenomenon remain finite. In order for a phenomenon to be reduced to an obviously finite "I" who constitutes it...²⁹

Sensibility defines the subjective experience, and the “I” constitutes, or “assembles” the experience of the phenomena in its reduced form. What this means for Marion is not only that our senses cannot accommodate many phenomena, but that our very act of constituting the reduced “version” *depends* on phenomena which the “I” cannot constitute because they lie beyond normal perceptive powers. Jackson glosses Marion: “...our very intuition of these unknowable phenomena implies not a lack in our intuition, not a lack in our ability to grasp all phenomena at once, but a *saturated phenomenon* that overwhelms and in fact constitutes the intuiting ‘I’.”³⁰

Marion surprisingly spends little time in his essay discussing examples of the “saturated phenomena,” but concludes by briefly identifying three kinds of experience to which his phrase applies. It’s worth noting the extent to which he describes the final two in almost ecstatic terms: “Next, a particular face that I love, which has become invisible not only because it dazzles me, but above all because in it *I want to look* and can look only at its invisible gaze weighing on mine (the icon). Finally, theophany, where the surfeit of intuition leads to the paradox that an invisible gaze visibly envisages me and loves me.”³¹ For Marion, the possibility of the “saturated phenomenon” is overwhelmingly positive and he seems to assume that the excess here proceeds

²⁹ Marion, 112.

³⁰ Jackson, 471. Emphasis Jackson’s.

³¹ Marion, 123.

to a subjectivity that somehow apprehends an immanence of immeasurable divine favor which the subject happily receives.

Marion's argument crescendos into the promise of God's loving and constituting vision by repeatedly using terms like "bedazzlement." Jackson likewise maintains the prospect of immanence in the "saturated phenomenon" as a welcome experience where, even though the constituted "I" feels overwhelmed, the excess is nonetheless pleasing. His application of Marion's argument to *Henry VIII*, for example, focuses on Buckingham's overwhelming—albeit brief—inclination to forgive his executors, and also on Katherine's heavenly vision.³² Jackson frames these moments of religious immanence with the help of John Caputo, a fellow Marion scholar: "Alternately, is God, for whom all things are possible, capable of making himself manifest, capable of pitching his tent in the field of phenomenological immanence, or are we prepared to deny God that power in advance?"³³ I quote from Caputo for two reasons. Firstly, his attempt to locate the experience of God within phenomenology critically does not, strictly speaking, assume that God's immanence would be welcome to the constituted "I" in the ways that Marion and Jackson propose. Secondly, his phrase "capable of making himself manifest" suggests a diversity of ways in which a host of religious experiences might indeed qualify as God "making himself manifest." Caputo's rhetorical framing of his question seems to condemn the possibility that we might deny God "in advance." Yet if we are prepared to grant God (and Caputo) this phenomenological liberty, it is one which we ought to extend to all manner of immanent religious experiences through which God may manifest himself, even if such experiences are not perceived with the clear joy that animates Marion's theophany or Katherine's "bedazzling" heavenly vision. By "all manner" I mean to indicate the experiences brought on by

³² Jackson, 474-475.

³³ *Ibid.*, 471.

encounters with sin—despair, alarm, horror, as well as, interestingly, desensitization. As I've previously indicated, despair especially plays a profound role in shaping the experience of sin in *Richard III* and *Macbeth*. The “immanence” and “saturation” that animates Marion's phenomenology accords perfectly with the experiential vocabulary of sin taken from Reformed theology.

In ways that powerfully reflect Protestant discourse, Shakespeare's plays present sin beginning as an epistemological and moral crisis which then leads to either the commission of wicked action, *or* the failure to act in a situation where negligence likewise obtains guilt. And while the origins of sin begin as a defective belief, sin spreads throughout the individual and then to his community, transgressing borders, assuming new dimensions and adopting pathology so that the body, the senses, and the mind become mediums for the expression of initially spiritual and moral privations. In its rejection of Catholic modes of mediation, Protestant theologians emphasized the role of the conscience in helping arbitrate the individual's relationship with God. The conscience testifies to the individual about their moral condition, condemning sin, but can also be given *too much* influence because the conscience *only* accuses its host.

In ways I will go on to explore more in Chapter Two, the role of the conscience figures significantly in Shakespeare's staging of Richard's mental breakdown before the battle of Bosworth in *Richard III*. In this play, and in others, Shakespeare's conscience combines both a sense of witness *and* accusation which simultaneously acts as an independent moral faculty created by God but which, according to Luther and Calvin, can *also* be used by Satan to induce despair and damnation by persuading the same individual to dwell *too much* on their sins. I should note at the outset that while this understanding of conscience has, to a degree, become conventional, Shakespeare combines different and sometimes divergent Protestant visions of the

conscience which emerge from a long history. And, indeed, Shakespeare's staging of the conscience accords most closely with definitions and operations described by John Calvin and Martin Luther, but the proliferation of Protestant accounts regarding the operation of the conscience complicates any ease with which we could label Richard's experience of the conscience as "merely" Protestant.³⁴ Shakespeare signals this alignment both locally, in the way that Richard describes his experience of the conscience, as well as in its larger effects on his characters. For example, Richard describes his conscience as having "a thousand several tongues" (*Richard III*, 5.5.147). Shakespeare here embroiders a conventional representation of the conscience—possessing a thousand voices—which was regarded as proverbial wisdom not only in England, but Continental Europe. Calvin uses the same phrase in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1559) when describing the role of the conscience in correcting faulty moral knowledge. His exploration offers less adorning of the proverb than Richard, but he suggests a similar experience of violence and anxiety for individuals who confront the reality of their sin.

For [the conscience] is a certain mean between God and man, because it does not allow man to suppress within himself what he knows, but pursues him to the point of convicting him. This is what Paul understands when he teaches that conscience also testifies to men, where their thought either accuses or excuses them in God's judgment ... Therefore this awareness which hales man before God's judgment is a sort of guardian appointed for man to note and spy out all his secrets that nothing may remain buried in darkness. Whence that ancient proverb: "Conscience is a thousand witnesses."³⁵

Calvin frames his theology of sin within the problem of moral knowledge afflicted by self-deception. He understands the conscience as a faculty that works to ensure an individual's

³⁴ Anders Schinkel has shown that some Protestant theologians argued for multiple kinds of conscience that were activated by different situations. For example, he writes of the German theologian Friedrich Balduin who "comes up with an elaborate classification of consciences. There is the 'right conscience' ('recta conscientia'), the 'hesitant conscience' ('conscientia dubia'), the 'conscientia opiniabilis' that depends on uncertain ideas, the 'scrupulous conscience', and (worse) the 'perverse/wrong conscience' ('conscientia perversa'), the 'conscientia perplexa', the too lenient conscience, the dangerous conscience, and the 'cauterized/stigmatized conscience' ('conscientia cauteriata'). *Conscience and Conscientious Objections*, 199.

³⁵ Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 848. In a footnote, McNeill attributes this proverb to Quintilian's *Institutes of Oratory*.

epistemic unity—trying to prevent the fracture of the moral self. That a man might “suppress” what he knows or allow secrets to remain “buried in darkness” pose significant dangers to the soul because sins which remain secret and suppressed invite the prospect of God’s judgment and stand as barriers to righteousness. As with Richard, Calvin’s meditation renders the conscience external and other. But Calvin imagines the conscience operating with rather more violence than hostile witness. He names the conscience as a “guardian,” but its might serves less to protect the individual from outside enemies than to keep him or her out of trouble—a combination of bodyguard and chaperone.

Should the individual somehow elude the efforts of the conscience to prevent their transgression, the conscience grows combative. Calvin argues that the conscience “hales man before God’s judgment.” Entries for “hales” from the Oxford English Dictionary make the violence clear: “to pull or tear asunder or in pieces; to contract, cause to shrink; to draw back (an arrow) on the string. b. To draw or pull along, or from one place to another, esp. with force or violence; to drag, tug. To harry, molest.”³⁶ Calvin thus develops a subjectivity of sin in which the individual experience of sin results in the confusion of a split personality—a war between the conscience and the sin-sullied self. One imagines a determined parent grabbing a child to give them a bath, and the child, screaming, grasping after anchor points on furniture.

That Calvin and Luther present the conscience in adversarial terms to its immoral host also represents a particular interpretation and reading of the term “conscience,” and its rather involved etymological pedigree. In *A Dictionary of Biblical Tradition in English Literature*, Dominic Manganiella observes that “conscience” is a translation of the Greek noun *syneidēsis*. The verb associated with it, *synoida*, occurs as early as the 6th century B.C. and

³⁶ “hale, v.” OED Online. Oxford University Press. August 2016.

is colloquial, meaning ‘to know with,’...the reflexive form *synoida emauto*, ‘I know with myself...’ Following the shift from a verb (*synoida [emauto]*) to a noun, *syneidēsis* signifies not merely another action performed *by* the self; it is now an agent within the self, lit. ‘the self that knows with itself.’ The development of the noun form of the word thus signals ‘the recognition of an alter ego, another self within the self that observes the self and then testifies as to what it sees’ (Opperwall).³⁷

Manganiella’s quotation of Opperwall’s alter-ego language thus understands the phrase “self that knows with itself” to indicate two potentially opposing, but certainly distinct, modes of intelligence that simultaneously inhabit the same person.

It is this interior experience of multiple perspectives that Shakespeare latches onto, but which he also *combines* (as I will later demonstrate more fully) with moral judgment. Richard’s one-man legal drama, that is, though technically a monologue, is also very crowded by other voices and figures that, having reached a critical mass after long neglect, burst forth in a sudden clamor—promptly on the spectral heels of the ghosts. For him, these witnesses offer not only testament to an event or fact, but also accusation. Particularly in his history plays, Shakespeare takes the liberty of condensing multiple historical characters into one dramatic personage, or changing the details of their lives, to suit his vision of the play. Shakespeare performs a similar distillation and combination in his staging of Richard’s conscience as a moral faculty that both bears witness to a fact *and* accuses him of moral misconduct. The difference between the two is critical in recognizing Protestant formulations of the conscience because witness was held to be a faculty of self-knowledge which operated *without* moral dimension. Anders Schinkels explains:

The symbol of conscience, then, is also engendered by the experience that someone (either God, oneself, or another person) bears witness to one’s actions, so that they cannot simply be forgotten, but have to be accounted for. C.S. Lewis, in his analysis of the meaning of ‘syneidesis’ and ‘conscientia’, distinguishes between an ‘external witness’ and an ‘internal witness’. The former refers to the situation in which one shares (secret) knowledge with another person – the ‘consciring’, which was close to ‘conspiring’. Where ‘syneidesis’ or ‘conscientia’ express the experience of an internal witness, one

³⁷ See *A Dictionary of Biblical Tradition in English Literature*, 153-154. Emphasis Manganiella’s.

conscires with oneself. [Adam] Smith’s ‘impartial spectator’, or ‘great inmate of the breast’ takes an intermediary position between the two. In general, we can say that the external witness gradually gave way to its internal counterpart...’³⁸

Schinkel’s attention here is upon the fact that multiple points of view and assessment operate under the “heading” of conscience. But, as he observes, the act of witness doesn’t attest to moral dimensions; merely with whether or not something happened, and in what manner. C.S. Lewis further clarifies the difference:

Jeremy Taylor makes the semantic situation unusually clear by noting the ancient meaning of *conscientia*—Horace’s *consciri sibi*—and saying that while this is correct so far as it goes it is not ‘full and adequate; for it only signifies conscience as it is a witness, not as a guide.’ Under the name *conscience* we must also include ‘that which is called *synteresis*, or the general repository of moral principles.’³⁹

As a faculty, the conscience, like Richard, reveals multiple personalities and operations that have all been brought under one name which struggles to contain them. Richard’s multiple transformations, as well as those of other characters, thus make drama an ideal medium to consider the operation of the conscience.

If the conscience is, for Calvin, on God’s payroll to discipline the errant soul, for Luther the conscience can all too easily be persuaded to take its charge too far and be used by the devil to drive the soul to despair rather than to salvation. Satan can so agitate the natural work of the conscience so as to bring someone to believe they lie beyond the hope of God’s salvation. He writes in “Lectures on Galatians:”

Taking advantage of the weakness of our nature, Satan increases and aggravates these thoughts in us. Then it is impossible for the human mind to conceive any comfort of its self, or to look only at grace amid its consciousness and terror of sin, or consistently to reject all discussion of works. To do this is beyond human power and thought. Indeed, it is even beyond the law of God. Although the law is the best of all things in the world, it still cannot bring peace to a terrified conscience but makes it even sadder and drives it to despair.⁴⁰

³⁸ Schinkel, *Conscience and Conscientious Objections*, 113.

³⁹ Lewis, *Studies in Words*, 195.

⁴⁰ Luther, *Martin Luther’s Basic Theological Writings*, 87.

For Luther, the conscience's activation represents a problem because of his characterization between what he calls passive and active righteousness. "Active" righteousness arises out of an individual's perception of their sin and, while their perception of sin may recognize true things, "active righteousness" can only intensify their experience of guilt. In the mindset of active righteousness, the individual attempts to accomplish "good works" in order to better their moral standing in God's sight. Luther argues that these attempts are never salvific and, indeed, that in "active righteousness" the conscience is actually a tool of the devil designed precisely to drive individuals into despair.

Luther develops his view of the conscience and its operations with a view to pastoral ministry and coming alongside those who need correction, and suggests that the conscience profits the believer insofar as they become truly persuaded of their depraved condition, at which point they must be given a Christological intervention to remind them of their standing in God's grace:

Therefore when I see believers are sufficiently contrite, oppressed by the law, terrified by sin, and thirsting for comfort, then it is time for me to take the law and active righteousness from their sight and set forth before them, through the Gospel, the passive righteousness which excludes Moses and the law and shows the promise of Christ, who came for the afflicted and for sinners. Here a person is raised up again and gains hope.⁴¹

Luther advocates for the embrace, acceptance, and reception of what he calls "passive righteousness" in which the individual afflicted by the terrors of their sin makes no attempt to defend themselves from the accusations of the conscience but instead relies totally upon the knowledge of God's sufficiency and atonement. This impulse toward passive grace is difficult and requires a certain humility that is, perhaps, not native to even the best of individuals. The

⁴¹ Ibid., 88.

proclivity toward “active righteousness” has, at its core, the proud and misguided belief that some acts of faith or apparent merit, whether in isolation or in concert, can be counted against the moral debt of their sins. For Luther, however, only passive righteousness allows the individual to escape the onset of despair and the conscience’s accusations by shifting the gaze from the impossibility of meritorious works (active righteousness) to the vision of the crucified Christ. This shifting of the spirit’s gaze must occur precisely in the maximum terror of sin and receive the balm of Christ’s atonement.

Calvin confirms that the conscience can dwell too much in the sorrowful contemplation of sins and proceed from repentance and humility to despair. Like Luther, he sees guilt-stricken individuals in this compromised state as vulnerable to attacks from Satan who will take advantage sorrow-induced weakness. The belief in exceptionality begins as immunity from consequence and terminates as immunity to salvation.

...nothing more readily happens to fearful consciences than falling into despair. And also by this stratagem, whomever Satan sees overwhelmed by the fear of God he more and more submerges in that deep whirlpool of sorrow that they may never rise again...the sinner ought always beware lest, while he worries himself into dissatisfaction weighed down by excessive fear, he becomes faint. For in this way we flee from God, who calls us to himself through repentance.⁴²

Calvin’s description here of despair employs phenomenological language that invites the reader to shift the perception of conscience from merely a guardian that “hales” someone before the throne of God to a “deep whirlpool of sorrow” into which one may easily fall without the hope of rescue. The whirlpool image also seems suggestively anti-sacramental in subverting the quality of the water. Where in baptism the application of water is seen to wash sin away, here the water washes away the entire person with his sins.

⁴² Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 609.

Luther's distinction between active and passive righteousness aims to correct improper visions of the self that has gone astray by embracing extremes and believing themselves to have achieved (or been reduced) to a condition of exceptionality which manifests as either pride or despair. The proud individual believes that he possesses the power and moral constitution to fulfill all of God's laws and commands and thus contribute to the conditions of his salvation. The man who despairs, on the other hand, receives only the witness and judgment of his conscience which, aggravated by Satan, convinces him that his sin stands so exceptionally repugnant in the sight of God that Christ's salvation cannot rescue him. The "practice" of passive righteousness aims to correct both of these misperceptions and faulty beliefs about God and the self, and the operation is meant to occur simultaneously.

Calvin maintains Luther's emphasis on mutually reinforcing knowledge of the self and of God in his vision of healthy Christian faith when opens his *Institutes*: "...it is certain that man never achieves a clear knowledge of himself unless he has first looked upon God's face, and descends from contemplating him to scrutinize himself."⁴³ This knowledge, Calvin goes on to say, serves as the only effective remedy against the human inclination to regard ourselves as righteous and just when, in fact, we are corrupted by "unrighteousness, foulness, folly, and impurity."⁴⁴ This knowledge of God and knowledge of the self form the basis for Reformed doctrines of justification. Victoria Silver writes:

The reformers' theology of justification, with its Pauline emphasis on that spiritual understanding, thereby secured the Christian religion to the believer's intimate relationship with the Christ, the unique expression of the one true God. Thus Luther and Calvin picture justification as a mind transformed, possessed of a new confidence whose source is God's Word—Christ and scripture together, since scripture is his witness—and whose impetus comes from the Spirit as the infinite, abiding expression of divine care.⁴⁵

⁴³ Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 37.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 37

⁴⁵ Silver, *A Just Deception*, 4.

The mind transformed and possessed of a new confidence finds that confidence from beholding the face of Christ even, as the prayers document, they have acknowledged their sins and wickedness.

But this experience of confidence as a result of the individual experience of God's divine care proved perhaps more elusive than Luther or Calvin expected. Sarah Beckwith has argued that the Reformation dissolved major social, spiritual, and subjective economies tied to the doctrine of penance—a sacrament mediated and governed by the Catholic church. Penance, contrition, and absolution were all intricately connected to the church as the approved mediator of salvation whereas Luther, Calvin, and other Reformers fought to re-assert Christ as the sole arbiter of salvation, whose guarantee is rendered not by the ministrations of clergy, but through the inward testimony of individual faith. She explains:

Some Reformation theology, for example, insisted that it was only by eradicating all human mediations that we could be sure of the God-sidedness of grace; all human interventions stain and contaminate and infringe the sovereignty of God. The theological warrant comes along with the eradication of the human—and human acknowledgment... Protestant “practical divinity” had to find ways of dealing with the epistemological fallout of this doctrine; one that rapidly became intellectualized as a problem of knowledge: how will we know if we are saved? The epistemological anxieties notoriously focused on this unknown but quite fundamental aspect of an unmediated relation with God.⁴⁶

By “unknown,” I take Beckwith to mean that the practical and affective answer to this question had, for centuries, been largely satisfied by Catholic rituals and performances of absolution. The dismissal of these comforts obliged Protestant Christians to navigate the steep and rocky terrain of sanctification in comparative isolation, a journey in which the shadows and swamps of sin often seemed to dominate the terrain.

⁴⁶ Beckwith, *The Grammar of Forgiveness*, 6.

John Stachniewski has argued persuasively that religious experience in early modern England wasn't just a matter of an individual's perception of their moral self, but was generated by the complex and overlapping pressures of church doctrines, shifting economic and social mores, and politics. Stachniewski explains:

These forces are nucleated in the collective projection of the Calvinist God. It is this communal construct, whose presence was not solicited by any individual but nevertheless had potent effects inside the psyche, that my book's title, the persecutory imagination, identifies. What most of us would regard as a fiction (and are therefore perhaps prone to underestimate) was an unignorable reality to the spiritual autobiographers which, they supposed, reserved autonomy to itself. It invaded the most intimate thought processes where in many cases, by the power vested in it by collective belief, it actively persecuted its host.⁴⁷

Stachniewski's comment about fiction appears to regard early modern religious experience—particularly of the Calvinist stripe—as a mass self-imposed and state-sponsored mental illness. The imagination suffers invasion and persecution not from God or any other divine force, but from *ideas* about God that have been assembled by a range of experiences and forces. Shakespeare's staging of Clarence's nightmare in *Richard III*, for example, doesn't suggest that the sudden attack of his conscience occurs *only* because Clarence's imagination persecutes him, but certainly the conscience subordinates the imagination in order to give Clarence a sense of the perdition that awaits him.

Clarence's dream entails both physical and psychological torment, and in this combination bridges medieval and early modern expectations about the agonies of hell; a bridging that also perhaps encompasses Catholic and Protestant theologies. Stachniewski argues that Luther and Calvin understood the “perfection” of damnation to occur in psychological terms

⁴⁷ Stachniewski, *The Persecutory Imagination*, 7.

if only because physical torment alone failed to adequately respond to the soul's rejection of God:

That Calvin conceived of the experience of the reprobate as a foretaste of hell indicates the intensity of the despair for which his theology provided. Indeed he impatiently dismissed those who, like preachers of the late medieval church, concentrated their terrorizing eloquence on the physical torments of hell as having 'crassae imaginationes.' Hell, as for Luther, was essentially psychological. It was the pain of eternal rejection by God. And since rejection could be communicated to the reprobate in this world, hell was the literal experience of the despairing reprobate.⁴⁸

Current definitions of "crass" tend to suggest merely the "undignified" and fail to communicate that Calvin criticizes medieval preachers for, essentially, being too narrow minded. The Oxford English Dictionary identifies "crass" as both "grossly dull and stupid," as well as, interestingly, "said of things material as opposed to immaterial."⁴⁹ To preach on the terrors of hell with such a clear bias for the eternal suffering of the body misled congregations by failing to forecast the greater psychological and relational agonies of God's rejection, which can only be comprehended by the mind. Shakespeare's staging of Clarence's dream suggests similarly broad horizons for the relationship between the persecuted imagination of a distressed sinner and the products of his harassed conscience.

Stachniewski further argues that, as Calvinism attained to the status of orthodoxy in Elizabethan England, what began as "epistemological anxieties" concerning questions of salvation matured into a full-blown epidemic of despair, and just in the terms that Luther and Calvin supply.⁵⁰ Following Luther, Calvin emphasizes the sufficiency of a passive righteousness which receives the consolation of Christ. He testifies to this comfort in his work *Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God* in a section titled "Perseverance:"

Nevertheless, as God sustains His elect to prevent them drowning, I am confident of

⁴⁸ Ibid., 24.

⁴⁹ Oxford English Dictionary. Accessed June 28, 2017.

⁵⁰ Stachniewski, 8.

standing against these innumerable storms. If Pighius asks how I know I am elect, I answer that Christ is more than a thousand testimonies to me. For when we find ourselves in his body, our salvation rests in a secure and tranquil place, as though already located in heaven.⁵¹

Calvin's description of his confidence amid the danger of "drowning" revisits the same phenomenological and contested terrain of the "whirlpool of sorrow." Calvin establishes his confidence in standing firm against the storms of doubt concerning his own election by asserting the "more than a thousand testimonies" of Christ, which serves as the positive opposite of the damning testimony of the conscience, itself also a "thousand witnesses." Calvin proceeds further by linking that assurance to the experience of "finding" himself in the "body" of Christ, by which he most likely means the communion and fellowship of the Church. If one succeeds in locating himself "in his body," then they *should* feel themselves to be "already located in heaven."

For Stachniewski, however, Calvin's promise of comfort seems to invoke an overly idealized experience of communion with the church and proved largely unavailable for many early-modern Protestants. A significant number of Puritan autobiographies from England detail protracted and intense struggles with despair that sometimes resulted in religiously motivated suicide. The perception of the individual's immediate contact with a god who had, according to Calvinist theology, already predestined who was elect and who was reprobate, far more often resulted in despair about the possibility of God's favor. Though Calvin's response to Pighius asserts a confidence of knowledge in his elect condition, Stachniewski argues that many Puritans struggled to ever achieve a similar level of certainty:

Moreover, since grace was supposed to arrive with irresistible force, uncertainty as to whether one was an authentic recipient had alarming implications. So the question around which anxiety circled for the individual was, "How do I know I am saved?"

⁵¹ Calvin, *Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God*, 130.

Either [one was] damned because God's prior decree meant that Christ had not died for them (Beza); or, although Christ's death was sufficient to atone for their sins, [one] had been denied the faith to benefit from this, not being of the elect (Calvin). Either way the explicitness of the doctrine of reprobation made for despair.⁵²

Stachniewski goes on to argue that such cases of uncertainty were only exacerbated by the tumult of economic and class tectonics. Calvin's double predestinarian theology, combined with medieval expectations about vocation, effectively convinced many people (the poor and lower-class individuals chief among them) that their abject terrestrial conditions could only reflect the likelihood of their eternal reprobation.⁵³ Stachniewski paints a grim picture of a Puritan England where religious devotion seems to have been synonymous with misery and uncertainty. He cites an anecdote from the Cambridge theologian John Overall who found parishioners were afraid they were all reprobate: "many...were distressed because 'they could not be persuaded that Christ died for them.'"⁵⁴

While Calvinism may have achieved a certain dominance within the Church of England, Stachniewski ascribes perhaps too much totalizing power to its influence. He argues that in the "sixteenth and seventeenth century, belief in God was not voluntary. There were questions only of what God was like."⁵⁵ If belief was truly involuntary, there was certainly a wider range of devotion and belief than the despairing accounts that occupy the principal of Stachniewski's description. Records of congregant behavior at church, for example—particularly during communion—suggests that a good many of those who counted themselves as Christian were not visibly bothered by questions of their election. Peter C. Herman, for example, observes a significant gap between government attempts to encourage and manage religious life and the

⁵² Stachniewski, 20, 25.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 78-80.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 53.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 66.

way such management actually took effect, and points to the 1572 *Admonition to Parliament* which complained about worshippers who took their religion “less than seriously:”

One he kneeleth on his knees, and this way he looketh, and that way he looketh, another he kneeleth himself asleep, another kneeleth with such devotion that he is so far in talk that he forgetteth to arise till his knee ache, or his talk endeth, or service is done...[A]nother hath so little feeling of the common prayer that he bringeth a book of his own, and though he sit when they sit, stand when they stand, kneel when they kneel, he may pause sometime also, but most of all he intendeth his own book. Is this praying?⁵⁶

Addressed to Queen Elizabeth in hopes of achieving greater “purity” in the church, the admonition bristles with puritanical exasperation. It takes hilariously detailed trouble to record the unruly and brazen displays of what the authors regard as spiritual torpor that remains impervious to the occasion of church and its liturgical rhythms.⁵⁷ The rhetorical question, “Is this praying?” implies impatient criticism of parishioners who could probably stand a little more despairing and hand-wringing over the status of their eternal souls.

Between Stachniewski and Herman, I would argue for a portrait of early-modern audiences that would have recognized Shakespeare’s theological investments in bringing characters like Richard and Macbeth into throes of despair, even if that despair doesn’t utterly dominate public and personal worship. Moreover, I would argue that the audience would have recognized Richard’s despair as arising from *more* than an imagination persecuted by Calvinist theology. For Stachniewski, guilt that has a divine origin (as opposed to a human, theological origin) appears to be an impossibility. But, as I argue in Chapter Two, Shakespeare’s employment of the ghosts seems to cast Richard’s despair as more than a product of a troubled psychology afflicted by exclusively secular pressures. Like Clarence’s nightmare, they emerge as ambassadors from a divinely ordained hell-scape usher him into his afterlife of suffering.

⁵⁶ Herman, *A Short History of Early Modern England: British Literature in Context* 9.

⁵⁷ Though anonymously published, the admonition has been attributed to London Puritans Thomas Wilcox and John Field. <http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803095352528> Accessed June 30, 2017.

Reformed determination that believers confront the terrible reality of their own sins before receiving the consolation of passive righteousness would come to serve as a standard feature of Protestant liturgies in Elizabethan England. We can see this, for example, in the popular liturgical text, *The Book of Common Prayer*. Daniel Swift recently asserted that for nearly a century, beginning in 1549, *The Book of Common Prayer* was “the definitive devotional text” of Early Modern England, noting that it was “cheaper and more widespread” than the Bible.⁵⁸ Its liturgies, cycles, and prayers helped to reflect and form English expressions of faith—from the collective and national to the personal. One of these prayers, recorded in the 1559 edition, is the “Confession of Sin”—a brief moment of penitence that precedes the Lord’s Supper. Identifiers like “we” and possessives like “oure” name the possibility of shared, communal sins, but the experience of guilt for these shared transgressions shifts to the intensely personal and bodily.

Then shall this generall confession be made, in the name of all those, that are mynded to recyve this holy Communion, either by one of them, or els by one of the ministers, or by the priest hym selfe, all kneeling humbly upon their knees.

Almighty God, father oure Lorde Jesus Christe, maker of all thynges, Judge of all menne, we acknowledge and bewayle oure manifolde synnes and wyckednesse, which we from tyme to tyme moste grievously have committed, by thoughte, woorde, and deede, against thy divine Majestie, provokynge mooste justlye thy wrathe and indignation against us: we do earnestly repente, and bee hartely sorye for these our misdoinges, the remembraunce of them is grievous unto us: the burthen of them is intolerable: have mercy upon us, have mercye upon us, mooste mercyfull father, for thy sonne oure Lorde Jesus Christes sake, forgeve us all that is paste, and graunte that we may ever hereafter serve and please thee, in newenes of lyfe, to the honour and glorye of thy name through Jesus Christ our Lorde. Amen.⁵⁹

Through corporate recitation before communion, the confession attempts to cultivate contrition in congregants by casting the consequences of iniquity as bodily experience; the pang of a guilty

⁵⁸ Swift, *Shakespeare’s Common Prayers*, 30.

⁵⁹ Cummings, *The Book of Common Prayer*, 134. Underline added.

conscience flanked by the more daunting prospect of pain. The confession's narrative carefully bridges the gap from the noumenal to the corporeal. The confessor's first responsibility is primarily epistemic—he/she “acknowledges” but this is immediately followed by the verb “bewayle.” The confession imagines the confessor so harassed by guilt that the vocal expression of anguish achieves urgency purely on account of its sonic character—volume, tone, and duration express what words cannot. The confession thereafter instructs that sin be regarded as a crushing “burthen,” whose “intolerable” weight the supplicant can by no means abandon or manage. Only through genuine repentance can the petitioner hope that God will relieve him of the weight that will otherwise obliterate him.

The prayer's effort to convey the gravity and weight of transgression receives further support—or, rather, stress—from the imposition of actual gravity upon the body. The italicized directions indicate that the minister require the congregation join him in “kneling humbly upon their knees,” adding further phenomenological dimension to the liturgy. The corporate kneeling urges recognition of spiritual and moral burdens by attempting to enforce them upon the body. While the kneeling emphasizes individual guilt because of the imposition of physical stress, the kneeling also performs a sense of corporate guilt since the prayer requires the entire congregation to “submit” to prayer's modes of acknowledgement. Every individual who opens his or her eyes would *see* the congregation kneeling, as if all together burdened with the same guilt. Even for those more devout (or concerned with appearing devout) who closed their eyes during the prayer, the creaking of pews and rustle of clothing, the gasping for breath at the effort—these synchronized waves of sound would announce the same information as the visual phenomenon of seeing the congregation kneel for the prayer.

Even as the confession's phenomenological dimensions link the "immanence" of sin to physical sensations like "burden" and "intolerable," sin is likewise concerned with knowledge. The act of confession in church, a corporate speech act that leaves ample room for theatricality, attempts to place epistemological burdens on the one who confesses in order to provoke a spiritual response. He or she must "know" themselves—must engage in self-examination. The confession underscores this with the use of words like "acknowledge" and "remembrance" as well as by noting in the list that transgressions can occur not just in word and deed but, interestingly, and firstly, in thought. The confession thus codifies a phenomenology of sin with the burden of self-knowledge but also implies the danger of self-deception; one may feel the burden of sin and yet remain somehow unaware of his burden's origin or meaning. The burden of knowledge concerns not merely the individual and his own sins, however, but the also the behavior of those in his community.

This theology of sin also appears in another state-sponsored devotional book, *Private Prayers, Put Forth by Authority During the Reign of Queen Elizabeth*. Both of these texts include a prayer called the "General Confession" which was applied both to church services and individual meditation. Both prayers of confession instruct kneeling so that the penitent's body may enact the weight of sin, and while the "Confession of Sin" preceded the sacrament of the Eucharist and was, therefore, administered only a few times a year (or perhaps only at Easter),⁶⁰ the "General Confession" falls under the office of "An Order for the Morning: Prayer Daily Throughout the Year." Thus, the frequency of the prayer's recitation would have formed a consistent expression in shaping popular attitudes and vocabulary for understanding the relationship between sins of commission and omission. The prayer splits the penitent's concern

⁶⁰ Hunt, "The Lord's Supper in Early Modern England," 41.

between transgressive deeds, but also creates a space to lament things left undone, forgotten, or poorly executed:

A general confession, to be said of the whole congregation, after the minister, kneeling.

Almighty and most merciful Father, we have erred, and strayed from thy ways like lost sheep. We have followed too much the devices and desires of our own hearts, we have offended against thy holy laws. We have left undone those things which we ought to have done, and we have done those things which we ought not to have done, and there is no health in us...⁶¹

The prayer anticipates sins of omission by introducing the failure to act through the lens of other actions which, though perhaps initiated with better intentions, were perverted from their original course. The formulation of “erring” and “strayed from thy ways like lost sheep” appropriates a familiar metaphor from the Gospels where sheep represent both individual sinners who merit God’s concern (Luke 15) as well as the Christian church collectively (John 10:26-28). In both cases, God’s relationship to the sinner or to the church assumes aspects of comfort, guidance, and discipline because of the ways that Jesus’ parables portray God as a “good shepherd.”

The prayer further casts sins of omission as resulting from an imbalanced spiritual constitution. The confession that “We have followed too much the devices and desires of our own hearts...” compels individuals to acknowledge the role of immoderation in their appetites; where the permissible and sanctioned hungers transform to excessive greed, or where charity has been perverted by lust. The emphasis on immoderate desire performed with the phrase “too much” receives additional confirmation from the prayer’s determination to emphasize the role of individual choice and agency—“our *own* hearts.” “Own” here is functionally superfluous, for “our hearts” would have sufficed in the act of designating the origin of immoderate desire, but

⁶¹ *Private Prayers, Put Forth by Authority During the Reign of Queen Elizabeth*, 14. The prayer is also recorded under the same office in *The Book of Common Prayer: The Texts of 1549, 1559, and 1662*, 103.

“own” modifies “our hearts” from a statement of origin to a statement of both origin and nature; an insisting, tight-fisted possessiveness.

The prayer formulates this portrait using an interesting combination of individually oriented language with collective pronouns. The prayer’s acknowledgement of immoderate desire identifies the perversion as one of the heart, and knowledge of one’s heart seems, on one level, individually oriented. The allusions to the shepherd parables, too, invite the individual at prayer to consider himself *as* an individual because of the way that Luke 15 expresses the shepherd’s concern for individual sinners such that to save one lost sheep, the shepherd will leave the other 99 to search. But the prayer’s use of pronouns like “we” and “our” as well as the clear insinuation of “sheep” in the plural, flock sense, also invites the individual to consider the ways in which he and his desires either contribute to or have been shaped by the larger interests, lusts, “devices and desires” of the community. The effect of the sheep imagery mixed with the collective, communal language juxtaposes individual and communal guilt in order to render their distinctions problematic; to perform their “straying” as synergistic. This sense of co-dependent and shared guilt, introduced by the sheep imagery, at last moves into the acknowledgement that sins of omission seem a natural consequence of “sheep” who both individually and communally have allowed their wanton natures to roam free. The syntax and shared vocabulary of “We have left undone those things which we ought to have done, and we have done those things which we ought not to have done” relates sins of omission to sins of commission as virtually inextricable, even though they might initially appear distinct because of the way that action seems the opposite of inaction.

In addition, while the “General Confession” gives a sense of early modern anxieties concerning sins of omission, writers like John Donne further document an anxiety over the

inability to account for the entirety of one's sins. The "General Confession" perhaps permits the individual or the congregation to recall to mind, in acknowledging things left undone, specific things for which they still feel a sense of responsibility. But in his *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions*, Donne articulates a sense of agony for responsibility not just for things left undone, but sins which, by virtue of commission or omission, he can no longer remember. Sin here accrues something of a negative interest, where a sense of guilt and acknowledgement seem to serve as "payments" against the "principle" of the sin's original moral debt. For Donne, to forget the sin leaves the responsibility their accounting solely in God's hands. Donne worries that, in forgetting, he perhaps might be more likely to repeat—perhaps with greater severity—sins which a sense of guilt might have otherwise prohibited in the future. I quote from one of his prayers at length partially because Donne's listing of the variety of sins, in their excess, performs something of the excess and unaccountable guilt that motivates his anxiety:

O eternal and most gracious God, who as thy Son Christ Jesus, though he knew all things, yet said he knew not the day of judgment, because he knew it not so as that he might tell us; so though thou knowest all my sins, yet thou knowest them not to my comfort, except thou know them by my telling them to thee. How shall I bring to thy knowledge, by that way, those sins which I myself know not? If I accuse myself of original sin, wilt thou ask me if I know what original sin is? I know not enough of it to satisfy others, but I know enough to condemn myself, and to solicit thee. If I confess to thee the sins of my youth, wilt thou ask me if I know what those sins were? I know them not so well as to name them all, nor am sure to live hours enough to name them all (for I did them then faster than I can speak them now, when every thing that I did conduced to some sin), but I know them so well as to know that nothing but thy mercy is so infinite as they. If the naming of sins of thought, word and deed, of sins of omission and of action, of sins against thee, against my neighbour and against myself, of sins unrepented and sins relapsed into after repentance, of sins of ignorance and sins against the testimony of my conscience, of sins against thy commandments, sins against thy Son's Prayer, and sins against our own creed, of sins against the laws of that church, and sins against the laws of that state in which thou hast given me my station; if the naming of these sins reach not home to all mine, I know what will.⁶²

⁶² Donne, *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions: Together with Death's Duel*, 68.

In Margaret Edson's 1999 play, *Wit*, a character refers to Donne's poetry as being principally motivated by "salvation anxiety." In his poetry and, here, in his meditation, Donne seems to fear that God might not take his sins as seriously as he does. Donne applies a curious interpretation to Jesus' revelation from Matthew 24 that only the Father knows the day of judgment. This apparent limitation in the knowledge of Christ makes Donne nervous that if Jesus doesn't know about the day of judgment, he might also miss some of Donne's sins before Donne stands before the judgment seat on the brink of eternity in heaven or hell. And if he "misses" these sins, then his salvific powers will be incompletely applied to Donne's moral debts, leaving him vulnerable to damnation.

Donne's interpretation of Jesus' statement about the day of judgment depends on what seems an intentional and artificial myopia that doesn't really take the time to discuss the ways in which the dual nature of Christ (that is, Jesus as man versus Jesus as God) complicates the issue of the divine knowledge that was available to Jesus during his incarnation. This myopia seems all the more pronounced when Donne concludes (but does not explain) that Jesus' inability to know the day of judgment also indicates his inability to account for *all* the sins of those who make supplication to him for atonement. Donne's anxiety here is also particularly Protestant; his prayer that Jesus take a careful index of all his sins wholly inhabits the Protestant insistence on a spiritual life in which the sacrament of penance no longer depends on the mediation or liturgical structures of the Catholic church, which were only too available to perversion or manipulation. Conversely, however, Donne's tone and progression display the consequence of the Protestant emancipation of the sacraments: the seeming banishment of assurance and consolation which Catholic mediation aspired to provide. Sarah Beckwith characterizes this affective fallout of the

Reformation in terms of a significant epistemological shift in understanding one's spiritual narrative:

Some Reformation theology, for example, insisted that it was only by eradicating all human mediations that we could be sure of the God-sidedness of grace; all human interventions stain and contaminate and infringe the sovereignty of God. The theological warrant comes along with the eradication of the human—and human acknowledgment... Protestant “practical divinity” had to find ways of dealing with the epistemological fallout of this doctrine; one that rapidly became intellectualized as a problem of knowledge: how will we know if we are saved? The epistemological anxieties notoriously focused on this unknown but quite fundamental aspect of an unmediated relation with God.⁶³

Donne's meditation—which, as I've said, appears to rely on a particularly anxious logic—takes the problem even further by fixating on the apparent limitations not just in human knowledge, but also in Jesus' knowledge. If Jesus is the person of the Godhead responsible for achieving the act of atonement and salvation, but Jesus doesn't know all of Donne's sins, then how will *God* know if Donne is saved? Donne's pondering of God's uncertain knowledge works to introduce the real problem: Donne's knowledge. He provides a litany of sins unconfessed, unrepeated, unacknowledged, and forgotten. Some of these sins he collects under categorical headings like original sin and “sins of the youth,” which seems to argue for the commission of sins that were motivated less by malice than by the rash impulse of adolescence.

Donne's meditation here seems to take seriously the instruction in both the “General Confession” and the “Confession of Sin” to “acknowledge” one's “manifolde synnes and wyckednesse.” The two sins emphasize a sober self-knowledge as a condition to proper repentance, and Donne here reflects on a life not only permeated with vice, but also characterized by torpor; a laziness that prevented the discharge of Christian duty and, encouraged

⁶³ Beckwith, 6.

the impulse to forget or misremember the severity of previous sins. Donne's desperate naming of all kinds of sins in one long sentence, including sins of omission, attempts to bring forward all real and potential iniquities, almost as if to persuade God that Donne should be granted absolution for the sincerity of his *attempt* to make an accounting for himself. He has done all he can to get his sins in order for God's impending moral audit. Brook Conti persuasively suggests that the meditation's frantic listing, however, further underscores the impossibility of reckoning one's own sin:

As Donne attempts to confess, he is continually brought up short by the impossibility of enumerating his sins except under very general names—sins of his youth, sins of omission, sins against his neighbor—and he lists every conceivable category up to and including “sins against the laws of that *Church*, & sinnes against the laws of that *State*, in which thou hast given mee my station.” Finally, as if exhausted, he concludes...Not only has he managed to accuse himself of every known sin without specifying any, he has effectually rendered the whole idea of confession beside the point. If a person is fundamentally guilty of all sins—including those he has not actually committed and those he is not aware of (and especially if God has already pardoned him ahead of time)—confession would seem to serve no purpose.⁶⁴

But Donne's meditation isn't, I think, interested in understanding or presenting a theological defense or model of how confession *should* work. Rather, I suggest that the meditation documents an experience of sin as individual insufficiency in the face of an overwhelming sense of guilt for sins which he knows definitely *are* his fault, and, more vexingly, for sins which *might* be his fault. Perversely, confession's rehearsal provokes rather than alleviates the burden of sin. Donne's inclusion of the category “sins of omission” understands himself as complicit in a moral universe that operates with ecological nuance and balance, so that the notion of individual agency in the commission of sin becomes a more complicated matter than Conti seems to understand it when she observes that Donne confesses to “those he has not actually committed.”

⁶⁴ Conti, *Confessions of Faith in Early Modern England*, 70.

Calvin's proposition that Israel had a "conniving" relationship with Achan comes closer, I think, to understanding the sense of agency and commission that Donne here formulates. Donne's failure to list specific sins and their circumstances doesn't necessarily mean he's *not* guilty. If, indeed, God takes sins of omission as seriously as those of commission, his transgression might still be judged severely.

Still, the meditation reveals Donne's *experience* of sin in ways that, though delivered in theological language, don't necessarily reflect the nuances of atonement theology or, even his actual beliefs concerning his own eternal fate.⁶⁵ Conti seems sensitive to this fact when she observes "especially if God has already pardoned him ahead of time." The meditation's occasion performs precisely this conflict: between the seeming knowledge that God's pardon

⁶⁵ Matthew Horn has argued that "Enough has been written to show that toward the end of his life Donne never really doubted his election." Horn, Matthew. "John Donne, godly inscription, and permanency of self in 'Devotions upon Emergent Occasions'." *Renaissance Studies* 24.3. 366. My argument's inclusion of Donne's prose and poetry is principally concerned with the way that they document sins of omission alongside other kinds of sins, as well as experiencing the essentially unaccountable, excessive nature of one's sins, whatever their category, and whether or not the individual feels himself to be directly responsible (as in the case of Achan) or "peripherally" responsible (as in Calvin's charge of Israel's conniving.) This focus necessarily compels me to abbreviate a longer discussion of the ways in which Donne's prose and poetry not only document early modern beliefs and ideas *about* sin and guilt, but also model ways that individuals experienced and responded *to* perceived sin and guilt. Horn's article investigates some of the ways in which Donne's prose and poetry feature a divide between Donne the author and Donne the speaker—a division which the prescriptions of the "General Confession" and the "Confession of Sin" from the *Book of Common Prayer* do *not* invite the supplicant to adopt or, indeed, make possible. I propose Donne's division of the author and speaker reconfigures the elements of these prayers to render both his prose and, especially, his poetry, as expressions of the "excess" that the "Confession of Sin" both documents and urges individuals to recognize in their consciences. Where the prayer imagines the individual to "bewayle manifolde synnes and wickedness," and configures their guilt as an "intolerable burden," Donne models the way that the act of writing itself attempts to "draw off" some of these excesses and translate them. This translation can serve multiple purposes, providing an instance of personal meditation for the author and, once published or shared, modeling spiritual postures and attitudes for readers. Donne thus models ways in which the act of writing (and, presumably, reading) participates in both individual and communal religious experience by attempting to distill the initially non-semantic, untranslatable, and overwhelming encounters with states of guilt, doubt, fear, or ecstasy. See also Brock, Michelle. "Experiencing Satan in Early Modern Scotland." *Critical Survey* 23.2.

extends throughout time and the *experience* of one's guilt *in* time, where each new and subsequent sinful action (or inaction) seems to clamor the terms of Donne's guilt in louder, more insistent terms than his experience of God's assurance of salvation *in spite* of his ongoing sin.

The conflict between Donne's belief in his election and his experience of specific sins resurfaces in his 1623 poem, "A Hymn to God Our Father." Like his meditation, the poem's narrative conflict depends on the speaker's experience of his sin both as overwhelming and novel compared to the perceived absence and insufficiency of God's salvation, whose terms God will not provide in terms comparable to the terrors supplied by the speaker's guilt.

Wilt thou forgive that sin where I begun,
Which was my sin, though it were done before?
Wilt thou forgive that sin, through which I run,
And do run still, though still I do deplore?
When thou hast done, thou hast not done,
For I have more. (1-6)⁶⁶

Donne's poem attempts to present to God a holistic portrait of his sin, even as the poem subtly complains about the ways in which original sin assigns a guilt to him whose justice he finds suspect. The speaker seems content to take responsibility in lines one and three, for example, for sins "where I begun" and "through which I run," whereas "though it were done before" distances his agency from original sin through the line's passive construction. The poem worries that God's gift of salvation can only apply to certain sins; ones which the poet can sincerely acknowledge and account for. The poem pits God's salvific agency against the destructive "agency" of his own sins—both seem boundless to Donne's speaker, and this first stanza seems to recognize sin getting the upper hand of Donne's soul: "When thou hast done, thou hast not done, / For I have more." It repeats Donne's sentiment in his *Meditation*: "I know them so well

⁶⁶ Donne, *John Donne Poems*, 398.

as to know that nothing but thy mercy is so infinite as they.” The poem’s worry about God’s salvific impotence implies that the act of atonement is one bound to time—that God will forgive all sins committed up until the point of forgiveness, but sins which come after the fact seem to require a renegotiation. The speaker stands in need of renewing his negotiation for two of the three of the poem’s stanzas, each of which conclude “For I have more,” which again asserts the poem’s worry about God’s inability to reckon with all of the speaker’s sins, or if not inability, something like exhaustion or impatience with a speaker who continues to “run” through his sin even as he claims to “deplore” it.

This inextricability of individual guilt from that of communal consent or neglect motivates my viewing of sin as a religious experience within moral ecosystems. In developing the idea of a moral ecosystem, I argue that Reformed prescriptions for human flourishing and health depend both upon individual and his community and environment. Personal desire, choice, action, and omission take shape with the encouragement, neglect, or discouragement of those around them. Thus, the success or failure of spiritual and moral fitness variously celebrates or implicates the relationship between the two (or more) parties. This model of a moral ecosystem reflects contemporary views of the functions and relations of biological ecosystems in which multiple factors can shape individual fitness and survival. Contemporary biologists Anna Melbinger and Massimo Vergassola, for example, understand evolution fitness as “the amount of genes that an individual will transmit to a future population (either carried by itself or its offspring).”⁶⁷ The greater such transmissions occur with ease, they argue, the greater the level of fitness. Superior fitness manifests as invulnerability to environmental challenges or hostilities. These can be myriad, ranging from the availability of resources like food and water to

⁶⁷Melbinger and Vergassola, “The Impact of Environmental Fluctuations on Evolutionary Fitness Functions,” 1.

the presence of predators.⁶⁸ Applying these contingencies to a moral ecosystem, faith expresses the spiritual and moral fitness that aim at eternal salvation. As individuals in a biological ecosystem encounter hostility from external and internal sources (predators and disease), fitness in the moral ecosystem confront the hostility of external forces (as Richard of Gloucester challenges Lady Anne), but also from internal failings. As Luther, Calvin, and Donne demonstrate, the faith may fail because of temptation, despair, or the failure of memory. These conditions can precede further commission of personal sin as well as contributing to communal sin when, through the failure of memory or weakening of conviction, an individual neglects her moral responsibility.

The phenomenological dimensions of sin in Reformed accounts apply themselves principally to individual experiences of terror and despair, but individual sins may also serve as an expression of corporate, communal failings. As I argued previously, because sin transgresses boundaries and dimensions, Reformation theology asserts that no sin occurs in isolation—every transgression occurs in a continuum of events, resulting from and contributing to defective moral ecosystems. I examine this most significantly in diagnosing Richard II’s ambiguous guilt in Chapter Three where, according to *Yuval Eylon and David Heyd, flattery functions as an* “essentially *inter*-personal or social” vice rather than, as lust, “merely” an individual vice.⁶⁹ But in all the plays, villainy and sin occur partially because different communities *permit* their commission. Calvin holds these communities partially responsible even as God’s justice singles out the principal sinner for the severest consequences, and Shakespeare, too, stages guilt as a conditional of immoral co-dependencies. These relationships of commission and omission must be recognized as contingent in order to sufficiently account for questions of guilt. As I will

⁶⁸ Ibid., 1.

⁶⁹ Eylon and Heyd, “Flattery,” 685-704.

demonstrate in Chapter Four, critics like Harry Berger Jr. sometimes emphasize one at the expense of the other, as he does with a structuralist argument of *Macbeth* that considers the antagonist's murder spree the mechanistic result of environmental processes.

Calvin's interpolation of personal and communal culpability emerges, for example, in his commentary on the biblical book in Joshua chapter Seven, relating the story of an unfortunate man named Achan. Achan indulges in some secret plundering after the fall of the city of Jericho. I will work through the entire chapter because its narrative critically portrays the complexity of individual and communal sin that illustrate how sin "behaves" as a moral contaminant whose effects can pollute both spiritual as well as physical spaces and even objects—sometimes, apparently, by mere association. The chapter begins by curiously interpolating individual sin and communal guilt:

But the children of Israel committed a trespass in the excommunicate thing: for Achan the son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi, the son of Zerah of the tribe of Judah, took of the excommunicate thing: wherefore the wrath of the Lord was kindled against the children of Israel. And Joshua sent men from Jericho to Ai, which is beside Beth Aven, on the East side of Bethel, and spake unto them, saying, "Go up, and view the country." And the men went up and viewed Ai, and returned to Joshua, and said unto him, "Let not all the people go up, but let as it were two or three thousand men go up, and smite Ai, and make not all the people to labor thither, for they are few."⁷⁰

The chapter's account bookends Achan's guilt with references to "the children of Israel:" firstly in assigning the entire people guilt for "a trespass in the excommunicate thing" and then asserting that God kindles his wrath against them as a natural consequence of their trespass. The narratives account further diffuses Achan's individual responsibility by introducing him as the "son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi, the son of Zerah of the tribe of Judah." This form of genealogical introduction features throughout the old and new testaments as a trope of identity

⁷⁰ Joshua 7:1-3. 1599 Geneva Bible. Hereafter all references taken from this edition.

construction, but its particular rehearsal here insinuates that Achan's theft emerges partially as a product of three generations of bad parenting, and perhaps even flaws endemic to the tribe of Judah. The kindling of God's wrath and the severity of Achan's sin assume a particularly ominous aspect juxtaposed to the chapter's narrative swerve in focus to the determination to "smite" Ai, whose threat Joshua and men of Israel judge as insignificant, reflecting their ignorance of God's wrath kindling against them, or their complicity in Achan's theft.

For John Calvin, the story of Achan critically testifies to the devastation that can afflict communities through the "cooperation" of sins of commission and sins of omission. Calvin posits that something like moral laxness in Israel enables Achan's transgression:

it seems very unaccountable that a whole people should be condemned for a private and hidden crime of which they had no knowledge. I answer, that it is not new for the sin of one member to be visited on the whole body. Should we be unable to discover the reason, it ought to be more than enough for us that transgression is imputed to the children of Israel, while the guilt is confined to one individual. But as it very often happens that those who are not wicked foster the sins of their brethren by conniving at them, a part of the blame is justly laid upon all those who by disguising become implicated in it as partners... But here it is easy to object that all were ignorant of the theft, and that therefore there is no room for the maxim, that he who allows a crime to be committed when he can prevent it is its perpetrator.⁷¹

Calvin's ethical vision collapses distinctions between guilty and non-guilty parties in a communal setting because he views each act—and particularly each sinful act—as collaborative. The circumstances that precipitate what can seem to be individual sin in fact include a host of factors where other individuals "foster the sins of their brethren by conniving." Calvin's language here understands sin, again, in ways that gesture toward a moral ecosystem in which the agency required for particular actions diffuses across a wide variety of social channels, action, inaction, location, and time. Still, Calvin's attempt to account for Israel's complicity in

⁷¹ Calvin, *The Book of Joshua*, 103.

Achan's action strains with an account whose telling clearly holds Israel guilty while omitting any clear evidence of their "conniving" for Achan's benefit. Evidence that "conniving" typifies their general comportment comes most clearly (if at all) from the report that Joshua's men give concerning the people of Ai. Their underestimation of Ai's martial strength *could* be read as conniving—not wanting to see threat where they should—and this underestimation of Ai's threat must then be read retroactively to parallel their failure to anticipate Achan's proclivity to theft in spite of God's clear warning.

The secrecy of Achan's transgression proves particularly devastating as God's wrath *reflects* the nature of Achan's sin; God does not warn Israel how or why his wrath arises. None the wiser, Israel's soldiers move into battle with Ai and experience a total loss of their composure: "wherefore the hearts of the people melted away like water." A bewildered Joshua tears his clothes and makes an impassioned supplication to God. God, however, seems nonplussed as if Joshua had no occasion to behave so dramatically.

And Joshua said, "Alas, O Lord God, wherefore hast thou brought this people over Jordan, to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites, and to destroy us? Would God we had been content to dwell on the other side Jordan. Oh Lord what shall I say, when Israel turn their backs before their enemies? For the Canaanites, and all the inhabitants of the land shall hear of it, and shall compass us, and destroy our name out of the earth: and what wilt thou do unto thy mighty Name?" And the Lord said unto Joshua, "Get thee up: wherefore liest thou thus upon thy face? Israel hath sinned, and *they* have transgressed my covenant, which I commanded them: for *they* have even taken of the excommunicate thing, and have also stolen, and dissembled also, and have put it even with their own stuff. Therefore, the children of Israel cannot stand before their enemies: but have turned their backs before their enemies, because *they* be execrable: neither will I be with you anymore, except ye destroy the excommunicate from among you."⁷²

God's question, "Wherefore liest thou thus upon thy face" seems a bit incredulous, as if God can't believe Joshua could be so unaware of the origin of his wrath. Unsettlingly, God's addressing of Joshua's distress nowhere names Achan. He instead names all of Israel in the

⁷²Joshua 7:7-12. Emphasis added.

“transgress” of his covenant. The chapter repeatedly uses the plural pronoun “they” in conjunction with the individual sins that Achan has committed. *He* has stolen, dissembled, and “put it even with his own stuff,” but, like his sin and stolen goods, the narrative conceals his specific role and guilt.

The narrative likewise complicates even the degree to which we understand the consequence of Israel’s guilt, conferred upon them by Achan’s actions. When the soldiers of Israel meet Ai in battle, their role in their defeat seems passive: “wherefore the hearts of the people melted away like water” suggests they suffered an unexpected turn of events which itself is obliquely rendered through the metaphor of their melting hearts. But with God’s assignation of guilt comes a depiction of greater agency—and therefore complicity—: “but [they] have turned their backs on their enemies.” Here, Israel’s defeat renders the soldiers less as victims of unexpected “organ failure” than as cowards or arrogant fools, and they have turned their backs because *they* are “execrable.” God promises that things will continue in this state of humiliation until the “excommunicate” is destroyed. The Oxford English Dictionary indicates that “excommunicate,” as both verb and noun, derives from the attempted translation of the Hebrew word “*hērem*”—objects devoted to destruction.⁷³ The examples cite Joshua chapters Six and Seven, identifying both people *and* physical objects under the heading of “*hērem*.” God’s detailed warning to Joshua and the people of Israel concerning the “proper” sacking and looting of Jericho clarifies a certain “slippage” by which people may become these objects: “Notwithstanding, be ye ware of the execrable thing, lest ye make yourselves execrable, and in taking of the execrable thing, make also the host of Israel execrable, and trouble it.”⁷⁴

⁷³ “excommunicate, v.”. OED Online. Accessed May 15, 2017.

⁷⁴ Joshua 6:18.

Rather than telling Joshua that Achan is the guilty party, God commands Joshua to “sanctify” Israel in a public ceremony by which Achan and his guilt can be filtered from the community by process of elimination, which further underscores the seeming inextricability of individual act and communal guilt. The purification of Achan from Israel relies, in part, on the spectacle of the ceremony not only to punish Achan, but to serve as a warning to everyone else:

Up *therefore*, sanctify the people, and say, “Sanctify yourselves against tomorrow: for thus saith the Lord God of Israel, ‘There is an execrable thing among you, O Israel, therefore ye cannot stand against your enemies, until ye have put the execrable thing from among you.’ In the morning therefore ye shall come according to your tribes, and the tribe which the Lord taketh, shall come according to the families: and the family which the Lord shall take, shall come by the households: and the household which the Lord shall take, shall come man by man. And he that is taken with the excommunicate thing, shall be burnt with fire, he, and all that he hath, because he hath transgressed the covenant of the Lord, and because he hath wrought folly in Israel’.”⁷⁵

God’s instruction to Joshua here commands that he give an account in which an individual act has resulted in God’s imputation of communal sin and transgression. God’s description of the “execrable thing” here blurs the distinction between the person who committed the transgression, and the object of his transgressive desires: Achan’s sin transforms him *and* the stolen items into objects of destruction. Only when at last God has described the process for selecting Achan does he acknowledge the individual component responsible for his wrathful response: “And he that is taken with the excommunicate thing, shall be burnt with fire, he, and all that he hath.” The phrase “with the excommunicate thing” reinforces Achan’s dehumanized status as an object by insisting that his eventual selection will not be complete unless the objects accompany him to judgment. Both the process of discovering Achan’s identity and passing judgment upon him reinforces the impossibility of perceiving Achan’s sin as isolated. Slowly whittling him away from tribe, family, household, and man stages the difficulty of “removing” sin from a

⁷⁵ Joshua 7:13-15.

community. Even with God's help, the process would have taken a significant amount of time and the trouble of organizing the entire nation in order to find one person. In parallel, once Achan's identity has been ascertained, the form of his judgment again attests to the power of sin to compromise all that it touches. Not only Achan, but "all that he hath" must be destroyed "because he hath wrought folly in Israel."

Achan allows the spectacle to take place as God describes to Joshua, perhaps hoping that they'll come up with the wrong guy. When Joshua finally arrives at him, however, he comes clean and his confession asserts a clear understanding of his individual choices and guilt:

"Achan answered Joshua, and said, 'Indeed I have sinned against the Lord God of Israel, and thus, and thus have I done. I saw among the spoil a goodly Babylonish garment, and two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold of fifty shekels weight, and I covered them, and took them: and behold, they lie hid in the earth in the midst of my tent, and the silver under it'."⁷⁶

Once Achan's guilt has been discovered, the chapter concludes in ways that further depict individual sin as a danger not only to social communities, but also to the spaces those communities occupy. Achan's judgment and his purification *from* Israel requires that his judgment extend to the members of his family, his livestock, and his physical possessions:

Then Joshua took Achan the son of Zerah, and the silver, and the garment, and the wedge of gold, and his sons, and his daughters, and his oxen, and his asses, and his sheep, and his tent, and all that he had: and all Israel with him, brought them unto the valley of Achor. And Joshua said, "In as much as thou hast troubled us, the Lord shall trouble thee this day:" and all Israel threw stones at him, and burned them with fire, and stoned them with stones. And they cast upon him a great heap of stones unto this day: and so the Lord turned from his fierce wrath: therefore he called the name of that place, The Valley of Achor, unto this day.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ Joshua 7:20-21.

⁷⁷ Joshua 7:24-26.

Achan's judgment must occur *away* from Israel's encampment. And as Achan's sin compromised Israel as a community, all of Israel is made to participate in the restoration of the moral health. Calvin understands the physical process of Achan's excommunication from Israel, in conjunction with his execution, in terms of Israel's communal pathology. He underscores this approach with repeated gestures to Achan's sin as a powerful contaminant that could have ruined all of Israel had it not been removed immediately:

Achan is led without the camp for two reasons; first, that it might not be tainted and polluted by the execution, (as God always required that some trace of humanity should remain, even in the infliction of legitimate punishments,) and secondly, that no defilement might remain among the people. It was customary to inflict punishment without the camp, that the people might have a greater abhorrence at the shedding of blood: but now, a rotten member is cut off from the body, and the camp is purified from pollution.⁷⁸

Calvin's reading understands the danger of Achan's polluting sin as the same kind of danger posed to a healthy body by a rotting appendage, and takes an unflinching approach to the correspondences between individual and communal sin, seeing providence in God's apparently pitiless judgments. He anticipates the protests of certain readers who will judge the punishment of Achan's family and livestock as excessive, and asserts that Achan's sin had irredeemably compromised everyone in his family and everything he owned. Calvin maintains an unflinching approach to the correspondences between individual and communal sin, seeing providence in God's apparently pitiless judgments and concludes that the gravity and weight of human sin lie so far beyond our ability to reckon their consequences that only God can adequately perceive and judge it them:

Everything, therefore, which Achan possessed perished with him as an accessory, but still it seems a cruel vengeance to stone and burn children for the crime of their father; and here God publicly inflicts punishment on children for the sake of their parents... The infants and children who then perished by the sword we bewail as unworthily slain, as

⁷⁸ Calvin, *The Book of Joshua*, 116.

they had no apparent fault; but if we consider how much more deeply divine knowledge penetrates than human intellect can possibly do, we will rather acquiesce in his decree than hurry ourselves to a precipice by giving way to presumption and extravagant pride...⁷⁹

The appeal to the unsearchable powers of divine knowledge in conjunction with warnings about excessive curiosity and pride are emblematic of Calvin's hermeneutic whenever confronted with difficulties surrounding issues of God's providence. His accounting for Achan's theft as resulting partially from Israel's sins of omission helps articulate some of the early modern expectation about the social behaviors of sin. Still, his determination to find fault with Achan's children in spite of clear textual evidence belies an anxiety that Brian Cummings sees as typical of early modern Protestant theology:

The Protestant obsessions with providence created a rich and complex philosophical language...In Luther and sometimes in Tyndale grace is like that, it is something that involves *luck*. Calvin half knew this, and half chose to suppress it. After his death, Calvinist theology struggled to overwhelm this desperate possibility, and strove to prove that luck had absolutely nothing to do with grace. Yet luck, in some unfathomable divine sense, might have everything to do with it.⁸⁰

Cummings' naming of luck also, of course, should extend to its inverse: bad luck. In some ways, Israel's marching into battle with Ai, unaware of Achan's transgression and God's subsequent wrath, is bad luck. Achan's portrait of sin proposes a severe modification to the way that we understand bad luck as a case of being in the "wrong place at the wrong time." In the case of Achan's family, we might also add "being with the wrong person."

Calvin applies this interpolation of individual and communal sin likewise to his commentary in Genesis covering God's destruction of the city of Sodom recorded in Genesis 18-19. In a reversal of the dynamics seen in Joshua, where God punishes Israel because of one man's sin, in Genesis, Abraham "barter[s]" with God to spare the city if a minimum of righteous

⁷⁹ Ibid., 117.

⁸⁰ Cummings, *Mortal Thoughts*, 235.

individuals may be discovered among its citizenry. In the account, Abraham and his family somewhat uncomfortably occupy the same landscape as Sodom and Gomorrah. And though they reside in moral isolation, not unlike Noah and his family, Abraham and Lot both express remarkable tenderness and concern for a city and people whose lives and culture prove the antithesis to their own. Abraham seems to understand city's precipitous position: he gradually whittles the number of righteous from 50 down to ten: "Then he said, 'Let not my Lord be now angry, and I will speak but this once, what if ten be found there?' And he answered, 'I will not destroy it for ten's sake.'"⁸¹ Abraham's ability to barter results from a curious self-diminishing of divinity in which God seems to suspend his omniscience and announces his plans to investigate the city to see if at least ten righteous people may be found: "And the Lord went his way, when he had left communing with Abraham, and Abraham returned unto his place."⁸²

God's investigation of Sodom's iniquity also furnishes the account with some rich phenomenological texture that arises from the way that God's momentary limitation on his divinity seems to act as a pre-incarnation incarnation. For as the passage concludes with language that applies God's departure to a specific, individuated movement, it also explicitly discusses God's physical senses in response to the city's sin. "Then the Lord said, Because the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is exceedingly grievous, I will go down now, and see whether they have done altogether according to that cry, which is come unto me: and if not, *that* I may know."⁸³ The passage suggests that the cities themselves cry, as if the streets, squares, and structures were protesting against the conduct of its inhabitants which has stained them. Calvin argues: "In saying that the 'cry was great,' he indicates the grievousness of

⁸¹ Genesis 18:32.

⁸² Genesis 18:31.

⁸³ Genesis 18:20-21.

their crimes, because, although the wicked may promise themselves impunity, by concealing their evils, and although these evils may be silently and quietly borne by men; yet their sin will necessarily sound aloud in the ears of God.”⁸⁴

This account proves significant to understanding early-modern pathologies of sin for the way that God expresses his divine wrath against the city and its populace not only through its ultimate destruction, but also through the affliction of blindness. When the men of Sodom discover that Lot is entertaining guests, they march upon his home and demand the guests be surrendered that they may “know them.” Lot attempts to intervene on behalf of his guests, even, disturbingly, going so far as to offer his two virgin daughters as a consolation prize. But the Sodomites remain undeterred and demand the angels. The angels rescue Lot and his family by striking the frenzied citizens blind: “But the men put forth their hand, and pulled Lot into the house to them, and shut to the door. Then they smote the men that were at the door of the house, with blindness, both small and great, so that they were weary in seeking the door.”⁸⁵ The angel’s affliction of blindness upon the “small and great” men of the city effectively removes Lot and his family from danger by placing them and their angelic guests beyond the perceptive powers of the Sodomites. But the affliction of blindness also appears to be a “just” punishment, where the deprivation of physical sense mirrors the moral blindness and self-deception that allow the men to justify their conduct. For Calvin, this blindness isn’t a total eradication of visibility, but a “dulling” of the senses:

Whereas, Moses says, that the men were smitten with blindness, we are not so to understand it, as if they had been deprived of eyesight; but that their vision was rendered so dull, that they could distinguish nothing. This miracle was more illustrious, than if their eyes had been thrust out, or entirely blinded; because with their eyes open, they feel about, just like blind men, and seeing, yet do not see. At the same time, Moses wishes to

⁸⁴ Calvin, *A Commentarie of John Calvine Upon The First Book of Moses Called Genesis*.

⁸⁵ Genesis 19:10-11.

describe their iron obstinacy: they do not find Lot's door; it follows then, that they had labored in seeking it; but, in this manner, they furiously wage war with God.⁸⁶

For Calvin, the dulling of their sense of sight both allows Lot and his family remain safe, but also results in making them even more agitated and fevered in their frenzy. Calvin seems to suggest that total blindness would have been a perhaps paralyzing condition, but with their sight numbed and dulled, the men of Sodom seem to believe they can compensate for their reduced condition by vigorous application of effort with help from the other senses. The passage doesn't indicate that the men of Sodom recognize the guests as angels, or recognize their affliction as divinely motivated, but Calvin regards them as "furiously wag[ing] war with God." The phenomenological dimensions of their punishment Calvin seems to regard as a guarantee that the men of Sodom will *continue* to engage in sinful behavior.

The dulling of the senses as a reflection of dulled moral knowledge resonates with other Protestant formulations concerning the operation of the conscience. As I indicated in the preface, Jeremiah Dyke's 1626 treatise *Good Conscience* argues that the numbed conscience prevents the individual from sensing their sin the way calloused skin prevents the perception of pain. But pain provides crucial information to the body, necessary for the maintenance of health and safety as well as for the possibility of pleasant sensations associated with touch. Healing the damaged skin (and damaged conscience) so that it may properly understand pain itself requires the application of a "hot yron" described in 1 Timothy 4.2. These phenomenological expressions of pain associated with the conscience also feature in the writings of William Perkins whose pathology of sin, like those seen in Luther, Calvin, and *The Book of Common Prayer*, unites body and spirit under the threats of self-deception as well as despair.

⁸⁶ Calvin, *A Commentarie of John Calvine Upon The First Book of Moses Called Genesis*.

Indeede Satan for his part goes about by all meanes he can, to benumme the conscience: but all is nothing. For as the sicke man, when he seems to sleepe and take his rest, is inwardly full of troubles: so the benumbed and drousie conscience wants not his secret pangs and terrours, and when it shall bee roused by the judgment of God, it waxeth cruel and fierce like a wild beast. Again, when a man sinnes against his conscience, as much as in him lieth, he plungeth himself into the gulfe of desperation: for every wound of the conscience, though the smart of it be little felt, is a deadly wound.⁸⁷

Perkins vivifies the conscience with a language which, in its insistence on wounds and physical pain, locates the experience of sin in the body as well as the soul. This experience is at once intimate and specific, as suggested by terms like “pang” and “smart,” but also overwhelming and abundant, as we see through the imagery of a man that “plungeth himself into the gulfe of desperation.” In suggesting that Satan attempts to benumb the conscience, Perkins departs from Calvin and Luther, who both argue that Satan tries to aggravate the conscience in order to lead the individual to despair through the unrelenting contemplation of his sins. Here the agitation of the conscience arises from the event of God’s judgment rather than Satan’s successful harassment.

For Christopher Elwood, Calvin’s interpolation of individual and communal sins (or righteousness) assumes even more significance because of Calvin’s refusal to render the sin of the Sodomites *as* the conventional, legal definition of sodomy which, for him as well as for Luther, was an unnatural and therefore unforgiveable sin.⁸⁸ Elwood observes that Luther’s commentary on the Genesis account repeats traditional views of Sodom’s punishment as a consequence of their presumed unnatural sexual behavior. For Luther, the apocalyptic conditions surrounding Sodom’s culture and abolition all too easily allegorically applied to his views of Catholic Rome. According to Elwood, Calvin refuses to be explicit where Luther is,

⁸⁷ Perkins, *A discourse of conscience wherein is set downe the nature, properties, and differences thereof: as also the way to get and keepe good conscience.*

⁸⁸ Elwood, “A Singular Example of the Wrath of God,” 67-93.

and he attributes this disparity in interpretive approach to different political and rhetorical pressures: “Luther’s polemic against the Roman church hierarchy...was well served by his interpretation of the sin of Sodom as sodomy or unnatural vice.”⁸⁹ Calvin’s writing of the Genesis commentary, on the other hand, “shows him to be focused on the practical demands of forging a Reformed community.”⁹⁰ Elwood argues persuasively for the influence of the rhetorical and political strains that shape Luther and Calvin in different ways. His investigation of Luther’s historical circumstances persuasively posits why, contrary to his own theology of passive righteousness, Luther might *prefer* to regard Roman Catholics as so exceptionally immoral as to be a forgone conclusion of God’s wrath.

Calvin’s refusal to perceive the sin of Sodom as exceptional makes them theoretically available for the possibility of repentance—even if they do not. But it also elevates the “value” of individual righteousness as a salvific presence in an otherwise wicked community. When God agrees to relent from destroying Sodom if ten righteous people may be found, Elwood would have us then conclude that the city’s destruction occurs, at least partially, because the ten people simply could not be found. This, as opposed to the possibility that, in the course of God’s investigation of the cities and their cries, his discovery of so heinous and unnatural a body of sins overwhelmed the ostensible value of the few righteous people in the city. Elwood explains:

Calvin’s resistance to strategies that would render the sodomite as other signals a rather different legacy. Wary of inherited habits of interpretation and concerned to see biblical accounts of sin apply to all persons, he supplied a model for traditions that employed the fear of Sodom’s spectacular punishment as a spur to communal self-examination. The Reformed Protestant churches’ concentration upon individual and social sanctification found inspiration not only in Calvin’s theology, but also in his insistence on an ordered system of discipline in which moral regulations would be applied consistently to all members of the church and commonwealth.⁹¹

⁸⁹ Ibid., 83-84.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 87.

⁹¹ Elwood, 90-91.

I'm largely unpersuaded that Calvin's resistance occurs because he perceives the sin of the Sodomites as something *other* than sodomy. Elwood proposes that their intended crime "could well have been the sexual crime of rape..." but, "the real horror seems to Calvin to lie in...violating God's heavenly glory."⁹² As I suggested earlier, the passage doesn't supply any clear evidence that the Sodomites knew the angels *were* angels. Comparatively, Lot's attempt to mollify the crowd with his daughters seems a reaction to specifically sexual appetites to the extent that he characterizes his daughters in terms of their "unblemished" sexuality: "Behold now, I have two daughters, which have not known man: them will I bring out now unto you, and do them as seemeth you good."⁹³ Still, that Calvin's overall purpose in his commentary on Sodom aims to motivate "communal self-examination" fruitfully applies to my investigation of Shakespeare's moral ecosystems.

If Reformed theology recognizes all the dimensions of a human life—physical, spiritual, psychological, and social—as susceptible to the threat of sin, this perception of vulnerability proceeds from the equal conviction that these modes of self also each play a part in ushering the individual into God's vision of human flourishing. Such flourishing depends on far more than intellectual assent or "right belief." Victoria Silver explains: "Such understanding is conceived as much more than ratiocination: it is an intelligence orchestrating all humanity's faculties of sensation, emotion, imagination and intellection, so that the person may have a living fellowship with the intractably hidden God of the Hebrew and Christian scriptures."⁹⁴ Shakespeare's drama attends to each of these elements of human experience across the plays I go on to investigate: *Richard III*, *Richard II*, and *Macbeth*. To the extent, then, that Shakespeare hopes in the

⁹² Ibid., 76.

⁹³ Genesis 19:8.

⁹⁴ Silver, *A Just Deception*, 5.

possibility of fellowship with God, whether in this life or that to come, these plays argue that we possess alarming agencies and inclinations that can further obscure God's hiddenness.

Chapter Two - Such Terrible Impression: Horror, Self-Deception, and Divided Selves in *Richard III*

As I argue in my introduction, in *Richard III* Shakespeare stages what we might refer to as a dramatic theology of sin which reveals that sin *begins* as a crisis of self-knowledge that pits the conscience against self-deception. The pathology of sin here functions like an infection, constantly corrupting an individual's moral epistemology in ways that may encourage them to act, or prevent them from acting, contrary to their ultimate moral good. In *Richard*, Shakespeare reveals a continuum of defective moral knowledge that begins as a belief in his moral exceptionality—ethical laws do not apply to him—and concludes with the equally compromised condition of despair: belief in his exceptional exclusion from the possibility of God's mercy or salvation. My argument begins with *Richard*, as the play does, but I want to explore *Richard*'s moral deterioration and experience of sin both individually and communally in order to demonstrate how Shakespeare's drama portrays sin as a condition constituted both by individual action and choice as well as the cooperation *or* passivity of that individual's community. This larger community comes to share in the individual's sinful condition and actions by functionally assenting to the individual's status as morally exceptional, even though they may perceive such a decision as foolish, rash, or wicked.

Richard's sense of exceptionality inaugurates the play where Shakespeare opens on his titular character caught in a moment of solitude, pensive and brooding over a life that no longer seems to require combat and intrigue. *Richard* finds himself unable, or unwilling, to enter the recreation and fellowship occasioned by the recent coronation of his brother and the political ascent of the house of York. *Richard*'s aversion to peace manifests in the tones of regret and even resentment with which he catalogues objects and skills which, having fulfilled their martial purpose, face obsolescence.

Now is the winter of our discontent
Made glorious summer by this son of York;
And all the clouds that loured upon our house
In the deep bosom of the ocean buried.
Now are our brows bound with victorious wreaths
Our bruised arms hung up for monuments;
Our stern alarums changed to merry meetings,
Our dreadful marches to delightful measures.
Grim-visaged war hath smooth'd his wrinkled front;
And now, instead of mounting barded steeds
To fright the souls of fearful adversaries,
He capers nimbly in a lady's chamber
To the lascivious pleasing of a lute. (1.1.1-13)¹

Richard matches his regret for the loss of martial discipline with disdain for the apparent trappings of victory. Not upon rest or peaceful solemnity does the personage of war spend its leisure, but instead upon erotic liaisons, dances, and “merry meetings.” Richard sounds condescending; aloof and embittered by experiences that have rendered these revels naïve and juvenile. His contempt for these pleasures underwrites an argument he makes about his own character: not only are the “delightful measures” childish and fleeting, but he imagines his contempt as a natural, necessary consequence of his identity and physical form—all apparently shaped by exterior forces without reference to his desires.

But I, that am not shaped for sportive tricks,
Nor made to court an amorous looking-glass;
I, that am rudely stamp'd, and want love's majesty
To strut before a wanton ambling nymph;
I, that am curtail'd of this fair proportion,
Cheated of feature by dissembling nature,
Deformed, unfinish'd, sent before my time
Into this breathing world, scarce half made up,
And that so lamely and unfashionable
That dogs bark at me as I halt by them; (1.1.14-23)

Richard's phrase “rudely stamped” argues that his flaws proceed from a flawed, even

¹ Shakespeare, *Richard III*. *The Norton Shakespeare*. Hereafter, all references will be taken from this edition.

malicious creation. Like a poorly minted coin, Richard falls outside the realm of sanctioned transaction and cannot function in the normal economy of human affairs. The fault lies entirely with “dissembling nature”—employing poor machinery or using poor material. Richard’s deformities and their consequences are here presented as the predictable outcomes of pure mechanical failure. But, as if to make the most of a rigged game, Richard announces his intention to play to his strengths or, rather, to play to his weaknesses.

Why, I, in this weak piping time of peace,
Have no delight to pass away the time,
Unless to spy my shadow in the sun
And descant on mine own deformity:
And therefore, since I cannot prove a lover,
To entertain these fair well-spoken days,
I am determined to prove a villain (1.1.24-30)

Underneath Richard’s sneering at peace and glorification of his deformities, however, we can recognize a man who, confronted with the prospect of peace, “determine[s] to prove a villain,” but wants to avoid accountability and repercussions for the choice. He curates a narrative that renders him as a static, or passive object in a morally charged universe so that he can act with an impunity unencumbered by guilt.

Richard’s determination to prove a villain primes the audience for dramatic chaos and Shakespeare magnifies the portentous climate established through his speech with constant references to time. Indeed, the first word of the play is “Now,” a word Richard uses thrice in the first ten lines, each of them commanding the beginning of a new sentence. “Time,” too, occurs thrice in relatively quick succession in lines 20-25. His speech also draws attention to time in both broad and seasonal terms (“winter,” “summer,”) as well as with the references to the time of recreation and festivity of music—“delightful measures”— which he refuses to enter. Near the end of this cataloguing, Richard concludes, “I hate the ideal pleasure of these *days*.” In listing

the different categories of time—seasonal, musical, historical—Richard seems to be attempting to account for certain contingencies in order for his plots to succeed. But when he turns to the subject of his plots, he identifies a category of time he has not previously named: what we might call “theological time.” “Plots have I laid, inductions dangerous, / By drunken prophecies, libels and dreams / To set my brother Clarence and the King / In deadly hate the one against the other.” (1.1. 31-35). Richard’s success in sowing discord among his brothers depends on his ability to counterfeit convincing occasions of divine revelation, and he seems to understand the generic stipulations of prophecies and dreams. The prophecy “which says that ‘G’ / of Edward’s heirs shall murderer be,” (1.1.39-40) is suitably vague, and therefore the more likely to inspire paranoia. The menace of the prophecy isn’t just that G is a murderer, or even his unclear identity, but the indefinite though certain promise of G’s future transformation communicated in the phrase “*shall* murderer be.”

With its attention to timeliness, Richard’s narrative arc of moral deterioration matches, as I argue in Chapter One, what William Perkins describes as a sequence of self-deception, passive conscience, and explosive judgment. Queen Margaret’s curses seem to describe this sequence, anticipating the delay between commission of sin and execution of judgment.

QUEEN MARGARET

If heaven have any grievous plague in store
Exceeding those that I can wish upon thee,
O, let them keep it till thy sins be ripe,
And then hurl down their indignation
On thee, the troubler of the poor world's peace!
The worm of conscience still begnaw thy soul!
Thy friends suspect for traitors while thou livest,
And take deep traitors for thy dearest friends!
No sleep close up that deadly eye of thine,
Unless it be whilst some tormenting dream
Affrights thee with a hell of ugly devils! (1.3.214-224)

Margaret here gleefully imagines the chaos of Richard’s judgment that, in its delay, acquires power and horror because his sins go unconfessed. Her concern, though more publicly declared, matches Hamlet as he watches Claudius in prayer: they both want maximum judgment, maximum damnation. Margaret’s comparison of sins to fruit also cleverly inverts a trope of Biblical and theological language in which fruition and ripeness—themselves qualities of “delay” and time—traditionally describe the character and deeds of the righteous. Psalm 1, for example, compares a righteous man to a “tree planted by the rivers of waters, that will bring forth her fruits *in due season*.”²

Shakespeare arms Margaret’s invective with Reformed theology. As William Perkins imagines the conscience awaking from apparent hibernation to afflict its host with the terror of “a wild beast,” she imagines the ripening of sin followed by a sudden and decisive judgment.³ In casting the conscience in an adversarial role to the unrepentant sinner, these early modern theologies rely on more than a little drama in the attempt to impress the gravity of sin upon both the pious and the impious. With a horrific grandeur and sudden excess, Shakespeare’s staging of Richard and Richmond sleeping through a procession of ghosts seems to take the theology seriously, imagining—and amplifying—the terms of engagement. Beginning with young, innocent Prince Edward and concluding with the perhaps less-to-be-mourned Buckingham, Richard and Richmond entertain Richard’s victims in the vulnerability of their sleep. To Richmond the ghosts offer encouragement of various forms, while to Richard, each curses him: “Despair and die!”

True to Margaret’s curse, Richard’s sins seem indeed to ripen (or, at least, compound),

² 1599 Geneva Bible. Psalm 1. All biblical references taken from this edition. Emphasis added.

³ Perkins, *A Discourse on Conscience*.

unafflicted by any tremor of warning from his conscience. Margaret's speech also anticipates the cancer-like growth of error and delusion in Richard's essentially atheistic epistemology. The "ripening" of his sins garners even more weight according to his mockery of their potential consequences. His skepticism emerges flamboyantly in his conversation with Queen Elizabeth, trying to enlist her aid and tempting her with the prospect of becoming the Queen Mother.

RICHARD As I intend to prosper and repent,
So thrive I in my dangerous attempt
Of hostile arms! myself myself confound!
Heaven and fortune bar me happy hours!
Day, yield me not thy light; nor, night, thy rest!...
Be opposite, all planets of good luck,
To my proceeding... (4.4.328-322)

Richard's principle conception of prosperity, however, doesn't depend on repentance, and so he happily invites the opposition of heaven, conflating it with "planets of good luck." Richard's rhetoric gathers impressive power not merely from his facility with wordplay, but from his apparent conviction that the Christian moral economy that governs Elizabeth is simple superstition. From Elizabeth's perspective, however, Richard's offer acquires a certain credibility because he appears willing to submit himself, with almost alarming recklessness, not only to the spiritual and moral discipline required by repentance, but also because of the bullfighter's bravado he displays in taunting the far-less predictable (and potentially more hazardous) prospect of bad luck. Brian Cummings has recently written on early-modern conceptions of luck as a force which theologians struggled to integrate into their understanding of issues like grace and salvation:

In the case of Judges 2:15, "euyl luck' is not a matter of pure chance. It is a consequence of the Israelites' own actions. Tyndale is in two minds on this subject. In the Prologue to Genesis, he recalls God's benevolence to the foibles of the patriarchs, such as Noah the drunk, Lot undone by his daughters, David the adulterer turned murderer. Why does God keep giving them a second chance? Tyndale extracts a moral: these chequered characters are forgiven so that next time they might do better...It is as if Tyndale discovered in the

old Hebrew stories an unaccountable surplus, an inexplicable metaphysics, a narrative of risk and uncertainty, which he struggles to put back in its place.⁴

As God is, apparently, in the business of giving second chances, Elizabeth's duty as a Christian behooves her to do the same. Richard implores her a little later in the same speech: "Plead what I will be, not what I have been; / Not my deserts, but what I will deserve." (4.4. 345-6) Of course, Richard has no intention to ameliorate his "chequered" ways, and only too happily courts cosmic forces he doesn't believe in to gain Elizabeth's help.

Richard's atheistic bravado typifies his embrace of religious imagery and language for political ends. The dramatic impact of Richard's willingness to confound himself here achieves an added potency in the context of his previous performances of piety. In Act Three, Scene Seven, for example, Richard directs a moment of clumsy religious theater in order to manipulate London's citizens into acquiescing to his coronation. The scene self-consciously draws attention to the icons and rhetoric of piety in order to emphasize Richard's appropriation of religious discourse in rebranding his power grab as election by popular demand.

BUCKINGHAM: Sorry I am my noble cousin should
Suspect me, that I mean no good to him:
By heaven, I come in perfect love to him;
And so once more return and tell his grace.

Exit CATESBY

When holy and devout religious men
Are at their beads, 'tis hard to draw them thence,
So sweet is zealous contemplation.

Enter GLOUCESTER aloft, between two Bishops. CATESBY returns

LORD MAYOR: See, where he stands between two clergymen!
BUCKINGHAM: Two props of virtue for a Christian prince,
To stay him from the fall of vanity:

⁴ Cummings, *Mortal Thoughts*, 217.

And, see, a book of prayer in his hand,
True ornaments to know a holy man.
Famous Plantagenet, most gracious prince,
Lend favourable ears to our request;
And pardon us the interruption
Of thy devotion and right Christian zeal. (3.7.88-103)

Richard makes a grand show of pretending to be unavailable to Buckingham, feigning the cliché of isolated seclusion associated with cloistered religious devotion. When he “finally” appears, having whetted the citizens’ (and audience’s) appetite for his appearance, he comes out winged with bishops to, again, try and signal his holy character. Both in absence and presence, Richard’s religious theater strives to achieve credibility through the appropriation of religious spectacle. Buckingham’s commentary clarifies this by inadvertently emphasizing Richard’s distinction from the character of holiness he wants to publicly establish. When the Mayor marvels that he stands between two bishops, Buckingham clumsily confirms, calling them “two props of virtue.” The Oxford English Dictionary reports that the earliest definitions of “prop” signified support systems for items, plants, or structures incapable of standing on their own: “A stick, rod, pole, stake, or beam used as a temporary support or to keep something in position, *esp. one not forming an integral part of the thing supported*; (in extended use) anything that serves to support something or keep it in place.”³ In calling the bishops “props,” Buckingham inadvertently suggests that Richard has no virtue of his own with which to stand and dramatize religious conviction.

Buckingham continues to undermine Richard’s attempt at counterfeiting piety with his term by describing the prayer book as an “ornament to know a holy man.” But here the prayer book only adds as much value as the bishops do as “props.” Ornaments only embellish the

³ OED Online. Accessed June 1, 2017. Emphasis added following the abbreviated term “*esp.*” Critically, theatrical connotations associated with the term should *not* be applied to Richard’s religious theater. According to the OED, applications of “prop” to theatrical/dramatic items came into use in the middle of the 19th century.

exterior—the appearance—of their host, even as Buckingham asserts Richard’s holiness. But holiness is a spiritual, metaphysical condition whose state no priest can prop or prayer book can alter. In a moment linked to what Joel Slotkin describes as the play’s “explicit assert[ing of] the transparency of Richard’s deceptions,” Buckingham hilariously fails to comprehend that the successful faking of piety depends precisely on erasing what his speech makes visible.⁶

Unsettlingly, however, this assertion is what lends the scene its ambivalent tone—Richard’s pseudo-religious antics and Buckingham’s oafish support are *so* transparent as to be hilarious, but the deception which *should* earn ridicule and contempt nonetheless succeeds. The mayor and citizens accept the ludicrous spectacle as sufficiently genuine.

Richard’s theater of religious authority here gains a particular traction partially because of his allusion to the naïve piety of his predecessor, Henry VI, a king, as the phrase goes, too heavenly minded for any earthly good. Hugh Richmond links Shakespeare’s staging of religion in *Richard III* to that of *Henry VI*:

Shakespeare builds on the historical success of Henry VI’s traditional religious motifs and vocabulary to an unusual degree, for the most part by reversing or parodying them in ways appealing to the Tudor synthesis of Protestant and Humanist views of fifteenth century Catholic society. ...At every level in the play Shakespeare deftly exploits the religious concerns of his time, mostly by inverting medieval conventions and attitudes. Yet the ultimate effect is not to discredit religion but to intensify an awareness of it in the subjective terms fostered by Reformation stress on the individual state of mind.⁷

I agree that the *ultimate* effect of these inversions intensifies an awareness of the subjective terms, but first want to emphasize that Shakespeare’s staging of Richard’s pious parody makes light—at least in this moment—of a serious problem precisely by, as Slotkin argues, staging the problem so transparently.

Off the stage, early modern individuals—both in England and on the continent—

⁶ Slotkin, “Honeyed Toads: Sinister Aesthetics in Shakespeare’s *Richard III*,” 12.

⁷ Richmond, “*Richard III* and the Reformation,” 512-514.

struggled to distinguish true faith from good acting. While Buckingham's ham-fisted exclamations only intensify our perception of Richard's performance as hackneyed religious theater, early modern anxieties surrounding the counterfeit of religious experience, convictions, and authority inspired widespread *and* significant concern. This concern punctuated the divisions between Catholic and Protestant expressions of Christianity in England, as Stephen Greenblatt argues of Samuel Harsnett's anti-Catholic polemic, *A Declaration of Popish Impostures*. Harsnett's book documents and excoriates a band of outlaw Jesuit priests for their brief, but popular, "performances" of exorcisms that took place between 1585 and 1586. Greenblatt argues that Harsnett's book raises critical questions about the perceived relationship between "secular" and "religious" authority in early modern England: "At the heart of this struggle...was the definition of the sacred, a definition that directly involved secular as well as religious institutions, since the legitimacy of the state rested explicitly on its claim to a measure of sacredness. What is sacred? Who defines and polices its boundaries? How can society distinguish between legitimate and illegitimate claims to sacred authority?"⁸ For Greenblatt, Harsnett proposes a thoroughly secular and terrestrial set of answers in which state and governments both define and manage the sacred in order to maintain social control and suppress insurgency.

James Shapiro has further argued that the feigning of religious experiences like conversion fueled animosity and suspicion between Christianity and Judaism. In this account, the appetite for incontrovertible markers of faith only led to the proliferation of theatric techniques designed to persuade the dubious of an individual's "genuine Christianity:"

The erosion of recognizable difference [between Anglicans, Catholics, and other branches of Christianity] paradoxically generated ever more strenuous efforts to

⁸ Greenblatt, *Shakespearean Negotiation*, 95-96.

distinguish Christian from Jew, and, with the increasing emergence of a sense of national identity, Englishman from Jew... As the history of the counterfeit Christians and the false Jews outlined above shows, in theological terms they were understood not only to be inveterate opponents of Christians but also imminent coreligionists whose conversion would confirm the rightness of the Christians' faith.⁹

Conversion here is thus understood not merely or even principally as a spiritual and creedal orientation toward Augustine's city of God, but toward an idealized England with the New Jerusalem vaguely shining in the background. The linking of religious and national identity resulted in the burden of proof falling on religious actions which, to the extent that they were required to be public, could only raise suspicion. Indeed, as if to send his audience a harbinger to announce the imminent arrival Richard's cartoonish cloistering, the Scrivener who briefly appears in the scene previous remarks: "Who is so gross / That cannot see this palpable device? / Yet who so bold but says he sees it not?" (3.6.10-12). His remark is addressed to Lord Hastings' indictment, but the brevity of the scene pivots his construction of the "palpable device" toward Richard's mockery in which the citizens of London are likewise silent. The scrivener justifies silence in the face of obvious ploys on the basis of fear and survival. Given the lowliness of their position, we can perhaps forgive such fear among the scriveners and the citizens, though their refusal of Richard's suit here wouldn't be the same as open rebellion against a monarch; Richard appears as king only later in Act Four, Scene Two.

The citizens and their eerily silent witness are shortly exchanged for Richard's conscience, which assumes the riotous aspect of mob. Richard's self-cursing in his phrase "myself myself confound" finds comic and dreadful fulfilment in the next act, in which Richard's social, political, and bodily death at last catch up with his spiritual death. Where one might only expect "myself myself confound" to suggest an ironic downfall where Richard

⁹ Shapiro, *Shakespeare and the Jews*, 33.

succumbs to circumstances he himself designed, Shakespeare stages a self-consciously, confounding cross examination of Richard versus Richard before his battle with Richmond.

Here the conscience long suppressed emerges.

My conscience hath a thousand several tongues,
And every tongue brings in a several tale,
And every tale condemns me for a villain.
Perjury, perjury, in the high'st degree!
Murder, stern murder, in the dir'st degree,
Throng to the bar, crying all, 'Guilty, guilty!'
I shall despair. There is no creature loves me,
And if I die, no soul will pity me.
And wherefore should they, since that I myself
Find in myself no pity to myself?
Methought the souls of all that I had murder'd
Came to my tent, and every one did threat
Tomorrow's vengeance on the head of Richard (5.5.147-160)

Where Richard sounded calculated and cunning calling himself a villain in the first act, he now quivers under its meaning. Part of the dramatic force of this moment comes from the phenomenological elements that vivify his perturbed conscience. Richard speaks of it as possessing “thousand several tongues.” The image is, on the one hand, grotesque by way of perverse synecdoche—the conscience seems to be a creature made entirely of tongues. The image seems parallel to the sensory excess suggested by the four living creatures in Revelation 4:8—“and they were full of eyes within.”¹⁰ Further, each tongue brings condemnation against Richard; a cacophony of voices that join together in prosecution.

Shakespeare's staging of Richard's one-man legal drama, particularly with an eye to the “thousand witnesses” and fractured personalities, also perhaps owes some dramatic debts to medieval morality plays in which the conscience was staged as a conflict between characters

¹⁰ Revelation 4:8.

representing different dimensions of both human self-hood as well as spiritual experience. In *The Castle of Perseverance* (whose manuscript dates to 1440), for example, the character Mankind is born into the world and immediately faced with a moral choice between sin and pleasure on the one hand, and the path of salvation and virtue on the other. The delights and dangers of each path are variously proclaimed by Good Angel and Bad Angel. Predictably, Bad Angel wins the first battle and leads Mankind into the compromising company of characters like World, Lust-Liking, and Folly. The play names conscience as a faculty which belongs to Mankind and though it does not appear as a character, operates in conjunction with the characters Shrift and Penance. These characters prove critical in facilitating Mankind's repentance, a process which requires Mankind to subject himself to painful surgery in the same kinds of pathological terms that Perkins uses to describe the conscience's ability to afflict an individual with pain. Shrift explains:

Therefore prepare thee now to shrive,
If thou wilt come to bliss!
Thou sinnest! Ere sorrow with thee dispense,
Behold thine heart -- thy privy sense --
And thine own conscience,
Or, surely, thou dost amiss.

MANKIND

Ya! Peter! others do too --

(He indicates the whole audience)

We have eaten garlic everyone!
Though I should to hell go,
I know well I shall not go alone,
I tell thee truly!
I did never so evil, I am not so sly,
But others have done as evil as I.
Therefore, sir, let be thy cry

And go hence from me!¹¹

Shrift calls upon man to examine his conscience—to “behold his heart” and acknowledge his transgression. But Mankind prevaricates and, in a display of self-deception that accords with Perkins’ description of a conscience “benumbed,” gestures to the audience, turning both his actual and moral gaze away from himself. The language of morality and vision here contributes to a common lexicon and pathology of sin that, as I’ve shown, Calvin likewise employs in describing the conscience—particularly when he speaks of man’s tendency to “avert” his mind, and *being forbidden* “so much as permitted to wink at [his conscience] without being forced, whether he will or not, at times to open his eyes.” *Sin’s phenomenological dimensions here assume still wider horizons while maintaining Mankind’s self-deceived state. He compares sin’s corruption to the unpleasant but universal (though not fatal) stench of garlic on the breath.*

Realizing that Mankind cannot be brought to repentance in his current condition,

Penance resolves to adopt more drastic measures:

PENANCE

With the point of penance I shall him *pierce*,
Man's pride to fell.
With this lance I shall disburse
Truly a drop from mercy's well.
Sorrow of heart is what I mean --
Truly, there may no tongue tell
What washes souls more clean
From the foul fiend of hell
Than sweet sorrow of heart!
God, that sits in heaven on high,
Asks no more, e'er that thou die,
But sorrow of heart with weeping eye,
For all thy sins smart.

They that sigh in sinning,
In sad sorrow for their sin,

¹¹ *The Castle of Perseverance*, 1206-1220.

When they shall make their ending,
All their joy is soon to begin.
Then mingles there no mourning,
But joy is joined with gentleness fierce.

*(She reaches Greediness' scaffold, and addresses
Mankind, seated above)*

Therefore, Mankind, in this tokening,
With point of spear I will thee pierce:
God's laws so dear instruct.
With my *dagger* of sorrow sweet,
I reach to thine heart's root.¹²

Penance finds Mankind's heart too calloused and insensitive to recognize its own peril. Penance thus employs a lance and then a dagger to pierce through the protective boundaries of self-deception and hypocrisy that defend Mankind's pride in order to bring him to contrition through sorrow. Mankind is suitably wounded and cries out in pain: "A seed of sorrow in me is set; / Certainly, for sin I sigh sore! / The moans of mercy in me are met."¹³ The forced surgical effort undertaken between Shrift and Penance thus anticipates Perkins and Calvin in their conceptions of the conscience not only in its apparent independence and agency, but also in its capacity to inflict pain and wounds. That Shrift and Penance should foreshadow these motifs of Protestant theology assumes still more freight in light of the fact that the Oxford English Dictionary defines "shrive" as "to impose penance upon (a person)."¹⁴ As with the garlic-breathed Mankind, the imposition becomes necessary when Shrift and Penance realize he will not willingly submit to their requests.

Shakespeare stages Richard's depraved political arc with a self-conscious nod to the tropes and motifs established in plays like *The Castle of Perseverance*. He refers to himself as

¹² Ibid. 1221-1244. Emphasis added.

¹³ Ibid. 1247-1249.

¹⁴ "shrive, v.". OED Online. Oxford University Press. October 2016

“the formal Vice, Iniquity,” (3.1.82), as if to place himself in a lineup of the usual suspects: Bad Angel, Lust-Liking, Backbiter, and Richard. But of course, he’s winking at us when he makes such a confession; the parade of vicious characters from morality plays advertise their badness in ways that aim to secure our confidence that Mankind is going to regret their company. Belial’s introduction, for example, offers a sort of self-caricature that ensures that his role in the play is more mechanical than personal:

Now sit I, Satan, steadfast in my sin,
As devil doughty, like a dragon on my sack.
I champ and I chew and I thrust out my chin;
I am boisterous and bold as Belial the black!
The folk that I grasp they gasp and they groan,
From Carlisle to Kent, my carping they take!¹⁵

Johnson’s modernization of the play maintains the characteristic use of alliteration, and here it punches the lines along, hammering us with repeated sounds. He may say he’s “steadfast in his sin,” and that he’s “boisterous and bold,” yet they’re not the characteristics of an individual, but of a cog in a larger machine. He’s telling us how he works, and what we can expect of him. He will not surprise us, as Richard does, with a sudden crisis of conscience that reveals previously unguessed psychological depth or nuanced motivations.

Shakespeare stages Richard’s deterioration in precisely the spiritual and psychological terms that Calvin supplies. As I demonstrated in the Chapter One, Calvin argues that the conscience operates independently of its host, obedient to the dictates and commands of God, who arms it with the power of terror. This terror that Calvin links to the ability of the conscience to “hale” a man before the judgment seat of God only intensifies to the extent that the conscience also functions as “a thousand witnesses.” Thus, the terror of the experience lies not merely in

¹⁵ *The Castle of Perseverance*, 40-45.

defeat against a more powerful quarry, but that the dimensions of legal judgment make the confrontation both painfully public and the execution of judgment irrevocable. Thus, as Richard's conscience hales him with the thought of impending judgment, we see too the fragmentation of his personality; oscillating between extremes of self-regard.

What do I fear? Myself? There's none else by.
Richard loves Richard; that is, I am I.
Is there a murderer here? No. Yes, I am
Then fly! What, from myself? Great reason. Why?
Alack, I love myself. Wherefore? For any good
That I myself have done unto myself?
O no, alas, I rather hate myself
For hateful deeds committed by myself.
I am a villain. Yet I lie: I am not.
Fool, of thyself speak well.—Fool, do not flatter. (5.5.136-153)

These lines prove almost as comic as they do tragic; Richard embarks upon a dialogue where he refers to himself in third person and performs both sides of the conversation. When he rebuffs the idea that he could fear himself, he does so with the pathetic attempt at an expression of self-care: "Richard loves Richard." His attempt becomes even more pitiable with the following qualifier; "that is, I am I." The line operates on the expectation that one may assume self-love as a *condition* of human identity. To even have an "I", Richard seems to suggest, guarantees love of self; an interest in one's own welfare. But as the next lines reveal, part of Richard understands his self primarily in the terms of a murderer, while the other part of him resists being named as a villain, or admitting that the deeds committed are hateful. Shakespeare's homophonic use of the "I am" construction underscores his conflicted identity. The "I am I" that promised love of self transforms in the next line into an admission of guilt: "Yes, I am." The interrogation crescendos—and devolves—into insults; Richard berating himself, by turns, for villainy and flattery. This back and forth where Richard plays both prosecutor and defendant culminates in

Richard's variation on the proverb. In Richard, Shakespeare not only repeats the adage, but embodies it.

That the ghosts "embody" something of Richard's pent-up conscience has been suggested by scholars like Harry Berger, who critically identifies that though they coincide with the timely arrival of guilt, the ghosts themselves have not all been translated into figures of innocent martyrdom, as if entering into the afterlife via murder should whitewash their own patchy histories. "In his ghostly exit performance, Clarence continues where he left off in act 1, scene 4: He represents himself only as a poor victim seeking justified revenge, whereas Buckingham's little speech glides quickly past his guilt to dwell on Richard's."¹⁶ The morally ambiguous eternity from which these ghosts process to haunt Richard establishes another parallel with the dreamy judgment Clarence encounters before his own demise at the hand of the murderers. We ought to recall that the hell Clarence visits is populated not just by historical figures like Warwick, but the "sour ferryman" and "Furies."

This strange combination of figures—first in Clarence's dream and then in the procession of ghosts—strikes Berger as problematic, since they cannot easily be united under an apparently common banner of coherent morality. "Considering the behavior in life of most of those ghosts, we're entitled to be skeptical about the Christian conscience they mediate."¹⁷ Berger here implies that whatever kind of moral epiphany—however strong or brief—Richard experiences, it might not affirm a Christian conscience because the figures were not, in a word, particularly *Christian* themselves. "Christian" here seems to assume expectations about the moral conduct and values necessary to certify an experience—as if the function of Richard's conscience were itself an enterprise that couldn't afford the compromising influences of Clarence and Buckingham. One

¹⁶ Berger, *Skills of Offense in Shakespeare's Henriad*, 15.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 15.

would have expected, perhaps, more carefully vetted representatives of heaven's holy doom. What one wants for an uncomplicated affirmation of the Christian conscience is a good, old-fashioned angel like Gabriel, or perhaps a Beatrice to play opposite Richard's lost and bewildered Dante.

Berger's skepticism regarding the Christian conscience comes under the larger project of reading Richard as directed more by theatric than moral motivations born of the play's interest in presenting him as a Tudor scapegoat—a project of the *play* in which Richard the character is consciously complicit.

...the play's major example of an attack of conscience, the soliloquy in act 5, scene 3 that responds to the parade of Richard's ghostly victims urging him to "despair, and die." The soliloquy divides the speaker in two. He argues with himself, judges himself, defends himself, threatens himself, feels sorry for himself, confesses and denies his villainy, and finally acknowledges himself a sinner who will die unloved and unpitied. But above all, he's putting on a show for his off-stage fans in the audience, as the phrase "There's none else by" coyly reminds us.¹⁸

I suppose it's certainly possible—even perhaps likely—that in some performances an actor might indulge the temptation to ham it up with the audience while playing out the auto-interrogative fulfilment of Richard's promise to "myself myself confound." And, to some extent, we *are* his fans insofar as we thrill in his intrigues and revel in his wordplay. Berger obliges himself to list the general movements of Richard's cross examination before announcing that Richard's true consideration breaks entirely out of the play—out of the circumstances and history that have occasioned the ghosts' visitation.

Berger continues in his vein of fault-finding, complaining that Richard's behavior lacks the poise and nuance of other, later figures who reflect a more thoughtful and wise Shakespeare.

...the soliloquy is psychologically simple to the point of caricature. In the brief space of twenty-five lines Richard races through a selection of the self-reflexive sentiments that

¹⁸ Ibid., 13.

get more intricately worked out in the soliloquies of such speakers as Hamlet, Edgar, Lear, Macbeth, and the three kings of the Henriad. In Richard's performance, the sentiments go off like a string of Chinese firecrackers... He seems to throw himself, if not on the audience's mercy, then on its pity...¹⁹

Berger's emphasis on Richard's relationship with the audience seems to come at the expense of the theological significance of his relationship (albeit brief) with the train of ghosts. While they may vary in moral standing, and while they may distinguish themselves by announcing to Richard the terms of his hand in their deaths or betrayals, the play simultaneously unites them by having each ghost, as I quoted earlier, curse Richard with the phrase, "Despair and die!" While Margaret's curses have inspired a good amount of scholarship, little recent criticism has discussed the theological freight of the ghosts' curses to Richard. When the ghosts tell Richard to despair, they're not merely telling him to lose hope in the possibility of his military victory against Richmond; they're trying to foreclose any possibility that Richard might repent of his sins and avoid not merely military defeat, but damnation.

A helpful analogue for the kind of despair the ghosts traffic in here might be found in the encounter between Redcrosse Knight and the figure of Despair in Edmund Spenser's poem *The Faerie Queene*, the first half of which was published in 1590. Despair presents as an emaciated, weathered, and weak old man and his appearance at first suggests no great threat to Redcrosse Knight. But what he lacks in physical might he makes up for in dangerous speech: "The knight much wondered at his suddeine wit," (1.9.41)²⁰ Despair confronts Redcrosse Knight with a narrative in which with each passing day, his sins only compound themselves: "Why then doest thou, O man of sin, desire / To draw they dayes forth to their last degree / Is not the measure of thy sinfull hire / High heaped up with huge iniquitie?" (1.9.46). Redcrosse falls prey to this

¹⁹ Ibid., 13-14.

²⁰ Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*.

damning rhetoric: “The knight was as much enmoved with his speech, / That as a swords point through his hart did perse, / And in his conscience made a secret breach.” (1.9.48). The “secret breach” here affirms the subtle danger of Despair, whose strategy is not to risk frontal assault, but to induce his victims into total surrender which, in the case of Redcrosse Knight, manifests as the impulse to commit suicide. He very nearly does and is only rescued by the intervention of Una. Elizabeth Heale explains:

Despair, with his persistent, goading eloquence, is both the voice of Redcrosse’s self-condemning conscience, and also the voice of the subtle tempter, Satan, enflaming with an expert touch the knight’s weaknesses – his weariness, and his sense of failure and hopeless error...It is appropriately Una, the True Church, who arouses in Redcrosse a saving faith in God’s mercies by reminding him of the biblical promises Despair omits.²¹

Heale is here alert to the fact that, at least for Spenser, the voice of the conscience can also “sound” like the voice of Satan: both traffic in terms of condemnation, but one experience of condemnation leads to repentance while the other leads to suicide.

In addition to the profound theology of despair that the ghosts introduce, I’m also not sure that these implicit stipulations of behavior or morality that Berger places on “Christian” in connection with conscience are ones which Shakespeare’s audience would have imposed on the play to recognize the emergence of his conscience within a broadly Christian framework. Indeed, that such a motley collection of characters could assist in Richard’s judgment might very well have been understood to acknowledge the vagaries of religious and spiritual systems sometimes rendered uncomfortably contingent in their inclusion of forces like fortune, luck, and chance. Brian Cummings notes that the theology of providence in *Hamlet*, for example, seems to defy placement in a coherent discourse:

the play confronts us with competing and often contradictory theological languages, perhaps best captured by Stephen Greenblatt’s aperçu of ‘a young man from Wittenberg,

²¹ Heale, *The Faerie Queene: A Reader’s Guide*, 41.

with a distinctly Protestant temperament, ...haunted by a distinctly Catholic ghost.” This contradictoriness is not incompatible with 16th century thinking on providence, and undercuts the way Shakespearean criticism has been so anxious about the references to predestination in the play and at the same time so determined to censor it from the play’s central meanings.²²

That early modern audiences would have accepted “contradictoriness” in thinking about the terms of providence suggests a more robust theological constitution than the skepticism Berger seems to suggest for understanding the conscience.

For a play so concerned with questions of conscience, it’s odd that Berger hears Richard’s voice moving to acknowledge the audience. Odd because Berger reads conscience as *the* motivating issue of the Henriad: “My response to these controversies—and this is the other reason why I think the disenchantment story needs to be changed—is to treat with utmost seriousness the importance Harry’s question, ‘May I with right and conscience make this claim’ has *for him*.”²³ Berger insists that a proper understanding of the Henriad depends on reading Henry’s crisis of conscience as a principally *personal* dilemma around which center all the other various plots of his troubled monarchy and French campaign. Berger goes on to qualify what “for him,” means precisely in the kinds of terms that, I would argue, offer a rare and helpful articulation of how we might understand individual religious experience:

I maintain that the cause behind the claim to the French throne is morally dubious, if not reprehensible; that since this cause, which can be traced back to Harry’s first appearance in *1 Henry IV*, leads him to make war more in his own than in the national interest, his subjects are asked to risk their lives for reasons that might not stand up at the bar of his conscience; that his language betrays the cost of his need to persuade himself, and not merely the world, that the cause is just; and that his frequent appeals to God therefore spring less from the desire to give himself political legitimacy and his war religious sanction than from the concern for his ethical probity and spiritual welfare.²⁴

²² Cummings, *Mortal Thoughts*, 213.

²³ Berger, “On the Continuity of the Henriad, 230. Emphasis Berger’s.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 230.

Berger understands the conscience here to engage issues of ethics and spirituality that underwrite Henry's political ambitions. And, notably, his personal need is *not* to persuade the audience but *himself* that his actions and motivations satisfy the conditions of justice in his claim to the French throne. Additionally, and critically, the *him* Berger identifies refers to Shakespeare's dramatic re-interpretation of Henry V—not the historical Henry.

Thus, it remains unclear why the psychological caricature of Richard's monologue should disqualify him from being regarded in the same way; why, because it lacks comparative intricacy, we must hear his speech as a sly acknowledgment of the audience and not his own fractured selves. For as Berger understands the personal conflict of Henry's conscience to critically motivate the play, I suggest that any reading of *Richard III* that does not also seriously examine issues of conscience, self-deception, and sin as authentic, personal experiences will misunderstand the play. I have argued that these issues are presented in Richard's first monologue when he announces that he is determined to "prove a villain." The question this speech asks and which the play undertakes to answer is not whether or not Richard does indeed prove to be a villain, but whether or not he can be personally held *responsible* for his villainous actions. Are we allowed to condemn Richard as a homicidal and moral monster, or should we pity him because we conclude—as he does—that he was "rudely stamped" and couldn't help but malfunction? The same theological issues Berger reads as saturating Henry's crisis are no less present in *Richard III*, and indeed animate Richard's terrorized monologue in critical ways.

Moreover, we ought not to assume that theological considerations cannot inhabit the same dramatic space as those in which we find the dark humor and caricature that characterize Richard's psychological unraveling. When Richard observes, "There's none else by," we should read this in the larger context of Richard's horrible epiphany and visitations from the ghosts.

The sudden activation of his conscience constitutes a religious experience even as Richard—like Clarence before him—resists its import. Berger’s suggestion that Richard ironically acknowledges the audience with a winking “there’s none else by,” places a strain on the line’s meaning that I’m not sure the context can easily support. I rather read the line “there’s none else by” as ironic not for invoking the audience, but for re-performing Richard’s most persistent errors: that he can be truly alone, that he can get away with his schemes, and that God does not exist or care. To say “there’s none else by,” reminds us that the absence of anyone in his vision isn’t just a fact of his ocular senses, but a fractured determination of his ethics. Indeed, in Richard’s circumstances, the phrase “there’s none else by” sounds rather like the opening of Psalm 14: “The fool in his heart hath said, *‘There is no God’*.” It invites the audience not just to witness Richard as a performance (with an actor who may or may not break the fourth wall) but to witness Richard as a wicked soul in distress as, perhaps, God might witness a wicked soul in distress.

I want to turn now to consider sin in some of its broader ecologies in which Richard centers. George, Duke of Clarence, provides the play’s other significant figure in decoding Shakespeare’s dramatic theology in ways that mirror and anticipate those of his brother. In a dream he recounts in Act One Scene Four, self-deception concerning himself and Richard underwrite a powerful nightmare. In the dream, his guilty conscience presents an experience of sin in phenomenological terms consistent with the saturated amplification that Marion describes, and with the horror and confusion typical of Reformed theology. *The dream’s* terms and intensity notably correspond to the theology proposed by the prayer of the Confession of Sin from *The Book of Common Prayer*. Shakespeare scripts this scene with something like an inversion of the prayer’s liturgical narrative. The Confession proposes, firstly, that proper

penitence requires an epistemic reorientation toward God in which the confessor rightly understands his moral position. Clarence, on the other hand, doesn't intend for his dream to function as a confession of sin, but of an account of his suffering *as a Christian faithful man*. His beginning posture is not that of humility, but unexamined self-justification.

BRACKENBURY: Why looks your grace so heavily today?

CLARENCE: O, I have passed a miserable night,
So full of fearful dreams, of ugly sights,
That, as I am a Christian faithful man,
I would not spend another such night
Though 'twere to buy a world of happy days--
So full of dismal terror was the time. (*Richard III* 1.4.1-7)

The scene opens with Clarence having just woken from fitful sleep, its evidence in his countenance apparent enough to elicit Brackenbury's concern. His first utterance, "O" testifies to the immanence and burden of the experience he struggles to articulate. "O" contributes no clear semantic value to the statement that he has passed a miserable night. Rather, per Bruce Smith's suggestion, Clarence's groaned "O" resonates as visceral and sonic. According to Smith, "The semantic emptiness of these O's on the printed page...stands as a testimony to their embodied fullness. As Joel Fineman remarks in respect to *Othello*, the insistent sound of [o:] has the effect of undermining the traditionally admired power of literary language to create visionary presence."²⁵ And it is this same undermining of literary language that the Confession of Sin likewise performs and instructs, "we acknowledge and *bewayle* oure manifolde synnes..."²⁶ The confessor not only acknowledges his sin, but also acknowledges the inability of literary expression to comprehend his sin's severity.

²⁵ Smith, *The Acoustic World of Early Modern England*, 14.

²⁶ Cummings, *The Book of Common Prayer* 134

While here less insistent (or, at least, less frequent) than the exclamations of Hamlet and Othello, Clarence's outburst attempts to express in sound what he cannot express in words—the misery of his experience, but a misery that has not yet revealed its cause. Clarence finds himself burdened with the experience of sin even as he does not yet perceive the misery as a *result* of sin. That he proceeds immediately to describe his night by twice using the phrase “so full” likewise seems to signal the failure of both semantic and non-semantic representation to contain the excess of his dream:

Methought that I had broken from the Tower
And was embarked to cross to Burgundy,
And in my company my brother Gloucester,
Who from my cabin tempted me to walk
Upon the hatches: thence we looked toward England
And cited up a thousand heavy times,
During the wars of York and Lancaster,
That had befall'n us. As we paced along
Upon the giddy footing of the hatches,
Methought that Gloucester stumblèd, and in falling
Struck me (that thought to stay him) overboard
Into the tumbling billows of the main.
O Lord! Methought what pain it was to drown!
What dreadful noise of waters in mine ears!
What sights of ugly death within mine eyes!
Methoughts I saw a thousand fearful wrecks;
A thousand men that fishes gnawed upon;
Wedges of gold, great ouches, heaps of pearl,
Inestimable stones, unvaluèd jewels,
All scattered in the bottom of the sea: (1.4.9-28)

Clarence signals excess here through his return to round, exaggerated figures like “thousand,” used benignly at first to describe his shared recollections with Richard (Gloucester) as they consider the Wars of the Roses. He then repeats this figure to describe the “fearful wrecks” and the “thousand men” gnawed upon by fishes. These visions of excess further suggest the flood of the saturated phenomenon in proceeding immediately after one of the most self-consciously “sensible” moments of Clarence's narration. He recounts his confrontation with “dreadful noise”

and “sights of ugly death,” invoking the limitation and fragility of his senses. For these experiences to be named, respectfully, as “dreadful” and “ugly” identifies them as repulsive and unwelcome—even overwhelming.

Adding to the excess of Clarence’s dream, his vision alights upon derelict treasures, lost at the bottom of the ocean. Clarence identifies *wedges* of gold, *great* ouches, *heaps* of pearl, *inestimable* stones, and *unvalued* jewels. Each category of treasure in name alone announces its own abundance, but to each one Clarence adds a further term of bounty. The last two, in particular, emphasize the “saturation” of his vision—“inestimable” identifies the impossibility of recognizing either the number or the monetary worth of the stones. “Unvalued,” on the other hand, suggests less the impossibility of reckoning worth than it does that, because they lie at the bottom of the ocean and have done for a long time, they will never have common, monetary value. Their value cannot be constituted by human gaze or desire.

Moreover, the dream works to repulse any vision of desire through an ominous juxtaposition of the treasure and human remains, perhaps implying that the pursuit of such treasures led precisely to this kind of death.

Some lay in dead men's skulls, and in the holes
Where eyes did once inhabit, there were crept—
As 'twere in scorn of eyes—reflecting gems,
That wooed the slimy bottom of the deep
And mocked the dead bones that lay scattered by. (1.4.29-34)

The scene of the reflecting gems in the skulls replaces Clarence’s exclamation of “ugly death within mine eyes.” His use of “crept” and “wooed” similarly attach excess to the gems by ascribing to them a certain spectral agency. In his vision, they appear to have power or dominion in ways that exceed expectations about the “behavior” of treasure even as the stones and jewels overwhelm Clarence’s ability to assign them value. I would add that Clarence’s use of the term

“thousand” also uncomfortably links the “heavy times” he shared with Richard and the scene full of treasure and “ugly death.” The bond established through the two scenes suggests the ultimately fatal futility of the efforts Clarence and Richard undertook. Does Clarence’s vision testify to those he has betrayed and victimized? Are we to understand that he beholds himself anonymously included among the fish-gnawed victims lured to their death by the fleeting promises of political power and the mammon that comes with it? Do we see a version of himself reflected in the skull’s jewel-bedazzling eyes? Though Clarence gives witness to Brackenbury of his dream from his own perspective, the invocation of the gem-eyed skulls casts *him*, and his heavy times, as the objects of witness. As Clarence reports the dream, he grows increasingly unsettled at the prospect of this witness, realizing that death proves no impediment to it. In all this, Clarence’s growing horror achieves a dramatic potency for as the deathly images pile up, the menace of witness remains little more than suggestion.

To this surfeit of imagery, I would argue that the flood of experiences so overwhelms his senses, he struggles to believe his own account. Six times in the course of recounting his dream, Clarence qualifies his vision with the expression “methought.” In its first use, Clarence uses “methought” to introduce his vision. Its function here seems similar to the “O” with which he grasps at things beyond his semantic reach. “Methought” here suggests provisional belief in the phenomenon of his dream even as he recounts it. This term comes up five more times, however, often interrupting different clauses or descriptions, as when paired with his exclamation, “Oh Lord! Methought what pain it was to drown” or when “Methought” interrupts “sights of ugly death within my eyes / _____ I saw a thousand fearful wrecks.”

Such frequent use of this term seems to mark Clarence’s loss of representational control—his failure to constitute the vision and phenomena through his own sensible or semantic

powers, or the strain of keeping track of that failure. Clarence's repeated utterances of "methought" notably resonate with the four "methoughts" that Bottom utters following his own astonishing "vision" in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*:

I have had a most rare vision. I had a dream past the wit of man to say what dream it was. Man is but an ass if he go about t'expound this dream. Methought I was—there is no man can tell what. Methought I was, and methought I had—but man is but a patched fool if he will offer to say what methought I had. The eye of man hath not heard, the ear of man hath not seen, man's hand is not able to taste, his tongue conceive, nor his heart to report what my dream was. (4.1.200-207).

Bottom awakes from his enchanted state and names it as a dream because the truth of his metamorphosis and return to human form, combined with his slumber, is so fantastical that he concludes only a dream could possibly explain what he remembers. Yet even naming his experience a dream does not satisfy the shock to his senses. Bottom employs the term three times to begin to try accounting for the content of his vision. But each time, he breaks off and can proceed no further in explanation than gesturing toward what he believes he cannot express in words.

I attended a 2013 production of *Midsummer Night's Dream* produced by the Shakespeare Globe in London and directed by Dominic Dromgoole. Pearce Quigley performed Bottom's speech placing emphasis on Bottom's uncertainty. In each of the first "methoughts," Quigley emphasized the word with strength, but then his volume and tone of voice diminished after each declaration. With the "and methought I had" Quigley reached up to feel for donkey ears he longer possessed—both relieved and astonished to find them gone. With the final utterance of "methought," Quigley stared off into space for a moment, inattentive to his body or setting, performing Bottom's thrall to the vision he can neither dispel nor accommodate. Dennis Huston has read this speech noting Bottom's semantic failure: "The rest of the speech is Bottom's

fumblingly comic attempt to find words and form for just what no man can tell.”²⁷ Bottom’s listing of impossible synesthetic experiences alludes to St. Paul’s first epistle to the Corinthians where he writes: “But as it is written, The things which eye hath not seen, neither ear hath heard, neither came into man’s heart, are, which God hath prepared for them that love him.”²⁸ Paul alludes to the prospect of heaven and his description bars the possibility that any experience—real or imagined—could give the Christian believer any sense of what to expect. Huston explains: “Bottom turns to St. Paul, in an attempt to find in the language of religious experience the ordering form he seeks.”²⁹

Filtered through a Pauline allusion to the ineffable wonders of heaven, Bottom’s synesthesia acquires even more excess when considered under the heading of theatrical phenomenology. To the definitions of synesthesia as “consciousness, self-consciousness, and self-awareness,” Jennifer Waldron also proposes “joint perception” because of the way in which Bottom’s “dream” constitutes an experience whose meaning depends on a collaborative effort and sense between the audience and actor. “The crossings of synesthesia therefore help to chart theatrical phenomenology not only because theater is a multisensory medium but also because live theater is a specifically communal, intersubjective phenomenon, during which many people sense or feel a similar event at the same time.”³⁰ Thus, Bottom’s synesthesia, belongs jointly to the audience and the actor, where “Shakespeare invites the audience to *sense* the words themselves, translating them through the body of the actor.”³¹ The audience’s assistance and collaboration are here necessary because Bottom has been overwhelmed by the power of his

²⁷ Huston, “Bottom Waking: Shakespeare’s ‘Most Rare Vision,’” 212.

²⁸ 1 Corinthians 2:9.

²⁹ Huston, 212.

³⁰ Waldron, “The Eye of Man Hath Not Heard,” 408. Emphasis added.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 410.

experience—we have to sense the words through his body because his semantic powers have failed. Waldron’s use of the word “sense” here thus extends Bottom’s semantic failure to the audience; the act of translation occurs not in the literary, but in witnessing the spectacle of Bottom’s speechless rapture.

Indeed, Clarence instead discovers riches that dazzle with malice and repulsive abundance. With his senses overwhelmed by horrible stimuli and the inability to secure any certainty about what he has seen, Clarence’s dream only initially seems to accord with descriptions of the “saturated phenomenon.” For convenience, I’ll requote Marion:

In face of that excess, perception not only can no longer anticipate what it is going to receive from intuition, but above all it can no longer bear the degree of intuition. Bedazzlement characterizes what the gaze cannot bear. Not bearing does not amount to *not seeing*; for one must first perceive, if not see, in order to experience this incapacity to bear... the glory of the visible weighs, and it weighs too much. What weighs here is not unhappiness, nor pain nor lack, but indeed glory, joy, excess.³²

I emphasize “not seeing” here to highlight, again, that for Marion (and Jackson) the experience of the “saturated phenomenon” depends not on transcendence, but immanence which engages and overcomes rather than excludes the senses. The experience of saturation here also interestingly aligns with Beckwith’s description of faith as lying closer to action than possession because excess or bedazzlement cannot be possessed. Indeed, because the excess comes to constitute the individual, one might say that the individual becomes possessed of the experience himself. Thus, in his dream, Clarence betrays no obvious expectation or anticipation for what might come next—he is simply overwhelmed by the excess of experience. And both in the dream and upon his waking, Clarence signals his inability to bear the excess. His dream narrative most

³² Marion, “The Saturated Phenomenon,” 114. Emphasis added.

clearly communicates this when he tells Brackenbury that he would have preferred death in his dream to more of the vision.

BRACKENBURY: Had you such leisure in the time of death,
To gaze upon these secrets of the deep?

CLARENCE: Methought I had, and often did I strive
To yield the ghost, but still the envious flood
Stopped in my soul and would not let it forth (1.4.34-38)

His state is much the same after waking: Clarence finds the memory so terrible that he would prefer to forgo a “world of happy days” that one more night of dreams might win him.

Thus what “weighs” on Clarence is certainly not joy. He tells Brackenbury his night was full of “dismal terror” and his dream provides ample evidence for this reaction. The dream’s environment shifts; moving Clarence from observing menacing wrecks on the ocean floor to a scene of hell where he encounters old enemies and demonic figures.

I passed (methought) the melancholy flood,
With that sour ferryman which poets write of,
Unto the kingdom of perpetual night.
The first that there did greet my stranger soul
Was my great father-in-law, renowned Warwick,
Who spake aloud, 'What scourge for perjury
Can this dark monarchy afford false Clarence?'
And so he vanished. Then came wand'ring by
A shadow like an angel, with bright hair
Dabbled in blood, and he shrieked aloud,
'Clarence is come -- false, fleeting, perjured Clarence,
That stabbed me in the field by Tewkesbury:
Seize on him, Furies, take him unto torment!'
With that (methoughts) a legion of foul fiends
Environed me, and howlèd in mine ears
Such hideous cries that with the very noise
I, trembling, waked, and for a season after
Could not believe but that I was in hell,
Such terrible impression made my dream (1.4.45-63)

Clarence’s infernal vision in his dream maintains the excess that characterizes his experience in the ocean—signaled through images of the “flood,” “perpetual night,” and “legion” that all

culminate with the “hideous cries” that finally wake him. The immanence of his terrible impression lingers with such force that whereas Clarence constantly qualifies his dream narration with insertions of “methought,” when he wakes he believes—against the testimony of his senses—that he is in hell.

One might simply conclude that on account of such terror—a term which brackets his dream—that Clarence is anything but overjoyed. Yet his instinct to pray immediately after telling Brackenbury about his dream complicates matters.

Ah, Brackenbury, I have done these things,
That now give evidence against my soul,
For Edward’s sake; and see how he requites me.
*O God! If my deep prayers cannot appease thee
But thou wilt be avenged on my misdeeds,
Yet execute thy wrath in me alone.
O spare my guiltless wife and my poor children.* (1.4.66-68)³³

He at first complains that the acts for which his soul now testifies against him he undertook in service for his brother’s (Edward IV) successful campaign for the English throne. Yet Edward cannot provide his soul with absolution and as a “Christian faithful man,” Clarence ought to have known this and should have considered the “cost” to his soul that the wars of York and Lancaster might oblige him to pay.

In the folio version, Clarence takes an unexpectedly contrite turn: he prays to God in a way that, in its suddenness and brevity, seems sincere both in its confession and supplication. The apparently spontaneous welling up of contrition plays an important role in helping us recognize Clarence’s encounter with the phenomena of his sin as a legitimate religious experience. Spontaneity, marked by abrupt and unpolished behavior, seems a possible antithesis to performance, where the true self remains concealed and unexposed. Matthew Smith has

³³ The italicized lines appear in the Folio version only.

recently written on the role of spontaneity and the experience of sin in reading Claudius' confession. For Smith, Claudius' perceived sense of privacy and isolation critically guarantee that he will not also have to contend with the difficulty of managing the expectations of other auditors. Smith notes that the beginning of his prayer, following immediately upon the exit of Polonius, achieves a sense of legitimate contrition because of his discursive fumbling: "O / my offense is rank." (3.3.35-36). Like Bruce Smith and Joel Fineman, Smith understands the prayer's opening "O," as a "sound [that] breaks the pattern of intensive verbal design that precedes it...suggesting a complete change in verbal control."³⁴ For Smith, however, the authenticity of contrition deteriorates as Claudius continues because of the impulse to regard himself in the act of prayer. "...we begin to get the sense that he is listening to himself, as if he were in the audience, and negotiating the relation between the appearance of contrition and the reality of deciding between two conflicting paths."³⁵ The act of listening to himself, like looking in the mirror, redirects the scope of Claudius' moral gaze from the consideration of his "rank offense" to the consideration of his performance of confession.

Brackenbury's presence as auditor prevents Clarence from achieving the condition of privacy that Smith argues usually precipitates authentic confession, but Clarence doesn't actually engage in confession until he has finished his telling of the dream. Up until this point we might say his posture lies closer to reliving and recounting. I would suggest that the confession begins, dramatically and suddenly, when Clarence makes an abrupt shift in the subject of his address. In the space of a few lines, he moves from "Ah, Brackenbury..." to "O God!" In the midst of making an admission of guilt while complaining about his brother's apparent ingratitude for his sacrifices, Clarence suddenly realizes the magnitude of his sin, his need for absolution, and that,

³⁴ Smith, "The Sense of Confession in *Hamlet*," 173.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 174.

distressingly, he's been addressing himself to the wrong party. The seamless transition between Brackenbury and God, and the change in tone from guilt mixed with resentment to terrified contrition, seems marked by the same violent loss of verbal control expressed with the exclamations of "O!" Thus, even if only for a brief moment, Clarence achieves an authentic sense of contrition.

That deep prayer might appease God, however, seems unlikely—Clarence doesn't pray anywhere else in the play, so if depth is not to be measured in volume, all that remains afforded to him here is the possibility of deep conviction which, apparently, doesn't require much elaboration. Such conviction may be suggested by the twice invoked "O" in the address of God, which likewise hints at a semantic failure to express an excess of guilt, anxiety, or fear. Otherwise, one might imagine that if a priest were on hand he might urge Clarence to pray, in lieu of depth, at greater length than four lines.

If the brevity of the prayer doesn't merit suspicion, we might notice that while Clarence makes a vague confession of guilt, repentance remains conspicuously absent—as with Claudius. Repentance constitutes the significant spiritual requisite for orthodox Christian sanctification and conversion practices. In his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, John Calvin explains that for the soul that recognizes its sin, repentance should be a total and immediate response: "...departing from ourselves, we turn to God, and having taken off our former mind, we put on a new...it is the true turning of our life to God, a turning that arises from a pure and earnest fear of him; and consists in the mortification of our flesh and of the old man, and in the vivification of the Spirit."³⁶ Clarence here seems to take his own guilt and desert of punishment as a given, proceeding to asking God to spare the lives of his family members. But the prayer ends here and

³⁶Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 597.

concludes any apparent inclination Clarence might have had in seeking spiritual transformation of the kind Calvin describes.

Indeed, we can almost be sure that Clarence intends no true repentance when his two murderers come just a moment later and the three fall into a comic dispute concerning his guilt. When Clarence urges them to spare his life because God forbids murder in the Ten Commandments, they quickly turn the same logic upon him:

FIRST MURDERER: How can'st thou urge God's dreadful law to us
When thou hast broke it in such dear degree?

CLARENCE: Alas, for whose sake did I that ill deed?
For Edward, for my brother, for his sake.
He sends ye not to murder me for this,
For in that sin he is as deep as I. (1.4.197-202)

Having admitted his guilt in prayer just moments before—even acknowledging that God might “execute” his wrath in him alone—Clarence engages in vehement protest, as if somehow alarmed that God might have chosen to answer his prayers so quickly. He doesn't jettison his contrition entirely—he allows that his deed was “ill,” but argues that he shouldn't be held responsible because he acted on the behalf of his brother Edward. He later identifies “the devil” and his “rage” as responsible for rendering him a “bloody minister.” In listing his rage along with “his brother's love” and the devil, Clarence attempts to externalize his guilt so that its prosecution might come in some other form than his own death. But Calvin's description of repentance suggests that the act must acknowledge and depart from sin—not make excuses that shift blame.

Despite Clarence's tepid interest in spiritual reformation—which is to say, he displays none—his initial reactions to the dream suggest good reason to treat it as a kind of theophany. Shakespearean audiences would have recognized the dream vision as a genre of divine revelation, and accorded such authority to the judgment it seems to pronounce upon Clarence.

Besides the Biblical precedent established with figures like Jacob and Joseph, early modern English theater-goers would certainly have recognized some kinds of dreams as religiously potent owing to, for example, the role of dreams in traditions of Anglo-Saxon hagiography. Patricia M. Davis has noted that the Venerable Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* catalogues up to eight distinct categories of dreams taken from the lives of well-known English saints like Boniface and Cuthbert.³⁷ Davis explains: "Anglo-Saxon Christians believed that dreams and visions could sometimes provide a unique direct access to the divine. Such dreams were recorded at the time of the Anglo-Saxon conversion. The dreams and visions seem to fit well into culturally expected categories based on the human life cycle and Christian religious beliefs."³⁸ It's important to note that Clarence's reaction to the dream does not closely adhere to traditional definitions of conversion. Davis suggests that the conversion effected by the dream resulted in "a lifelong inward process of the heart turning toward Christ and subsequent reformation."³⁹ While his prayer suggests little in the way of substantial reformation, Clarence's dream does, notably, correspond to two of the dream categories that Davis identifies: that of the "otherworld journey" and that of the "prophecies of death and destruction."⁴⁰

Clarence may be glad of the opportunity to petition God's mercy, but any joy he feels on account of the dream or even the request seems subdued or else wholly overshadowed by lingering terror. In its clear departure from the joy that Marion describes, Clarence's dream suggests more nuanced readings of religious experiences as saturated phenomena. More complication arises when we consider that Clarence's terror proceeds not only from excess, but from moments of clear surprise and contradiction that occur throughout the dream. For example,

³⁷ Davis, "Dreams and Visions in the Anglo-Saxon Conversion to Christianity," 82-83.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 87.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 76.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 82-83.

when Gloucester “strikes” him overboard, he falls “into the tumbling billows of the main.” Clarence appears to have just fallen into the waves, but suddenly sights of ugly death and dreadful noise suffuse his vision as he beholds the “thousand fearful wrecks” and victims. Clarence moves almost instantaneously from the “tumbling billows” to near the “bottom of the sea”—close enough to perceive that gems have replaced the eyes of those long dead.

These morbid riches don’t seem to earn Clarence’s notice, but his gaze is held in such suspension viewing the grisly scene in detail that he surprises Brackenbury. His interrupting question, “Had you such leisure,” stages a moment of astonishment Shakespeare writes for Brackenbury but, to the extent that Brackenbury is an auditor, also intends the moment for his readers and theater crowd. Clarence affirms the strangeness of the vision and proceeds directly to narrate his failed attempt to escape the vision.

...and often did I strive
To yield the ghost, but still the envious flood
Stopped-in my soul and would not let it forth
To find the empty, vast, and wand’ring air,
But smothered it within my panting bulk,
Who almost burst to belch it into the sea. (1.4.36-41)

Strangely, the conditions that would seem to guarantee Clarence’s death are the same that preserve him. Rather than drowning in the ocean, the “envious flood” contains his “ghost” within his body, preventing him from the relief of dying.

The irregularity of the dream only intensifies as his experience shifts again from the bottom of the ocean to a scene that Clarence describes to Brackenbury as hell. While Clarence’s opening profession of faith and later prayer of contrition bookend the dream with Christian terms, such moments only highlight the non-Christian elements of the hell of Clarence’s dream. Shakespeare embroiders Clarence’s theophany with figures like the “sour ferrymen” and the Furies invoked by the “bright angel,” lending distinctly classical Greek and Roman influences to

Clarence's torment and suggesting something more akin to Hades than simple orthodox Christian conceptions of perdition.

While such images may signal Shakespeare's interest in composing as "rich" and evocative a vision of hell as possible, the classical elements of the dream also testify to the role of the psyche and imagination in religious experience. The repeated invocations of "methought" in Clarence's recounting of the dream testify not only to the lingering effects of sensory excess, but also draw attention to the role of the mind and its capacity for belief in the midst of religious experience. Clarence repeats this connection when he concludes to Brackenbury, "for a season after / [I] Could not *believe* but that I was in hell."⁴¹ (1.4.61-62)⁴¹

When Clarence refers to Charon, the "sour ferryman," he identifies him saying "which poets speak of," signaling that his conscience and imagination have absorbed not only theological and doctrinal vocabulary and discourses to supply the terms of his guilt, but also literary. His imagination has internalized elements of his education and, perhaps, private reading, to forge the expressions of divine judgment. Once activated, Clarence's conscience at work in the dream re-appropriates literary memories drawn from moments of recreation and education, subverting them and recasting them as threatening and alien where once they had been familiar and, presumably, pleasant. There is, in this moment, some of what Stachniewski describes as a power that can "invade the most intimate thought processes" and "persecute[e] its host." Clarence's dream reveals not only the power of sin to estrange him from God and from others, but the power still more dreadful and alarming—to estrange him from himself; his own knowledge and memories. His imagination suffers invasion and persecution not from God or any other divine force, but from *ideas* about God and hell that have been assembled by a range of

⁴¹ Emphasis mine.

experiences, beliefs, and forces. Shakespeare's staging of Clarence's dream doesn't suggest that the sudden attack of his conscience occurs *only* because Clarence's imagination persecutes him, but certainly the conscience subordinates the imagination in order to give Clarence a sense of the perdition that awaits him.

Stachniewski's concept of invasion might also helpfully apply to understanding the dream's narrative. The dream presents three movements that occur simultaneously; each one of them an invading type of movement. Firstly, Clarence's journey is one which "invades" the earth, moving from its surface down through the depths of the sea and then into hell, which was held in medieval theology to reside in the center of the earth. Secondly, we see the invasion of bodies by death as Clarence beholds bodies in various state of decay until, at last, gems take the place of eyes in skulls. These transitions anticipate the revelation of the mythic invasion, where, in the final movement of exterior to interior horrors, Clarence encounters mythic figures populating his dread. Clarence's conscience appoints Charon and the Furies to life in this hell with a certain justice. In *The Oresteia*, furies hound Orestes for slaying his mother, Clytemenstra. Here, they follow a similar mandate of revenge against Clarence for his betrayal of his brother-in-law Edward, Prince of Wales.⁴² That they should arise in his dream to carry him away to torment where once they had been ignored or dismissed as cautionary figures of fiction seems in keeping with E.O. James:

The function of myth, in short, is to stabilize the existing regime, to afford infallible precedents for practice and procedure, and to place on an unassailable foundation the general rules of conduct, traditional institutions and the sentiments controlling social behaviour and religious belief...In words of the late Dr. Marett, "myth is not aetiological but fidejussive. Its business is not to satisfy curiosity but to confirm the faith. It is here to cater, not for the speculative man with his 'Why', but for the practical man with his 'How' if not thus?"⁴³

⁴² *Richard Duke of York*, 5.5.

⁴³ James, "The Nature and Function of Myth," 477.

For Clarence, the “how” seems to have held, until his dream, merely academic interest. An education which would have included the mythological lessons of classical authors came as the privilege of the royals and aristocracy when he was a young man.⁴⁴ That privilege having failed to prohibit a career of political expediency and familial murder, there’s a certain irony and justice to the revelation of Charon and the Furies to torment Clarence where once their names and allusions were status symbols of a perhaps misspent education.

From a sensory perspective as well, Shakespeare’s construction of the dream offers contradiction, furnishing further material for Brackenbury’s astonishment. For example, though he is conveyed to that kingdom of “perpetual night,” he recognizes Warwick, though Warwick does not identify himself. It may be possible that he recognizes Warwick by his voice, but the conflict between the darkness of the night and Clarence’s sight remains because he reports that, following Warwick’s brief lines, he vanishes. This contradiction of visibility continues when “a shadow like an angel” confronts Clarence,⁴⁵ and we learn that the angel has “bright hair dabbled in blood.” That Clarence can observe these details stands in stark contrast to Shakespeare’s implication of darkness (as well as ghostliness) by identifying the figure as “a shadow.” Further, these contradictions present a species of synesthesia similar to Bottom’s—not just in terms of the excess, and apparent conflict between the senses, but in presenting the audience with an invitation to “joint perception.” It’s an invitation that we are, perhaps, more reluctant to accept than the more enchanting terms of Bottom’s romantic romp, but Clarence’s account no less

⁴⁴ Nicholas Orme has indicated that the humanities education received by royals and aristocracy contemporary to George, Duke of Clarence, would have included the works of figures like Ovid, Virgil, and Homer. *From Childhood to Chivalry*, 155.

⁴⁵ This is most likely the young Edward, Prince of Wales, whose death Shakespeare stages in *3 Henry VI*. Clarence, along with his brothers, all take part in killing him.

requires a similar collaboration to parse the seeming impossibility of perfect vision amidst perfect darkness.

Jeremy Lopez reads this scene as staging conflicts of temporality, providing further insight into the dream's strangeness which the audience, along with Brackenbury, seem more capable of detecting than Clarence, elevating the sense of foreboding. Lopez highlights how the dream's narration tries to adhere to two different temporal models in what he calls a "disjuncture between theatrical significance and temporal verisimilitude."⁴⁶ This disjuncture occurs, according to Lopez, because the dream presents both "theatrical" and "historical" time. The dream appears to begin on historical footing with Clarence leaving the tower and joining Gloucester where they dwell on the "thousand heavy times" in the wars between York and Lancaster. The dream abandons historical temporality, however, as soon as Clarence falls into the ocean and the dream ferries him from the ship graveyard to the pagan hell. Lopez explains: "the scene introduces two different ways of understanding time—stage time, historical time—and blurs them, just as it elides and blurs the distinctions between other crucial elements throughout: between sleeping and waking, pity and cruelty, human law and divine law, murderer and victim."⁴⁷ This blurring occurs with special poignancy with Clarence's description of Gloucester's apparent clumsiness. Shakespeare's choice of the word "struck" highlights the difficulty in making distinctions because in Clarence's use, "struck" means simply an accidental collision. But beyond naming a type of physical action, "struck" also harbors the possibility of intention and hostility. The dramatic irony of Clarence's blindness to Gloucester's disguised attack "merges with or perhaps

⁴⁶ Lopez, "Time and Talk in 'Richard III I.iv'." 302.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 303.

creates what seems to be Clarence's, or Clarence's dream's, potential knowledge of things he cannot know.”⁴⁸

Lopez is here alert to the way that the dream stages the “problems” of Clarence’s knowledge. The only conclusion that Clarence draws from the dream is that he is indeed guilty of former sins, yet this knowledge is insufficient to prompt repentance. The dream represents a kind of knowledge, potentially divine in origin, to which Clarence does and does not have access. Though he dreams it and is himself the evidence, he lacks the facility, interpretive powers, or willpower to decode the dream’s meanings. He cannot recognize significant moments of contradiction or irregularity within the dream which are nonetheless seemingly apparent to Brackenbury as well as to the audience.

The self-deception that runs throughout this scene and, indeed, throughout the play, highlights Shakespeare’s interest in issues of casuistry and case-divinity—an interest that seems to have united many early-modern dramatists. Camille Wells Slight writes: “the casuists’ torturous reasoning and emphasis on exceptions to moral law provided a ready target for dramatic satire,” and identifies both English and continental authors whose work participated in the discourse: Ben Jonson, Moliere, and John Webster.⁴⁹ The practice of casuistry was premised on the uncontroversial conviction that civil laws were, by their necessarily broad application, incapable of guaranteeing that legal actions were also always moral. Thus, Protestant theological discourses in particular argued that the conscience, as a divine faculty given to all people, could be a trustworthy moral adjudicator in special circumstances where the law was too vague or clumsy. The danger, of course, arises in that to privilege individual choice over the law almost guarantees that people will make choices that merely masquerade as moral. Slight argues, for

⁴⁸ Ibid., 303. Emphasis added.

⁴⁹ Slight, *The Casuistical Tradition in Shakespeare, Donne, Herbert, and Milton*, 67.

example, that Shakespeare's drama reveals the only too obvious hypocrisy of nominally religious figures like Clarence, but also uncovers the moral blindness of religious figures and institutions from which we expect greater integrity. "Buckingham's speech persuading the Cardinal to seize the young Prince of York exemplifies the sophisticated type of casuistry that argues that sin is not sin...Richard III exposes the way in which men use the casuistical principle that circumstances alter cases to rationalize the most reprehensible actions."⁵⁰

For *Sights*, the struggle of conscience and casuistry to deliver the immoral individual from even perceiving his own wickedness serves as the moral and thematic core of the play. She links this conflict to William Perkins' "A Discourse of Conscience," suggesting that its dedicatory letter might serve as a gloss on this theme. It's worth quoting here not only to demonstrate the degree to which Perkins highlights the connection between conscience and self-deception, but also to highlight the extent to which his argument relies upon—and contributes to—a theology that, like Calvin's, unites the body and spirit under a common pathology of sin.

Indeede Satan for his part goes about by all meanes he can, to benumme the conscience: but all is nothing. For as the sicke man, when he seems to sleepe and take his rest, is inwardly full of troubles: so the benumbed and drousie conscience wants not his secret pangs and terrours, and when it shall bee roused by the judgment of God, it waxeth cruel and fierce like a wild beast. Again, when a man sinnes against his conscience, as much as in him lieth, he plungeth himself into the gulfe of desperation: for every wound of the conscience, though the smart of it be little felt, is a deadly wound.⁵¹

Like Biblical commentaries, tracts, and the liturgical language of the prayer of confession from the Book of Common Prayer, Perkins vivifies the conscience with a language which, in its insistence on wounds and physical pain, locates the experience of sin in the body as well as the soul. This experience is at once intimate and specific, as suggested by terms like "pang" and

⁵⁰ Ibid., 69. Emphasis added.

⁵¹ Perkins, *A Discourse on Conscience. wherein is set downe the nature, properties, and differences thereof: as also the way to get and keepe good conscience.* Emphasis added.

“smart,” but also overwhelming and abundant, as we see through the imagery of a man that “plungeth himself into the gulfe of desperation.” The image of the gulf in particular serves as a helpful parallel to the sea into which Clarence plunges in his dream, but in which he only eventually comes to realize that he has been suspended in a sea of his guilt. Clarence’s dim and dawdling apprehension of the relationship between the horrors of his dream and his culpability corresponds to Perkins’ insistence that Satan does all he can to “benumme” the conscience. The syntax of the sentence can at first be mistaken; when he then says “but all is nothing,” Perkins isn’t refuting the agency of Satan to effect numbness in the conscience, but referring to the awful guarantee of God’s eventual judgment, signaled when he declares, “and when it shall bee roused;” “it here referring to the conscience, presented as a fierce and wild beast that turns against its bearer.

The numbing of the conscience invites further investigation because it describes another significant portion of Shakespeare’s dramatic theology of sin. Having seen that figures like Clarence easily lie to themselves about their position and merits in a moral world, and that this self-deception proceeds from pride, the other element that Shakespeare advances here is that sin begets sin without the provocation of the conscience until a dramatic moment at which, confirming Perkins’ theology, the conscience suddenly re-asserts itself in profound terms, often coinciding with events that could easily be read as judgment. In naming his dream “such terrible impression,” I also hear an echo of Richard’s phrase “rudely stamped.” When it suits them, both brothers seem to understand their identities and experience in terms of being acted upon from without by forces harder, crueler, and more determined than themselves. This myopic sense of injustice and injury, indeed, initiates the play.

Richard and Clarence garner the perhaps more spectacular stagings of the embattled

conscience, but the pathology of sin and self-deception insinuates among nearly all the characters. Shakespeare repeats the problems of moral knowledge and self-deception with characters like Brackenbury, Lady Anne, and Queen Elizabeth. Their interactions with Richard and his compromised morality precipitate their own moral failures in ways that suggest that, to use an old phrase, sin begets sin. Shakespeare stages Richard's guilt and ambition as arising from his own will, but the success of his exploits depends on corrupting the moral strength of those around him. Their corruption renders these figures simultaneously as victimized as well as complicit, because their passivity and blindness in the face of Richard's machinations give Richard even greater largesse and compound the ultimate expression of his experience of sin and its consequences.

Brackenbury's compromise is, perhaps, easy to miss because it comes in a moment of transition where the scene quickly pivots between the lush horrors of Clarence's dream and the dark humor of his tete-a-tete with the murderers. But the murderers only gain access to Clarence with Brackenbury's permission—one which he quickly surrenders:

Enter the two Murderers

FIRST MURDERER: Ho! who's here?

BRACKENBURY: In God's name what are you, and how came you hither?

FIRST MURDERER: I would speak with Clarence, and I came hither on my legs.

BRACKENBURY: Yea, are you so brief?

SECOND MURDERER: O sir, it is better to be brief than tedious. Show him our commission; talk no more.

BRACKENBURY reads it

BRACKENBURY: I am, in this, commanded to deliver

The noble Duke of Clarence to your hands:

I will not reason what is meant hereby,

Because I will be guiltless of the meaning.

Here are the keys, there sits the duke asleep:

I'll to the king; and signify to him

That thus I have resign'd my charge to you.

FIRST MURDERER: Do so, it is a point of wisdom: fare you well.

Exit BRACKENBURY (1.4.80-94)

The arrival of the two murderers clearly surprises Brackenbury, and for a moment, his training kicks in, for he demands of the first of the two men: “In God’s name, what are you, and how came you hither?” Brackenbury’s oath conveys his sense of alarm, and one senses that his first question “what are you” arises more from an admixture of hope and doubt that the murderer means no harm. The second question—“how came you hither”—is likely less interested in issues of locomotion and geography than with authority and motive. The murderer seems to understand what Brackenbury actually means because he answers with an over-literal response to the second question—“I came here on my legs”—to avoid answering the implied, actual question. To this, Brackenbury responds with a question that again fails to convey what he means: “Yea, are you so brief,” might here be understood as a weak attempt to express incredulity and reservation that the murderer could possibly consider his conduct justified by such a curt and flippant answer. The second murderer, exploiting the same weakness as his co-worker, pretends to understand the question according to its literal import, and responds with praise for brevity in comparison to tedium, as though Brackenbury had been musing upon the maxims of classical rhetoric.

Brackenbury is, of course, not interested in oratory, but can’t bring himself to correct the obvious misinterpretations. Rather, his semantic failures anticipate, perhaps even precipitate, his moral failure. When he reads the commission from the murderers instructing the delivery of Clarence, he declares, “I will not reason what is meant hereby, / Because I will be guiltless of the meaning. / Here are the keys, there sits the Duke asleep.” Brackenbury understands only too well what the commission means for Clarence but pretends that, as if to pronounce in the hearing of the murderers and the audience his refusal to “reason what is meant,” he might yet avoid having Clarence’s blood on his hands. He can hardly imagine the two men mean any good

toward Clarence, or he wouldn't vocalize the feeble hope to be "guiltless of the meaning." As Brackenbury stands in for the audience as the auditor to Clarence's nightmare, Shakespeare invites the audience to feel itself complicit and guilty. Brackenbury's sins of silence and self-deception become our own, and his deluded intention to remain guiltless stages Calvin's portrait of the indulgent soul. Squint as he might, Brackenbury cannot unsee and unread what he has seen and read.

Self-deception is on display too in one of the most "intimate" confrontations between Richard and one of his victims; the perverse courtship of Lady Anne. She initially seems to see Richard clearly for the monster he is—he confesses to the murder of her husband. Shakespeare's dramaturgical construction of the scene indeed trumpets Richard's monstrosity and reiterates connections between mind, spirit, and body in the economy of sin. Richard intercepts the mourning party, bearing the body of King Henry. We learn from Anne that the gentlemen and halberdiers have a visceral reaction to Richard's presence. "What, do you tremble? / Are you all afraid? / Alas, I blame you not, for you are mortal / And mortal eyes cannot endure the devil.-" (1.2.43-45). Her retinue makes no answer but, presumably, continues to manifest bodily aversion to Richard. Their flinching and trembling dramatically contrast to Anne's bold, even cocky posture which seems so self-assured and over-confident. When she chides her men for the mortal weaknesses, she speaks as though she were not, somehow, subject to the same vulnerabilities. She imagines, perhaps, that the purity of her grief and rage protect her.

To the trembling bodies of the gentlemen, Shakespeare adds the bleeding body of Henry. Anne calls our attention to its post-mortem trauma, again addressing her quivering companions.

O gentlemen, see, see! Dead Henry's wounds
Ope their congealed mouths and bleed afresh!
Blush, blush, thou lump of foul deformity,
For 'tis thy presence that ex-hales this blood

From cold and empty veins where no blood dwells.
Thy deed, inhuman and unnatural,
Provokes this deluge supernatural. (1.2.55-61)

As Richard provokes an irresistible and spontaneous trembling in the living, his very presence as Henry's murderer is understood to create and conjure new blood in Henry's body—*ex nihilo*, it would seem—and then drive it with violence the original wounds. Stephen Greenblatt offers a modernization of Anne's phrase "ex-hale" and suggests "calls forth,"⁵² which distinctly resonates with the other conjuring/witchcraft language that Anne uses throughout the scene. But "calls forth" critically omits the inclusion of violence that Calvin employs when he describes the operation of the conscience. Combining the two, the suggestion is not that of a body "sighing" forth its blood, but more dramatically spurting or pouring out, perhaps not unlike some scenes from Monty Python and the Holy Grail.

The scene's composition thus employs graphic and sudden movements from multiple bodies in ways that with even moderate stage direction could prove visually arresting. The abundance of trauma experienced by both the living and the dead characters testifies to Richard's evil, yet Lady Anne seems somehow blind to the evidence. Instead of walking away, she prevaricates and entertains him. Her apparent stasis in the scene assumes a powerful irony owing to her repeated injunctions of sight and seeing even as she fails to act according to the testament of her vision. Richard's success in wooing Anne suggests that she ultimately prefers, for some reason, the fantasy he presents to her: "This hand—which for thy love did kill thy love— / Shall, for thy love, kill a far truer love." (1.3.97-98). She surrenders her hatred and chooses to believe that Richard slew her husband out of love, and that such love should earn her affection.

⁵² Greenblatt, *Richard III: The Norton Shakespeare*, 521.

Richard marvels at his own success, and his speculation on her reorientation provides further insight into the self-deception which proves so critical to his coup.

Was ever woman in this humour wooed?
Was ever woman in this humour won?
I'll have her, but I will not keep her long.
What, that I killed her husband and his father,
To take her in her heart's extremest hate,
With curses in her mouth, tears in her eyes,
The bleeding witness of my hatred by,
Having God, her conscience, and these bars against me,
And I no friends to back my suit withal
But the plain devil and his dissembling looks—
And yet to win her, all the world to nothing? Ha!
Hath she forgot already that brave prince...(1.3.215-226)

Richard provides a shrewd assessment of the odds against which his suit succeeds, his evident surprise indicating a previous certainty that he would fail. Richard's meditation here too demonstrates Shakespeare's crafting of an encounter with the experience of conscience and sin. His speech reflects the surfeit of Anne's immanent sensory experience—"curses in her mouth, tears in her eyes" and the bleeding body of her husband. He juxtaposes these elements with "God, her conscience, and these bars" and wonders if she has "forgotten" that brave prince.

To "forget" falls very near Lopez's formulation about Clarence's dream—Richard seduces Lady Anny into a state where she both knows and does not know who Richard is, and what motivates his action. And here, as with Clarence, the knowledge has not merely "slipped" her mind, but she has chosen to believe an alternative version of events that offers her at least two outcomes she evidently prefers—however shortsighted. Firstly, Richard flatters her with his charm and wordplay to induce her belief that she lies central to his affections, and she finds his flattery and performance of affection preferable to grieving. Secondly, and perhaps more significantly, believing that Richard acted out of love for her rather than hatred means she no longer needs to resist him.

Richard's identification with the devil calls to mind the epistle of James, which commends: "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you."⁵³ Richard offers Lady Anne one better: not his flight but his death by her own hand—but she can't summon the will to kill him. Richard's success here depends on suggesting that if Lady Anne wants to remain consistent in her hatred and distrust, she must follow that hatred to its "natural" conclusion by killing him if given the chance. He convinces her to disqualify her convictions and feelings by trying to align them their most extreme possible manifestation. Richard establishes a false dichotomy: if Lady Anne truly hates him and believes he belongs in hell, then she ought to kill him herself. Consequently, the failure to kill him implies the invalidation of all previously held and expressed angers. But of course, this is false; Lady Anne need not desire to kill Richard herself in order to validate her hatred or to desire justice. But this what she comes to believe. Allowing Richard to reframe their violent history as a bloody romance allows Lady Anne to abandon the emotionally and psychologically taxing posture of a grieving widow while convincing herself that she has not compromised her moral high ground. Like the surfeit of evidence provided by Clarence's dream, Lady Anne cannot bear the weight of her conscience and sustain a vision of Richard in his true wickedness. She opts for a vision that can accommodate her desire for something more pleasant, whose weight proves easier to carry.

Finally, Queen Elizabeth's exchange with Richard in Act 4, Scene 4, articulates, in some of the play's clearest terms, the danger of divided or fractured selves as a consequence of contact with Richard's compromised morality. Richard tries to solicit her help appealing both to her sense of charity and, cunningly, her ambition.

Without her follows—to myself and thee,
Herself, the land, and many a Christian soul—

⁵³ James 4:7.

Death, desolation, rein, and decay.
It cannot be avoided but by this;
It will not be avoided but by this.
Therefore, good-mother—I must call you so
Be the attorney of my love to her. (4.4.337-344)

Richard paints an apocalyptic future that promises to despoil England and all her citizens if Elizabeth refuses to help him. When Elizabeth at last responds, the current apocalypse somehow unobserved, Christian duty weighs less in her mind than the temptation of Richard's offer: being the mother-in-law to the King. She wrestles momentarily between her options: "Shall I forget myself to be myself?" (4.4.350). What Richard masquerades as a conflict between past and future selves Elizabeth undertakes in earnest: forgetting and letting go of the bereaved mother and sister in order to acquire a political, idealized political self, apparently unmolested by old griefs. She capitulates and promises to serve Richard's purpose. When she leaves the scene, Richard muses with wonder at her acquiescence (as he does of Lady Anne): "Relenting fool, and shallow, changing woman." (4.4.363)

The compulsion to avoid knowing what one knows, or seeing what one sees, characterizes the phenomenology of sin in Richard III and shows up elsewhere in Shakespeare's cannon. In Hamlet, for example, John Gillies is alert to the tension between knowledge and sin when Hamlet confronts his mother, Gertrude: "When Hamlet says, 'I'll make your eyes look down into your heart / and see how horrid there and black it shows,' he implies that he has access to what is in Gertrude's heart. He knows what color her heart is and why."⁵⁴ Moreover, Gillies suggests that Hamlet confronts Gertrude precisely because she refuses to look upon her own heart. Hamlet's determination to "make her look" suggests Gertrude's unwillingness to consider the color and the reason that Hamlet detects.

⁵⁴ Gillies, "The Question of Original Sin in Hamlet," 410.

This unwillingness to acknowledge and act upon the conviction of the conscience models a dramatic theology of sin which, I suggest, can serve as a critical lens through which to view not only Richard III, but other moments of moral conflict on Shakespeare's stage. If Clarence demonstrates that Shakespearean characters may be haunted by the past, he also demonstrates that the same characters may be haunted by themselves. To engage in self-deception as all these characters do attempts to bifurcate the self, drowning out or ignoring the immanent conscience whose judgments the will refuses to consider. This refusal to recognize and condemn what the conscience certifies as evil—whether in one's own soul or in another's—constitutes a dramatic theology of sin that Shakespeare stages again and again. Complex, idiosyncratic, and self-deluding as they are, Shakespeare scripts many of his characters to adopt Hamlet's strategy—helping, or forcing, them see in themselves what they cannot bear to behold.

Chapter Three - Our Sceptre's G(u)ilt: Flattery and Ecologies of Sin in *Richard II*

In Chapter Two, I argued that Shakespeare's dramatic theology, particularly his treatment of sin, absorbs significant influence from major theological sources like *The Book of Common Prayer* as well as the writings of Calvin and the drama of medieval mystery plays. I began with *Richard III* because the theological terms of Shakespeare's drama receive such significant support from the phenomenological dimensions of Clarence's and Richard's encounters with conscience. Their encounters with sin register the abundance, excess, and saturation that, as Jean-Luc Marion describes, can function as legitimizing markers of a religious experience. This phenomenology critically corresponds with early modern Christian and Jewish theological traditions that inherited and developed pathological understandings of sin whose consequences bridged spiritual and physical experience.

Because of the terrific violence, dreams, visions, and ghosts with which Clarence and Richard encounter their own sins, one might be tempted to judge Shakespeare's theological investments in a play according to his use of these supernatural terms. By comparison, *Richard II*, which was first performed in 1595, only a few years after *Richard III*, possesses none of these elements in such bold terms; dramatic encounters with a guilty conscience don't feature with the same prominence. Yet shortly after the opening of *Richard II*, we find confirmation that Shakespeare invokes the same dramatic theology. In Act One, Scene 2, John of Gaunt and the Duchess of Gloucester tangle over how to respond to Richard's role in the murder of Gaunt's brother, Thomas of Woodstock. His murder at the hands of Thomas of Mowbray, acting on Richard's orders, occasions the conflict with Bolingbroke that opens the play:

JOHN OF GAUNT: Alas, the part I had in Gloucester's blood
Doth more solicit me than your exclams

To stir against the butchers of his life.
But since correction lieth in those hands
Which made the fault that we cannot correct,
Put the quarrel to the will of heaven,
Who, when they see the hours ripe on earth
Will rain hot vengeance on offenders' heads. (1.2.1-8)¹

Since Richard authorized the murder, Gaunt can appeal to no other political authority and has no alternative but to appeal to God. Gaunt permits himself a moment of judgment fantasy, imagining heaven raining “hot vengeance on the offenders’ heads.” His formulation the “hours ripe on earth” articulates a sense of “delayed gratification” as essential to the design of divine judgment. His position repeats the theological language of William Perkins and John Calvin. Perkins imagines the delay of God’s judgment in the pricking of the guilty conscience to operate in proportion to the fierceness of its hostility to sin: “when it shall bee roused by the judgment of God, it waxeth cruel and fierce like a wild beast.”² Gaunt’s expectation about the “ripeness” of Richard’s sins as well as the descent of divine judgment also parallels Queen Margaret’s curses in *Richard III*. Her tone grows almost giddy to imagine what horrors await her adversary: “If heaven have any grievous plague in store / Exceeding those that I can wish upon thee, / O, let them keep it till thy sins be ripe, / And then hurl down their indignation.” (1.3.214-218). For Margaret and Perkins, patience comes as a small price to pay according to their conviction in the guarantee of divine judgment, but this conviction strikes the Duchess as mere cowardice posing as piety. She presses Gaunt further:

DUCHESS OF GLOUCESTER: Finds brotherhood in thee no sharper spur?
Hath love in thy old blood no living fire?...
Yet art thou slain in him. Thou dost consent
In some large measure to thy father’s death
In that thou seest thy wretched brother die,
Who was the model of thy father’s life.
Call it not patience, Gaunt, it is despair.

¹ Shakespeare, *Richard II*, all citations taken from the Norton version edited by Stephen Greenblatt.

² Perkins, *A Discourse on Conscience*.

In suff'ring thus thy brother to be slaughtered
Thou show'st the naked pathway to thy life,
Teaching stern murder how to butcher thee.
That which in mean men we entitled patience
Is pale cold cowardice in noble breasts. (1.2.8-10, 25-35)

In Gaunt's refusal to apply himself personally to achieving justice for his brother, the Duchess sees not only the murder of a single man, but the erasure of an entire dynasty that will also swallow up Gaunt. She fears that Gaunt's appeal to prayers—be they ever so full of righteous indignation—rather than to arms sets a dangerous precedent of inaction that will virtually invite Richard to further eliminate political rivals and obstacles.

The Duchess's frustration with Gaunt's patience and clear preference for both immediate and material action articulates a bristling restlessness that underscores much of the drama that inaugurates *Richard II*. Her stance presents the conflicts of action versus inaction and free speech versus self-censure. To this list we might also add the major distinction in classifications of sin: commission versus omission. Phyllis Rackin argues that the motif of action versus inaction implicates the audience in the play's trial of Richard's troubled monarchy:

Each of the first three scenes of the play can be seen as a painful conflict, frustrating to the audience, in which forces of action are pitted against forces of inaction. In the first scene, Mowbray and Bolingbroke want open confrontation, and Richard attempts to smooth things over...Richard is clearly a bad king; but, as John of Gaunt said, the part of a good subject is not to oppose his king, for the king is God's anointed. So the audience, like Gaunt, is torn between a desire to see Richard punished...and a religious and patriotic dread of disrupting the cosmic and political order.³

Rackin's observation of the conflict between action and inaction in the first three scenes identifies a pattern which persists throughout the play. The tension between action and inaction in the first scene rather famously not only stages Bolingbroke and Mowbray's desire for confrontation against Richard's apparent desire for concord, but the way that this conflict itself

³ Rackin, "The Role of the Audience in Shakespeare's *Richard II*," 266.

functions as a proxy or substitute for Bolingbroke's conflict with Richard, upon whose order Thomas of Woodstock, the Duke of Gloucester, was murdered. Indeed, the hot rhetoric and the near-duel between Bolingbroke and Mowbray work to apostrophize Richard because neither man can afford to accuse Richard of authoring Gloucester's death.

Paula Blank has also recognized the first three scenes as critical in establishing motifs that encode the play's DNA with some of its determining binaries. Where Rackin recognizes the struggle between action and inaction, Blunt proposes the problem of free speech versus self-censure. For Blunt, it is this problem that principally motivates Mowbray's curiously bridled responses to Bolingbroke's accusations of treachery. Mowbray offers a brief and vague defense on the subject of Gloucester's death: "For Gloucester's death, / I slew him not, but to my own disgrace / Neglected my sworn duty in that case." (1.1.132-134). Mowbray seems to deny and then acknowledge an uncertain guilt in Gloucester's death, and Blunt suggests "the earl means to be evasive on this point...his words deflect interpretation. He had already hinted that he cannot do otherwise...in the context of the king's granting the right to 'free speech,' there is also a hint that Mowbray cannot or will not speak openly before the king."⁴ Still, it's clear that Mowbray *does* want to unburden himself of the truth—to speak plainly what Bolingbroke likely suspects—that Richard is more to blame than he. Earlier, Richard characterizes Bolingbroke and Mowbray's conflict as a result of intemperate and insensible rage: "High-stomached are they both and full of ire / In rage deaf as the sea, hasty as fire." (1.1.18-19). Mowbray repurposes Richard's imagery when Richard asks Mowbray to respond to Bolingbroke's accusation. Whereas "deafness" previously impairs the ability of the two men to solve their dispute rationally, here Mowbray portrays the same insensitivity, should Richard be willing to adopt it,

⁴ Blank, Paula. "Speaking Freely About Richard II," 337-338.

as an aid or boon to resolving the conflict. He does *not*, importantly, wish the truth were something less inflammatory or that he were less inclined to share it:

RICHARD: How high a pitch his resolution soars!
Thomas of Norfolk, what sayst thou to this?
MOWBRAY: O let my sovereign turn away his face
And bid his ears a little while be deaf,
Till I have told this slander of his blood
How God and good men hate so foul a liar.
RICHARD: Mowbray, impartial are our eyes and ears.
Were he my brother, nay, my kingdom's heir,
As he is but my father's brother's son,
Now by my sceptre's awe, I make a vow
Such neighbor nearness to our sacred blood
Should nothing privilege him nor partialize
The unstooping firmness of my upright soul.
He is our subject, Mowbray, so art thou.
Free speech and fearless I to thee allow. (1.1.109-123)

Richard needles Mowbray with the “pitch” of Bolingbroke’s invective, perhaps entertained by playing a spectator to the drama of misdirected vengeance in which, though absent, he occupies the principal role. Mowbray clearly *wants* to disclose some variation on the truth; to explain to Bolingbroke that Richard ordered him to kill Gloucester. His petition bids not that his own unruly tongue or boisterous lungs be tamed or stilled, but that Richard should somehow be temporarily rendered insensible—blind and deaf—to the truth and therefore protected from the insult (or injury) of his revelation.

Richard’s response makes a grand show of pretending to miss the point—he insists on his qualifications as mediator and the resolution of his impartiality, taking pains to emphasize that just because Bolingbroke is his cousin doesn’t mean that he can expect special treatment. Of course, neither Bolingbroke nor Mowbray even remotely expect that the outcome of the trial might be shaped by Richard’s potential proclivity to nepotism. Richard’s insistence on the awe of his scepter and uprightness of his soul are just a smokescreen, both warning and daring

Mowbray to take Richard at his word. Blunt points out that the ethics of free speech hover throughout these first three scenes: “The privilege of speaking freely is also tied, in *Richard II*, to the charge of speaking *truly* before the king. At the lists, before their judicial duel, Mowbray and Bolingbroke follow the official procedure for giving testimony...in accordance with that law, the men are charged with speaking the truth before they do battle.”³

The conflict between free speech and speaking truly before the king is one which, ironically, Richard himself names at the play’s beginning. When Mowbray and Bolingbroke appear before Richard to unfold the terms of their quarrel, they begin by offering Richard courtly salutations and blessings:

BOLINGBROKE: Many years of happy days befall
My gracious sovereign, my most loving liege.
MOWBRAY: Each day still better other’s happiness,
Until the heavens, envying earth’s good hap,
Add an immortal title to your crown.
RICHARD: We thank you both—yet one but flatters us,
As well appeareth by the cause you come,
Namely, to appear each other of high treason. (1.1.20-27).

Richard correctly infers that if either Bolingbroke or Mowbray *has* conspired in treason, then the proffering of “years of happy days” or an “immortal title” offers only the semblance of blessing in order to disguise something worse. Yet as the following scenes unfold, Richard’s accusation of flattery accumulates irony and hypocrisy as it becomes clear that the clash of rhetoric and the near clash of swords work more to conceal and evade the subject of *Richard’s* wickedness than Bolingbroke or Mowbray’s.

Richard’s is the first of many voices in the play to condemn flattery, and his criticism connects the speech act to Shakespeare’s dramatic theology. While Richard signals an apparent

³ Ibid., 336.

sensitivity to the ways that Bolingbroke or Mowbray might employ disingenuous rhetoric to further political ambitions at his expense, Richard's own monarchy and culture of governance depend heavily on precisely the vice that he condemns, advertising his proclivity to the self-deceptive epistemology that, for Shakespeare, characterizes the foundation of all potential sin. The play's interest in flattery as an "interpersonal vice"⁶ modifies this formulation by staging narratives of individual, flawed self-knowledge and self-deception which also implicate the other. In my chapter on *Richard III*, I showed how Shakespeare crafts these moral crises in such a way that Richard's and Clarence's beliefs in their moral exceptionality to the law appear principally self-engineered and self-motivated. In *Richard II*, similarly, both Richard and Bolingbroke (later Henry IV) each come to believe and act with a similar belief in their own exceptionality. But here, Shakespeare demonstrates that their supersession of moral or legal restraints also critically depends on their counselors—not just in the form of encouragement, but in the dereliction of their duty to *provide* sound counsel against poor judgment.

⁶ Flattery proposes lying to another person about the way he is perceived in the hopes of reward rather than lying about one's self. Flattery's relationship with self-deception as a kind of epistemic crisis has recently been explored by Yuval Eylon and David Heyd. *They argue that part of the danger of flattery comes through the fact that the speech act purports to communicate a compliment, but is in fact void of any meaningful knowledge. They write:*

...even if one flatters by uttering a compliment she knows to be true, the assertion does not transmit knowledge. This is so even if the flatterer uses a true compliment on purpose, is a reliable judge of the matter at hand, and has a reputation for being reliable. The reason is that the flatterer is unreliable in another sense: he would not have made the compliment unless he wanted to gain something from the flatteree and might just as well have made a false compliment if such a compliment were useful and available...An act of flattery, then, is an act of deception designed to win over the flatteree. In this respect, it seems morally indistinguishable from any other act of deception.

For Eylon and Heyd, flattery earns peculiar notice because unlike "traditional" vices (lust, gluttony, envy), flattery "is an essentially *inter*-personal or social vice"⁷ and therefore prohibits the possibility that a person can flatter themselves. Some of the prohibition comes from the way that flattery responds to and reinforces a perceived social hierarchy, as between a subject and king. This hierarchy cannot exist without multiple parties. The emphasis they place on the "inter-personal" also seems interested in the way that flattery reconfigures the consequences of a vice among a social network of people. To refer again to the traditional vices, gluttony may corrupt an individual's health and result in obesity, but any impacts of the glutton's corruptions on his or her relationships are accidental to the vice. The corruption of both parties is essential to flattery, however—not just the one who conceives and initiates the act. See "Flattery," 685-704.

If in *Richard III*, Shakespeare's staging of theology reveals that sin can manifest as a crushing burden that summons explosive judgment in response to individual transgression, *Richard II* reveals that Shakespeare's theology also conceives of sin as hidden; as a force whose origins and ability to infect others makes the assignation of guilt difficult. In *Richard II*, Shakespeare adapts a well-known and controversial episode from English history and reinvigorates the story with significant uncertainty. It's difficult to identify with certainty, for example, the moment in the play when Bolingbroke decides, once and for all, to pursue more than the reacquisition of his "inheritance of free descent" (2.3.135) that originally motivates his return from exile. It's likewise difficult to identify when or how Richard becomes convinced he can seize Bolingbroke's estate without significant consequence. We are only shown the actions of men who have previously assented to an immoral violation of moral or civil law, and whose decision implicates both them and those around them.

Bolingbroke's exile, return, and eventual usurpation of Richard presents the play's dominant concern with the nature of kingship, but this conflict strongly depends upon (even as it seems subordinate to) Bolingbroke's conflict with Bushy, Bagot, and Green.⁷ These counselors emphasize the conspiracy of self-deception that underwrites not only Richard's monarchy, but his entire governmental system. Through highlighting the role of flattery in the conflict between Bolingbroke, Richard, and Richard's minions, Shakespeare demonstrates how the sins of the one—Richard—are also the sins of the many. At numerous points in the play, characters try and account for the shifting political tides, laying blame at the feet both of Richard and, variously, of his counselors.

⁷ Shakespeare's staging of these three counselors draws heavily on multiple dramatic and historical sources who supply various spellings for their last names. Unless quoting directly from one of these or critical sources, I will maintain Shakespeare's spelling of their names.

Awarding equitable blame is a vexed issue in the play because the social hierarchies that constitute the universe of the play make direct confrontations with Richard incredibly difficult. The reluctance to charge Richard with crimes motivates much of the play's conflict, deflecting both suspicion and consequences first on Mowbray, and then on Bushy, Bagot, and Green. But more than the difficulty of doling out punishment on the deserving parties, Shakespeare's investigation of flattery innovates upon his dramatic theology by portraying sin in ecological terms where, again, individual guilt proceeds from personal agency, but the ultimate shape and consequences of this guilt depend on the complicity or passivity of others. Guilt does not belong exclusively to Richard *or* to Mowbray; to Richard *or* to Bushy, Bagot, and Green as if the moral debt of sin could pass stably from one person to another. In *Richard II*, sin's transmission amplifies its force, and it accrues in power as it passes among political players and bystanders. And far from being restricted to Richard's monarchy, tracing flattery's influence demonstrates that Bolingbroke and his supporters prove just as susceptible to the sins that ensnared Richard's politics.

Richard II stages a moral universe where the audience observes the demise of Richard's monarchy and struggles to distinguish his guilt from that of his followers and, indeed, from his enemies, but discovers that clear assignations of blame become more and more difficult as sin corrodes clear distinctions between individual and community. I argue for the play's ecological understanding of sin because the characters themselves connect political sins and guilty relationships to the transgression of boundaries and the wasting of physical spaces, their resources, and their ability to confer stable identity on the people who inhabit them. This is not to say that Shakespeare shows us the power of sin to actually deteriorate physical spaces, but

rather to demonstrate that his characters—Bolingbroke and John of Gaunt chief among them—perceive guilt and sin in ecological terms.

One of the most remarkable instances of this kind of vision occurs in Act Two, Scene One, where Gaunt surveys England's many virtues. As an idea, as a nation, and as physical land, Gaunt argues that England supplies the world with a citadel of "Christian service" and "true chivalry." England offers the world an exemplar of spiritual and ideological excellence, but even as he proclaims these, perhaps, more abstracted qualities, he grounds them in England's physical properties. This "*earth* of majesty", "this other Eden," "this blessed plot, this earth, this realm." England possesses an excellence beyond the power of men or kings to confer: it is a fortress "built by Nature for herself." And yet, this essential goodness of its origin is not inviolable. In this same scene, both before and after Gaunt's vision of England, he ruminates with fury and sorrow on the way that England's "conquest of itself" has resulted from the influence of flattery in Richard's court. In similar fashion, Bolingbroke characterizes his conflict with Bushy, Bagot, and Greene by reframing their political influence as the consumption of England's natural resources and further articulates his adversity to them as the determination to engage in some much-needed gardening: "caterpillars of the commonwealth / Which I have sworn to weed and pluck away" (2.3.165-166). The caterpillar provides a metaphor of corpulence which early modern usages only intensify. The Oxford English Dictionary indicates that as early as 1475, figurative expressions referred to "A rapacious person; an extortioner; one who preys upon society."⁸ When Bolingbroke later confronts them, he recounts more personal grievances, but here his use of the term "commonwealth" recognizes their wickedness on the scale of a national blight.

⁸ "caterpillar, n.". OED Online. Oxford University Press. Accessed April 20, 2018.

As these conflicts variously apostrophize and implicate Richard, the play's friction with flattery condenses a long history of disputed social hierarchies, economics, and class mobility as relevant during Richard II's monarchy as during Elizabeth I's. Frank Whigham has argued persuasively that the permeability of the social boundaries between different classes increased in proportion to the degree that the defense of those boundaries depended upon rhetorical powers and speech acts, both bound up in the traditions and practices described in courtly literature:

The court was simultaneously an arena of conflict and a mart of opportunity as well as a radiant center of order. I think we can fruitfully construe these interrelated functions by focusing on the crucial issue of social mobility. The received sense of personal identity, seen as founded on God-given attributes such as birth, was slowly giving way to the more modern notion that the individual creates himself by his own actions. This new view was enticing to those on the rise, but it threatened those who resisted sharing their positions or who feared they would be displaced. The latter proposed the distinctions found in courtesy theory in order to maintain their preeminence; the former read the courtesy books, hoping to avoid being so distinguished. The effect of this practical intellectual struggle was to articulate a sophisticated rhetoric, indeed, an epistemology, of personal social identity—a new understanding of *how people tell who they are*.⁹

Whigham's observations about social mobility and identity run parallel to questions that *Richard II* stages about kingship. Either station is granted and secured by God, conferring qualities both material and essential and is therefore inviolable without consequence, or station depends on a mixture of ambition, merit, and opportunity. Similarly, Richard II and Bolingbroke propose that a monarch acquires and maintains its legitimacy from the ontological guarantee of divine right, or "right" is a matter of propaganda and success, surging from a more terrestrial, Machiavellian set of aspirations and daring. Whigham's attention to the "*new* understanding of how people tell who they are" suggests that part of the shift in social ontologies was the growing conviction that God alone could not be depended upon to secure the social narratives of the individual or the group to which he or she belonged. Conversely, if God was no longer enforcing (or had, indeed,

⁹ Whigham, *Ambition and Privilege*, X-xi. Emphasis Whigham's.

never enforced) the segregation between classes, the power and privileges of the elite were all the more available for the taking.

Whigham sees the divine/Machiavellian paradigm as fundamental to the emergence and popularity of courtly literature, noting that the anxieties which motivated the upper classes to articulate the supposedly inviolable distinctions of their power and privilege too often amounted to the publishing of instructions that guaranteed their counterfeits:

...the idea that those who rule do so with, and because of, their rhetorical powers also suggests that one with rhetorical powers may hope to rule, or at least be powerful, or at least gain some access to power and its assorted privileges...A corollary to this internal discrepancy reveals rhetoric's fundamental indeterminacy of application. If rhetoric maintains rule by persuading subjects to submit, may it not be that the subjects are *merely* persuaded to submit, to those who have merely rhetorical powers?¹⁰

Whigham's phrase "*merely* persuaded" alludes to a shift in assumptions about social class both for the ruling and the subjected classes. As assumptions about the importance of birth began to erode, more and more active investment in persuasion became necessary to reinforce boundaries that had previously been more effectively guarded by fear and reverence. Ruth Kelso almost seems to lament the dissipation of such structures and limits, whose loss effectively created a sort of class "homelessness":

The churl was always to be found pushing his way among his betters, and the gentlemen degenerating and sinking into the state of the churl...Classes were not sharply distinguished; that is, the line between the gentle and the ungentle was vague. There was a group certainly that bore the name of gentlemen by unmistakable right; there was another group that just as unmistakably had no right to the title and never claimed it...¹¹

Like exploring a city whose landmarks have been levelled by war or disaster, the blurring of class lines made social navigation difficult—the gentlemen and the churl were both likely to get lost, swept away into misfortune or adventure. Whether or not an individual believes his station

¹⁰ Ibid., 2.

¹¹ Kelso, *The Doctrine of the English Gentleman in the Sixteenth Century*, 37-38.

to enjoy divine sanction or not, however, the “telling” of identity clearly demarks a collection of performances intended to persuade others to “submit” to accepting the identity for which one advocated. The issue of flattery lies near to the heart of the problems of class that courtly literature both addresses and complicates. If the “churl” can master enough rhetoric to gain access to a community previously forbidden to him, he may only do so through deception and lies.

Paula Blank argues that the conflict between free speech and self-censorship that emerges in *Richard II* reflects similar anxieties and pressures surrounding the relationship between free speech and governance during Elizabeth’s reign, and points to a speech made by parliamentarian Peter Wentworth in 1576: “there is nothing so necessary for the preservation of the prince and state as free speech, and without it, it is a scorn and mockery to call it a Parliament House, for in truth it is none, but a very school of flattery and dissimulation, and so a fit place to serve the devil and his angels in, and not to glorify God and benefit the commonwealth.”¹² Wentworth vocalizes a worry that restricted speech can serve no other end but to deceive and misguide the prince, and to misguide the prince imperils the state. Indeed, the restriction of free speech only forecasts dire conditions: the service of diabolical forces. Wentworth appears to have been a consistent advocate for the true freedom of speech in Parliament because Parliament was in a unique and instrumental position to advise the queen and ensure the delivery of sage council. This theme of concern emerges again in 1587, in which Wentworth put some pointed questions before Parliament:

1. First, whether the prince and state can be maintained without this Court of Parliament.
2. Item, whether there be any council that can make or abrogate laws, but only this Court of Parliament.

¹² Elton, *The Tudor Constitution: Documents and Commentary*. Second Edition, 271.

3. Item, whether free speech and free doings or dealings be not granted to every one of the Parliament House by law.
4. Item, whether that great honour to God and those great benefits may be done unto the prince and state without free speech and doings in this place that may be done with them.
5. Whether it be not an injury to the whole state and against the law that the prince or Privy Council should send for any member of this House in the Parliament time, or after the end of the Parliament, and to check, blame, or punish them for any speech used in this place, except it be for traitorous words.¹³

Wentworth's questions, both in theme and order, argue that the political health of the monarch cannot be divorced from that of the realm, and that the health of the monarch depends critically upon the ability of Parliament to exercise their responsibility to speak freely—a responsibility and privilege granted and mandated by the law. Certainly, Wentworth seems to cultivate a high opinion of the powers and influence of parliament—the maintenance of prince and state as well, it seems, the honour of God, depend on their ability to speak freely.

If Wentworth sounds self-important, certainly he takes no less seriously the possibility that members of Parliament could face significant reprisal for going too far with their words. Additionally, for all the largesse in their duties apparently afforded by the law, Elizabeth was anxious to limit the amount of open debate that touched on delicate subjects she perceived better left unaddressed. In 1593, she communicated to Parliament the urgency of “discretion” through the lord keeper:

[The queen] sayeth there be two things in a man most behoveful if they be well used: wit and tongue, they are those; they be most happy possessions and needful helps, as all they be placed... Your petitions... must be ruled, and that her Majesty granteth you liberal but not licentious speech, liberty therefore but with due limitation... It shall be meet therefore that each man of you contain his speech within the bounds of loyalty and good discretion, being assured that as the contrary is punishable in all men, so most of all in them that take upon them to be counsellors and procurators of the commonwealth.¹⁴

The lord speaker's statement appears to leave ample room for a conscientious Parliament to

¹³ Ibid., 273.

¹⁴ Ibid., 274.

broach and discuss a wide range of subjects without fear of reprisal. His tone carefully mixes vague warning with the apparent granting of liberty provided that each man exercise his wit and tongue within the bounds of loyalty. On the issue of loyalty, at least, Elizabeth and Wentworth appear to have agreed, at least in the abstract. Wentworth's questions and items draw the boundary of speech at the point of "traitorous words." Elizabeth no doubt sought to pacify a potentially frustrated parliament in the seemingly generous permission of "liberal but not licentious speech," but in practice did not entrust to them the practice of "good discretion." Blank notes that throughout her reign, Elizabeth, "ultimately ruled that all "matters of state" (including her marriage, succession, questions of religion and foreign policy) could not be raised in the House unless she had granted explicit license to do so..."¹⁵

Shakespeare's writing of *Richard II* appears to have absorbed this contemporary struggle to define the responsibilities and freedoms of both Parliament and its speech, particularly in their influence on the monarch. Rebecca Lemon has suggested striking similarities in the political conflicts that align the monarchies of Richard II and Elizabeth: "representing the deposition of Richard II is not simply about staging the successful toppling of a legitimate sovereign. It is, more powerfully, about the assertion of one model of monarchy over another: one based in the rights of the state and rule of law, the other in the supremacy of royal prerogative."¹⁶ Elizabeth's prohibitions against the debate of issues like her marriage, succession, and religion (all strategically bundled under the impersonal title "matters of state") assume a royal prerogative that, at least on these issues, suspected Parliament and its exercise of law would operate somewhere between impediment and threat.

¹⁵ Blank, 336.

¹⁶ Lemon, *Treason By Words*, 56.

Wentworth’s advocacy for the freedom of Parliamentary speech reflects the influence of longer traditions of literature—including courtly and moral instruction—that aimed at cultivating the integrity and characters of both rulers and those who served them. His concern that restrictions on free speech could lead make Parliament a “very school of flattery and dissimulation” appears representative of early-modern moral primers and books written to help shape the uncertain characters of young men. The “hiddenness” of flattery’s true nature emerges, for example, in *The Pilgrimage of Princes*, written by Lodowick Lloid Gent in 1573—just three years before Wentworth’s warning. Gent writes, “Flatterie is the swéete bayte of enuie, the cloake of malice, the onelye pestilence of the worlde, a monster ougly to beholde if it coulede be séene, verye terrible to trust if it might be knowne...”¹⁷ Gent underscores flattery’s essential unreliability with images like “bait” and “cloak” that conceal something worse. His comparison of flattery to a monster “ugly to behold if it *could* be seen” and terrible to trust if it “*might* be known” cautions that no foresight can arm an individual against flattery’s harmful effects. One cannot both entertain a flatterer and see beyond the pleasant speech to perceive the dangers behind it.

Political theorist Thomas Elyot also contributes to the tradition with his book, *The Banket of Sapience*, written in 1564 and dedicated, likely, to Henry VIII. The table of contents reads like an ABC’s of a courtier’s catechism, beginning with “Abstinence, Adversitie,” and “Affection” and concluding with “Vayneglorie, Virginitee,” and “Wrath.” On flattery he writes:

MY sonne, if il mē wil fede the with flattery, consent not vnto them. Better are the strokes of hym that loueth truely, than the false kysses of them that doe flatter thee. Tale bearers, rioters, glosers & flatterers, fle far from them, as from thy chiefe enemies. Within thy selfe, beholde wel thy self, and to knowe what thou arte, geue no credence to other. Whose ares be so stopped from truth that he may not abyde to here truthe of his friende, his health and prosperitie is to be despayred. Lyke as wormes sonest doe breede

¹⁷ Gent, *The pilgrimage of princes, penned out of sundry Greeke and Latine aucthours*.

in softe woode and gentyll, so the most noble wittes desirous of prayse, gentle and honorable, moste maketh of flatterers, and doe noryshe suche persones, as bee their destroyers.¹⁸

Elyot's instruction seems to assume, or at least anticipate, an identity already sufficiently formed with a moral foundation strong enough to resist the allure of flattery, but this stable self proves elusive when we consider his book in its larger dimensions and when he treats other subjects. His work assumes a Christian audience, made plain by the inclusion of a section for "Scripture" in which he adapts the epistle of Second Timothy: "Al scripture inspired of God is profitable to teache or to reproue, to correct, to instruct in iustice, that the man of god be perfitte, and furnished vnto eury good woorke."¹⁹ He deviates very little from Paul: "For the whole Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable to teach, to convince, to correct, and to instruct in righteousness."²⁰ The quotation of Paul here echoes the ethos of the introduction where Elyot essentially quotes from the opening of Proverbs, "Sapience hath builded a hause for hir selfe she hath prepared hir wyne, and lae forthe hir table: she calleth ou[t] abroad in [t]he stretes"²¹

Elyot emphasizes the compromising company of flatterers by immediately comparing it to the primacy and dependability of, as it were, keeping company with one's self: "within thy selfe, beholde wel thy selfe, and to know what thou art, geue no credence to other." As though with a mirror, Elyot here urges a practice of reflection with "beholde," implying that self-examination will lay bare to the moral gaze all the faults, defects, and vulnerabilities that

¹⁸ Elyot, *The banket of sapience compyled by Sir Thomas Eliot Knight*.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ 2 Timothy 3:16. 1599 Geneva Bible. Hereafter all references taken from this edition.

²¹ Elyot, *The Banket of Sapience*. Proverbs 1:20-21 reads: "Wisdom crieth without: she uttereth her voice in the streets. She calleth in the high street, among the prease in the enterings of the gates, and uttereth her words in the city.

flatterers, for various reasons, downplay or dismiss. Elyot's advice assumes, or at least hopes for, a self already sufficiently moral, conscientious, and grounded so that this exercise of reflection can guarantee rejection of what flattery proposes. Indeed, Elyot's formulation for coming to correct self knowledge seems to assume the presence of a strong conscience. The etymological and moral traditions surrounding the conscience use social rather than individualistic language to describe its operation. Raymond Opperwall writes, "*syneidēsis* signifies not merely another action performed *by* the self; it is now an agent within the self, lit. 'the self that knows with itself.'²² "The self that knows with itself" closely parallels both the social language and the psychological/moral posture suggested in Elyot's phrase "beholde wel thy selfe."

Elyot here presents flattery to his "sonne" as the marker of people who seem to be friendly but are not in fact friends. Because of the intended audience, Elyot's argument works less by way of metaphysical investigation into the operation of flattery and more by way of frightening comparison through more poetic and dramatic terms. The danger posed by flatterers is at once intimate, as suggested through their false kisses, but also explosively violent, as seen through his reference to the rioters. His warning centers around the effort to adjudicate between the unhealthy desire for praise and the healthy desire for truth. "Better are the strokes of hym that loueth truly" communicates the conviction that while truth may injure, the naked assault of the strokes is far to be preferred to the clandestine and parasitical operation of flattery, which works like worms that infest "soft wood." The image also resonates with my formulation on sin and its ecological consequences. Whether the wood belongs to a tree or to a beam in a house, the infection that corrupts a local, seemingly contained site remains invisible. This invisibility

²² *A Dictionary of Biblical Tradition in English Literature*. 154-155.

protects the worms from interference, giving them time to render greater damage to the structure, or to the tree's yield of fruit or shade.

Elyot's comparison of truth to "strokes" also acquires rhetorical force through continued Biblical allusion. In the context of a book that aims at moral instruction of young men, the "strokes of hym that loueth truly" offers one of the book's clear parallels to the book of Proverbs. All of Chapter 13 concerns the habits of wisdom, particularly with reference to the instruction of children, Elyot seems to most clearly allude to verse 24: "He that spareth his rod, hateth his son: but he that loveth him chasteneth him betime."²³ Here we see that the loving relationship between a father and son acquires a type of legitimacy according to the father's willingness to discipline and rebuke his son. The author of Hebrews repeats this logic in using the father and son relationship as an analogue for that between God and the Christian soul in the midst of trial or sanctification:

For whom the Lord loveth, he chasteneth: and he scourgeth every son that he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God offered himself unto you as unto sons: for what son is it whom the father chasteneth not? If therefore ye be without correction, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons.²⁴

The author of Hebrews amplifies the authorization of discipline here by pointing to the example of Christ who, as God, was already perfect in every way, yet submitted to the shame and suffering of crucifixion. His example is placed for Christians to inspire them in their pursuit of godly works and character: they cannot truly engage in the imitation of Christ if they resist submitting to discipline and suffering for their faith. The two invocations of the verb "chasteneth" echoes the lexicon and priorities of Proverbs while raising the stakes. The author poses a rhetorical question about the relationship between true "sonship" and chastening in order

²³ Proverbs 13:24.

²⁴ Hebrews 12:6-8.

to again raise the issue of spiritual legitimacy, and then follows it with the blunt conclusion that those who go without correction are “bastards, and not sons.”

The confrontation between John of Gaunt and Richard in Act Two, Scene One, depicts some of the dynamics that Elyot describes, as if Gaunt were standing in as something of a surrogate father trying to reign in a dissolute and entitled son. The scene repeatedly stages a conflict over the definition and application of flattery and which is made all the more conspicuous by the silence presence of Bagot, Greene, and Bushy who, one scene previous, inform Richard of Gaunt’s ailing health. Gaunt’s death, which occurs without fanfare offstage, represents one of the play’s tragedies for his voice is the one Richard needs as much as he despises it. Gaunt’s anger with Richard, curiously, matches his devotion to the monarchy and determination to correct the young king’s vices in order that he might better serve England.

The sequence of scenes in Act One carefully establishes Gaunt as the moral voice of the play by offering a portrait of his loyalty as a prelude to his rebuke. In Act One, Scene Two, we find Gaunt face to face with the specter of his brother’s death and the temptation to avenge him. But his debate with the Duchess of Gloucester testifies to the resolve of his loyalty:

JOHN OF GAUNT: God’s is the quarrel; for God’s substitute,
His deputy anointed in his sight
Hath caused his death; the which if wrongfully,
Let heaven revenge, for I may never lift
An angry arm against his minister.

DUCHESS OF GLOUCESTER: Where, then, alas, may I complain myself?

JOHN OF GAUNT: To God, the widow’s champion and defence. (1.2.37-43)

This scene helps generate a sense of credit for Gaunt going into the next scene in which York and Gaunt debating the value of imparting a few final words of wisdom to their young and impetuous king. Despite his ill health and the blow of his son’s exile, Gaunt initially seems optimistic.

GAUNT: Will the King come that I may breathe my last
 In wholesome counsel to his unstaied youth?
 YORK: Vex not yourself nor strive not with your breath
 For all in vain comes counsel to his ear.
 GAUNT: O, but they say the tongues of dying men
 Enforce attention like deep harmony.
 Where words are scarce they are seldom spent in vain
 For they breathe truth that breathe their words in pain;
 He that no more must say is listened more
 Than they whom you and ease have taught to gloze...
 Though Richard my life's counsel would not hear,
 My death's sad tale may yet undeaf his ear. (2.1.1-10, 15-16)

Mindful of the good he may yet do for England by advising Richard with “wholesome counsel,” Gaunt regards the liminal space of his ebbing life as an opportunity to finally say that which, when possessed of greater health, Richard could not hear. He counts on, or hopes in, the possibility that Richard’s defenses will be pierced, as though by the beauty of music, by Gaunt’s willingness to bequeath a final investment of his wisdom and time to his king. Gaunt’s meditation on the value of his wisdom repeatedly emphasizes its rarity and impermanence. His words are scarce and, more, delivered at great cost through the difficulty of pain. This wisdom cannot be shouted across a hall, but requires an act of submission and patience to catch the diminished volume of wisdom whose loudest expression is a breath. Gaunt waxes poetic, getting carried away with himself with what seems a wistful, half-acknowledged wish that his final words of wisdom should have been given to the grateful and attentive ears of his son, Bolingbroke, rather than his bratty cousin.

York interrupts this reverie by asserting that Richard has irretrievably succumbed to more vicious influences that cannot, even by the dying wisdom of Gaunt, be overruled:

YORK: No, it is stopped with other flatt’ring sounds,
 As praises, of whose taste the wise are feared,
 Lascivious metres, to whose venom sound
 The open ear of youth doth always listen,
 Report of fashions in proud Italy,

Whose manners still our tardy-apish nation
Limps after in base imitation. (2.1.17-23)

York contrasts the “deep harmony” that Gaunt associates with the beautiful urgency of death with the “lascivious metres” that, though poisonous, the young cannot resist. Once opened to this influence, the identity becomes prodigal from itself, imagined here as the clumsy embrace of proud, foreign fashions.

The debate continues, and Gaunt seems determined to tell Richard what none other can, and York pleads with him to be moderate in his advice: “Deal mildly with his youth / For young hot colts, being reined, do rage the more.” (2.1.69-70.) Gaunt may have intended to follow York’s advice, and perhaps had hoped that Richard might have shown the occasion greater reverence in light of Gaunt’s health. But from the outset, Richard shows himself flippant and disrespectful. Queen Isabel greets Gaunt with respect only for Richard to undercut her tone and etiquette with a jibe at Gaunt’s age, helping convert Gaunt’s deep harmony by turns, into rage.

QUEEN: How fares our noble uncle Lancaster?
KING RICHARD II What comfort, man? how is't with aged Gaunt?
JOHN OF GAUNT O how that name befits my composition!
Old Gaunt indeed, and gaunt in being old:
Within me grief hath kept a tedious fast;
And who abstains from meat that is not gaunt?
For sleeping England long time have I watch'd;
Watching breeds leanness, leanness is all gaunt:
The pleasure that some fathers feed upon,
Is my strict fast; I mean, my children's looks;
And therein fasting, hast thou made me gaunt: (2.1.71-81)

One could imagine Gaunt’s initial response taking Richard’s joking in stride, acknowledging a certain appropriateness (in fact if not in occasion) of Richard calling him “aged” as a cheeky euphemism for his more serious condition. His invocation of “Old Gaunt” again tries to be amicable, but the power of wordplay and association takes over, leading from “gaunt” to “grief” and “fast.” Entertaining his young king, he can’t help remembering his own son, whose

audience and company he clearly would have preferred, and he can't help suppress the inclination to blame Richard for starving him of Bolingbroke—for making him both more and less g/Gaunt than he would prefer.

Gaunt continues offering macabre observations about his own name, and initially the wordplay which dances around Gaunt's ailing physical condition reassures Richard.

JOHN OF GAUNT: Gaunt am I for the grave, gaunt as a grave,
Whose hollow womb inherits nought but bones.
KING RICHARD II Can sick men play so nicely with their names?
JOHN OF GAUNT No, misery makes sport to mock itself:
Since thou dost seek to kill my name in me,
I mock my name, great king, to flatter thee. (2.1.82-87)

Gaunt's meditation on his immanent death leads him to consider other deaths, both figurative and dynastic. The metaphor begins with the diminished intimacy of his own grave, perversely imagined as a womb of death, where only his bones shall reside, and there forever. The perversity of configuring the grave in such a way resurfaces in his contemplation of the dynastic death of his family, which he alludes to when he accuses Richard of seeking "to kill his name in [him];" ending the succession of generations that had enjoyed the name and land of Hereford. He concludes, "I mock my name, great king, to flatter thee," and claims to mock his name but clearly, in fact, begins to mock Richard, calling him "*great*"—a greatness undercut by the fact that Richard isn't flattered by the implied accusation that he has killed Gaunt's name.

KING RICHARD II Should dying men flatter with those that live?
JOHN OF GAUNT No, no, men living flatter those that die.
KING RICHARD II Thou, now a-dying, say'st thou flatterest me.
JOHN OF GAUNT O, no! thou diest, though I the sicker be.
KING RICHARD II I am in health, I breathe, and see thee ill.
JOHN OF GAUNT Now He that made me knows I see thee ill;
Ill in myself to see, and in thee seeing ill. (2.1.88-94)

Richard's question about Gaunt's apparent flattery appears to marvel at the way Gaunt chooses to spend his final days: what profit can he hope to collect from the living with flattery? Flattery

may allow one to secure many things, but the one thing it cannot do, Richard seems to suggest, is extend one's life. Gaunt reproves him, saying that those who live flatter those who die. This seems to refer to the fact that the living flatter the dead in hopes of winning, at the last moment, material wealth or some other blessing from those who will no longer need their moveables, and also seems to be an oblique acknowledgement of the fact that he knows Richard's true purpose in showing up at this hour, in place of his son though, ironically, Richard fails to flatter Gaunt.

The conversation and wordplay then turn to the subject of death itself, and the wisdom that Gaunt might have marshalled to help Richard adjust the perilous trajectory of his monarchy assumes a more barbed form: "thou diest, though I the sicker be." Gaunt exchanges fatherly advice for riddles, invoking the authority of God to emphasize a quality of sight and life that he, though dying, possesses and which eclipse the temporal vision, health, and breath to which Richard lays claim. He may enjoy these, Gaunt allows, but these conditions minister nothing of value to the corruption that emanates from Richard's to the misrule of his realm.

Thy death-bed is no lesser than thy land
Wherein thou liest in reputation sick;
And thou, too careless patient as thou art,
Commit'st thy anointed body to the cure
Of those physicians that first wounded thee:
A thousand flatterers sit within thy crown,
Whose compass is no bigger than thy head;
And yet, incaged in so small a verge,
The waste is no whit lesser than thy land. (2.1.95-113)

Gaunt's accusations criminalize Richard's actions and berate his reputation while curiously rendering Richard as more passive than active. He *lies* in a death bed, the sick patient who has submitted himself to the care of "those physicians." Richard's guilt here seems less a matter of what he's done than, as "too careless" a patient, what he hasn't done—responsibility that he's neglected or forgotten. This attribution of passivity and confusion of Richard's guilt with those

of his “physicians” comes in the larger context of significant vitriol and could invite suspicion that Gaunt indulges himself in the release of indiscriminate rage. Indeed, only a moment later, Richard deflects these criticisms as Gaunt’s maddened senility: “A lunatic lean-witted fool / Presuming on an ague's privilege.” But Gaunt in fact perfectly understands the complex relationship between Richard and his courtiers as one in which the monarchy’s political sins gather substance and consequence because of what Richard does as well as what he fails to do.

Gaunt’s speech continues to amplify in terms of engagement as well as fury and turns to the subject of reputation, extending his meditation on the inter-social nature of Richard’s wounded royal identity. His reformulation of Richard’s land as his grave also connects his understanding of reputation to ecosystems of political sin that recontextualize Richard’s misdeeds as national and geographic catastrophe. Whereas his grave he depicts as barely large enough to accommodate his bones, Richard’s death and burial require the entire extent of his kingdom in order to accommodate the scale of his sick reputation. Gaunt’s jab at Richard’s reputation aims at one of the most tender of early-modern nerves, especially for the aristocratic and ruling classes. Curtis Brown Watson has argued that the early-modern surge in the regard for reputation resulted, in part, from the larger revival of Roman/antiquity and the elevation of its authors and values. Reputation, particularly post-humus reputation, acquired esteem as the pagan version (or alternative) to Christian conceptions of the immortality of the soul.²⁵ Curtis Brown Watson explains: “The desire for posthumous reputation was possibly even greater than that for reputation during one’s lifetime. For the Romans, posthumous fame was the chief means by which a man’s values could outlast the life of the individual.”²⁶ Brown points, for example, to *Othello* where Cassio concludes that “to lose one’s reputation is to lose ‘the immortal part’ of

²⁵ Watson, *Shakespeare and the Renaissance Concept of Honor*, 140-145.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 141.

oneself,” suggesting that Shakespeare seems to have absorbed classical conceptions about reputation and frequently sought to stage them; often in conflict with Christian teaching on the soul.²⁷

Gaunt’s focus on the subject of reputation results, in part, from a consideration and criticism of Richard’s behavior, but also from an affective concern: as he had hoped that Richard might be sensitized to his advice because of his frail condition, his prospective death has stirred the question of Gaunt’s *own* reputation for himself. Brown writes:

The solace provided the pagan humanist by immortality of good name was no mere rationalization of the ugly fact of death. Emotionally he had surrendered himself to the love and pursuit of virtue; this devotion had become more important than life itself, hence he could derive great satisfaction from the knowledge that his reputation as a man of noble character would live on after he died.²⁸

Gaunt’s arrival upon the subject of reputation, and particularly its immortal qualities, proceeds naturally from his earlier conclusions about the way that Richard has “killed his name” by banishing Bolingbroke. Historically, Gaunt in fact had several other sons and daughters with four women. The exclusion of Bolingbroke’s other siblings allows Shakespeare to stage a particularly pitiful portrait of Gaunt in his last hours as a man dying with none to survive him.

Here, as with the issue of reputation, Gaunt’s worry about the immortality of his name operates as another allusion to the influence of antiquity on early-modern thought. In Plato’s *Symposium*, Diotima proposes to Socrates that individuals may achieve immortality in two ways: through their offspring, or through the achievement of eternal glory, depending on the conception of the body, and the conception of the soul.

Now, some people are pregnant in body, and for this reason turn more to women and pursue love in that way... while others are pregnant in soul—because there surely *are* those who are even more pregnant in their souls than in their bodies, and these are pregnant with what is fitting for a soul to bear and bring to birth. And what is fitting?

²⁷ Ibid., 4.

²⁸ Ibid., 143.

Wisdom and the rest of virtue, which all poets beget, as well as all the craftsman who are said to be creative. But by far the greatest and most healthful part of wisdom deals with the proper ordering of cities and households, and that is called moderation and justice.²⁹

In both of these, as Michael J. O'Brien explains, a mortal's acquisition of immortality depends upon "always leaving behind something new to replace the old."³⁰ The two forms of immortality come with their respective burdens, and Plato regards the immortality of poets, artists, and statesman as facing the greater challenge. To order states and families through the encouragement of wisdom and justice requires a greater effort of begetting than those who are "pregnant in the body *only*."

Gaunt's speech both acknowledges and complicates these categories of immortality. He seems to expect that neither Bolingbroke nor his son, Harry, can expect to last long or perpetuate his family's line with Richard on the throne. His conversation with York signals his willingness to gamble on Richard as something of a surrogate son: in the absence of an enduring family, perhaps his wisdom and glory can live on in an England reformed by Richard's repentance. Richard, on the other hand, has no children and only his reputation on which to depend. Yet the same tyranny that causes Gaunt to complain of his death's name simultaneously promises that what will survive Richard will not be glory, but infamy. Gaunt's warnings about Richard's imperiled reputation also acquire a sense of troubled immortality from the way that Gaunt describes his death bed as "no lesser than thy land." Equating Richard's reputation with his land proposes several items—an enormity of scale and size, but which is also thoroughly inhabited, public and traveled, so also thoroughly known. But beyond these, land *endures*. It may come under new ownership, it may be farmed or neglected, it may be the site of wars, but these events or conditions occur principally on the surface. Gaunt's comparison of Richard's reputation and

²⁹ Plato, *Complete Works*, 493.

³⁰ O'Brien, "Becoming Immortal' in Plato's *Symposium*," 185.

his land gathers this sense of immortality retroactively when, in the same scene, York cautions Richard against seizing the lands that, by rights, belong to Bolingbroke as Gaunt's heir, or if not to Bolingbroke because of his banishment then to *his* son, Henry, whom York identifies as loyal to the crown.

Seek you to seize and gripe into your hands
The royalties and rights of banished Hereford?
Is not Gaunt dead, and doth not Hereford live?
Was not Gaunt just, and is not Harry true?
Did not the one deserve to have an heir?
Is not his heir a well-deserving son?
Take Hereford's rights away and take from time
His charters and his customary rights,
Let not tomorrow then ensue today,
Be not thyself—for how art thou a king
But by fair sequence and succession? (2.189-199)

In the space of these ten lines, York thrice refers to Bolingbroke as “Hereford.” Lines 190 and 191, in particular, call attention to the impossibility of Richard recuperating his reputation. York refers to Bolingbroke as “banished Hereford.” This naming calls attention to the fact that though the man can be exiled, the land to which he is dynastically linked cannot simply disappear or vanish in a fit of royal orders. The next line repeats the argument with the same formula, comparing the mutability of the individual with the persistence of the land that gives him his place and identity: “Is not Gaunt dead, and doth not Hereford live?” These lines work to justify Gaunt's pronouncement, reminding Richard that his reputation cannot be banished and will not die.

Returning to Gaunt's vitriolic doom against Richard, he at last refers to the king's silent favorites, holding both them and Richard's diet of their flattery responsible for his wounded royal health: “And thou, too careless patient as thou art, / Commit'st thy anointed body to the cure / Of those physicians that first wounded thee: / A thousand flatterers sit within thy crown.”

(2.1.97-100). Shakespeare's staging of this final encounter between Gaunt and Richard invites us to sympathize with the former: on the verge of death and denied the company of his son, he has gathered what remains of his life and wisdom to try serving Richard and England, be it ever so difficult, with some timely advice. The scene previous has already primed the audience to be kindly disposed toward Gaunt and against Richard with his callous tone and mercenary intentions to seize Gaunt's estate and moveables, so that when Richard quips "What comfort, man? how is't with aged Gaunt?" Bolingbroke's father only seems to grow in pitiful nobility in comparison. Thus, when Gaunt incriminates Bushy, Bagot, and Green—while refusing them the dignity of their names—it might be easy to agree his charges against them.

Yet, as Paul Gaudet has noticed, for all the accusations that pile up against Richard's "physicians," Shakespeare pointedly does *not* supply us with much positive evidence to convict Bushy, Bagot, and Green of the crimes that Gaunt and Bolingbroke allege.³¹ The "wounding" to which Gaunt refers would seem to require a transgressive reading of a few moments where the three men contribute to Richard's behavior or decision-making process. In the previous scene, Act One, Scene Four, for example, Richard muses on Bolingbroke's recent departure into exile:

He is our cousin, cousin; but 'tis doubt,
When time shall call him home from banishment,
Whether our kinsman come to see his friends.
Ourselves and Bushy, Bagot here and Green
Observed his courtship to the common people;
How he did seem to dive into their hearts
With humble and familiar courtesy,
What reverence he did throw away on slaves,
 wooing poor craftsmen with the craft of smiles
And patient underbearing of his fortune,
As 'twere to banish their affects with him.
Off goes his bonnet to an oyster-wench;
A brace of draymen bid God speed him well
And had the tribute of his supple knee,

³¹ Gaudet, "The 'Parasitical' Counselours in Shakespeare's *Richard II*," 142-154.

With 'Thanks, my countrymen, my loving friends;
As were our England in reversion his,
And he our subjects' next degree in hope.
GREEN: Well, he is gone; and with him go these thoughts.
Now for the rebels which stand out in Ireland.
Expedient manage must be made, my liege,
Ere further leisure yield them further means
For their advantage and your highness' loss (1.4.19-41)

Though Bolingbroke has been exiled, his memory remains present and Richard bristles with the worry that he might, though banished, return having thought better of his peaceful departure.

Richard's ruminations on Bolingbroke's popularity with the lower class emphasizes the extent to which he seriously considers this prospect. Bolingbroke's willingness to "court" the "common people" and throw away "reverence" upon "slaves" represents a transgression of social decorum.

If Bolingbroke so willingly "dives" into the hearts of the lower classes (setting a precedent for his son, Prince Hal), might he not also just as willingly transgress against the doom of his king?

His nervous energy overflows against Aumerle when Richard acknowledges Bolingbroke's former closeness as a cousin, yet reveals that such close kinship is unlikely to "call him home from banishment." That Richard identifies Bolingbroke and then Aumerle as "cousin, cousin"—using the same word to identify men in radically different situations—subtly warns Aumerle, not to presume that *his* kinship with Richard guarantees his safety. He, too, might run afoul of Richard's caprices and end up exiled or worse.

Richard's fretting over Bolingbroke's potential threat continues under the guise of sneering contempt for his cousin's vulgar coziness with the commonwealth: "How he did dive into their hearts...what reverence he did throw way upon slaves...Off goes his bonnet to an oyster-wench." Richard criticizes Bolingbroke for an unnatural and unbecoming familiarity with those beneath his social station. As Richard's cousin and grandson of Edward III, Bolingbroke ought to have comported himself with a greater respect for his heritage, and with some eye to the

compromising effect his low-class gamboling might have on the king's reputation. This concern for class decorum, however, masks the recognition that Bolingbroke's ability to curry favor with the masses might catalyze into something more dangerous when he admits the speculation: "As were our England were in reversion his / And he our subjects' next degree in hope." Katherine Eisaman Maus notes that that the phrase "in reversion" here refers to "a legal term for property that reverts to the original owner on the expiring of a contract."³² Richard worries that Bolingbroke's popularity, however base, constitutes a more legitimate claim to England's land and rule than his royal genealogy, which enjoys but the affections of a few close friends.

Richard seems to display more forethought than typical and exactly anticipates the form Bolingbroke's threat will take, but Green dismisses it out of hand: "Well, he is gone; and with him go these thoughts. / Now for the rebels..." Given the audience's knowledge of Bolingbroke's usurpation of the throne, Green's dismissal of Richard's concerns might be read as the premature and lazy advice of a man ill-equipped for political vision. His argument seems to commend something in the order of "out of sight, out of mind," setting aside the possibility that Bolingbroke might return and stir up an army of angry slaves and oyster wenches. Gaudet fairly proposes that his advice could easily read as a recommendation toward the practical: "He recalls Richard from his hatred of Bolingbroke to more immediate necessities of state...reminding Richard, as Carlisle and Aumerle counsel later, that kingship cannot be maintained through the pursuit of personal obsessions."³³ Green recognizes that time is a limited commodity and that the more they allow to the Irish, the more difficult quelling their rebellion shall grow.

³² Maus, *Richard II. The Norton Shakespeare*, 966.

³³ Gaudet., 146.

Green's encouragement to "expedient" action recalls Richard from his troubled ruminations and he determines to make good on the advice by going in person as soon as time can allow, but also in expediting the finance of his Irish wars by implementing disastrous financial policies that target the rich, and then John of Gaunt in particular.

We will ourself in person to this war:
And, for our coffers, with too great a court
And liberal largess, are grown somewhat light,
We are inforced to farm our royal realm;
The revenue whereof shall furnish us
For our affairs in hand: if that come short,
Our substitutes at home shall have blank charters;
Whereto, when they shall know what men are rich,
They shall subscribe them for large sums of gold
And send them after to supply our wants;
For we will make for Ireland presently.

[Enter BUSHY]

Bushy, what news?

BUSHY: Old John of Gaunt is grievous sick, my lord,
Suddenly taken; and hath sent post haste
To entreat your majesty to visit him. (1.4.41-55)

Richard makes a blithe and unconcerned acknowledgement of his court's illiberal opulence and financial mismanagement. This mismanagement, however, doesn't call for correction or belt-tightening, but resorting to even greater mismanagement: blank charters to spend other people's money with no clear end in sight. Bushy enters with news of Richard's wealthy uncle Gaunt, taken "grievous sick" and Richard responds with what seems a practiced and callous humor:

Now put it, God, in the physician's mind
To help him to his grave immediately!
The lining of his coffers shall make coats
To deck our soldiers for these Irish wars.
Come, gentlemen, let's all go visit him:
Pray God we may make haste, and come too late!
ALL: Amen! (1.4.61-65)

With Bolingbroke banished, Richard sees Gaunt's failing health as a virtual invitation to seize a fortune that he can use to fund his Irish campaign. Bushy, Bagot, and Green here stand on less

firm footing here, but Richard's decision to seize Gaunt's estate—the event upon which Bolingbroke founds his return—derives from Richard's invention. Bushy's entry might be staged and directed with an assortment of winks and tones that might characterize the three as opportunists who smell blood, but all that Shakespeare provides us is their hearty declaration of assent to Richard's plan of mocking prayer: "Amen!"

This scene renders Bushy, Bagot, and Green as men who seem to give well-intentioned advice (however short-sighted) and who happily support Richard's schemes. Recent productions of *Richard II* have attempted to compensate for this thinness of evidence through non-verbal cues to their guilt in order to help justify the vitriol levelled against them. In the *Hollow Crown* production, for example, Ben Whishaw's effeminate Richard frowns at Patrick Stewart's ailing, acid-spewing Gaunt. Under Rupert Gold's direction, the scene's editing includes brief shots of Bushy and Green who seem to shift with mild anxiety when Gaunt names their influence. But, again, the play hardly justifies Gaunt's wrath much less the litany of crimes that Bolingbroke unfolds immediately before executing Bushy and Green at the beginning of Act Three.³⁴

I will unfold some causes of your deaths.
You have misled a prince, a royal king,
A happy gentleman in blood and lineaments,
By you unhappied and disfigured clean:
You have in manner with your sinful hours
Made a divorce betwixt his queen and him,
Broke the possession of a royal bed
And stain'd the beauty of a fair queen's cheeks
With tears drawn from her eyes by your foul wrongs.
Myself, a prince by fortune of my birth,
Near to the king in blood, and near in love
Till you did make him misinterpret me,
Have stoop'd my neck under your injuries,
And sigh'd my English breath in foreign clouds,
Eating the bitter bread of banishment;
Whilst you have fed upon my signories,

³⁴ Gold, *Richard II*.

Dispark'd my parks and fell'd my forest woods,
From my own windows torn my household coat,
Razed out my imprese, leaving me no sign,
Save men's opinions and my living blood,
To show the world I am a gentleman.
This and much more, much more than twice all this,
Condemns you to the death. See them deliver'd over
To execution and the hand of death. (3.1.7-30)

Bolingbroke's accusations range from the socio-political to the personal, alleging that they undermined Richard's kingly identity and prevented him from performing his royal duties. Their separation of Richard and his queen and breaking "possession of a royal bed" insinuates that they have effected an exchange and perversion of marital intimacy. The disruption of the royal marriage both insinuates their and Richard's homosexuality, and also that their unnatural relationships with Richard effectively confuse the issue of succession. The royal bed is delicately portrayed as a once-stable place of fecundity, whose breaking precludes the possibility of children and heirs to the throne. Further, they *made* Richard "misinterpret" Bolingbroke, an event which led to a reversal in his fortunes, and precipitous fall in class, and a violation of his ancestral wealth, lands, and public identity. Bolingbroke enumerates an impressive list of events he seems to have taken quite personally, but to which we as an audience are never granted access, and to which Bushy and Green never admit guilt. Bushy simply concludes with stoic defiance: "More welcome is the stroke of death to me / Than Bolingbroke in England. Lords, farewell. (3.1.31-32)

Still, the audience is granted greater access to a vision of their guilt than Gaudet would have us believe if we recalibrate our expectations about the operation of sin according to Calvin's parameters, particularly with an eye to his operative verb "conniving." As I argue in Chapter One, Calvin argues in his commentary on the book of Joshua that Israel seems to have intentionally misdirected their attention away from Achan and the circumstances that fostered his

moral decline and then the theft of precious items from Jericho. Similarly, Bushy, Bagot, and Green misdirect the spiritual and moral gaze of Richard under the banner of avoiding unpleasant thoughts. This practice extends beyond this instance and beyond Richard, resurfacing when Bushy advises the queen to dismiss her fears by comparing them to an optical illusion:

BUSHY: Madam, your majesty is too much sad:
You promised, when you parted with the king,
To lay aside life-harming heaviness
And entertain a cheerful disposition.
QUEEN: To please the king I did; to please myself
I cannot do it; yet I know no cause
Why I should welcome such a guest as grief,
Save bidding farewell to so sweet a guest
As my sweet Richard: yet again, methinks,
Some unborn sorrow, ripe in fortune's womb,
Is coming towards me, and my inward soul
With nothing trembles: at some thing it grieves,
More than with parting from my lord the king.
BUSHY: Each substance of a grief hath twenty shadows,
Which shows like grief itself, but is not so;
For sorrow's eye, glazed with blinding tears,
Divides one thing entire to many objects; (2.2.1-17)

Queen Isabel's premonitions of grief and ill at first seem baseless; she acknowledges that she knows "no cause," but still expects disaster at the pricking of her "inward soul." From our perspective as an audience, the play's juxtaposition of scenes works affectively to justify her anxieties, despite her ignorance of the specifics. Immediately on the heels of watching Northumberland conspire with Ross and Willoughby to meet Bolingbroke at Ravenspurgh, as if she had felt a disturbance in England's cosmos, Isabel senses what Richard's favorites cannot—or refuse—to acknowledge.

As the sequence of scenes justifies Isabel's anxiety, the play also retroactively condemns Bushy's easy dismissal of the cares that promise his own demise. Shakespeare repeats and modifies Bushy's comparison of grief and its division into "many objects" when Richard,

apparently blinded with his eyes “full of tears” in Act One, Scene Four, (4.1.244) requests a mirror and then smashes it—dividing “one thing entire to many objects:”

RICHARD: Is this the face which faced so many follies,
That was at last outfaced by Bolingbroke?
A brittle glory shineth in this face;
As brittle as the glory is the face
 [He throws down the glass]
For there it is cracked in a hundred shivers.
Mark, silent King, the moral of this sport:
How soon my sorrow hath destroyed my face. (4.1.285-291)

When Richard then shatters the glass against the ground, the shards allegorize not only the sense of his fractured identity, but also the dispersal of guilt and sin among both his followers and detractors. In each shard, Richard sees a fragment of his face, of his brittle glory. This scene justifies Isabel’s fear and turns Bushy into an unwitting prophet of sorts, as Shakespeare redeploys a metaphor used to dismiss Isabel’s fears into an image that anatomizes Richard’s shattered monarchy, implicating both him and his followers. The scene continues to condemn Bushy’s advice as deceptive and self-serving when Bolingbroke responds to Richard’s theatrics with attention to the same optical elements that Bushy employs:

The shadow of your sorrow hath destroy'd
The shadow of your face.
KING RICHARD II: Say that again.
The shadow of my sorrow! ha! let's see:
'Tis very true, my grief lies all within; (4.1.292-295)

Bushy’s easy dismissal of the shadows that Isabel perceives assumes that the shadows are *just* shadows that only “show like grief itself.” Yet Richard agrees with Bolingbroke’s judgment that the shadow of sorrow has destroyed the shadow of his face, and concludes “my grief lies all within.” The scene refigures shadow as that which conceals grief rather than that which acts as a distorted image of something smaller and benign.

Gaudet argues that critics like E.M. W. Tillyard, Irving Ribner, and A.P. Rossiter have

accepted the judgments pronounced against the three counselors principally on account of the considerable force of the dramatic and historic sources upon which served as some of Shakespeare's sources. Chroniclers Holinshed and Hall as well as plays like *Thomas of Woodstock* and anonymous poems such as "Richard the Redeless" and "Ther is a busch that is forgrowe" all revile Bushy, Bagot, and Green, and link the influence of their flattery to Richard's tyranny. That this impressive collection of texts performs a relationship that Shakespeare does not undertake troubles Gaudet and deserves some pause: "Commentators who seek to explain away Shakespeare's failure to stage the favorites' malevolence seem to imply that Shakespeare's audience held a rigid and uniform view of English history and came to the theatre expecting their preconceptions to be met... we might well question what the absence of staged guilt could signify within the play"³⁵ Gaudet argues persuasively that this absence redirects the audience's attention back to Richard, resulting in a play that ultimately portrays a king whose choices—and therefore culpability—arise independently of his own willful and impulsive character. Limiting the influence of Bushy, Bagot, and Green clears a dramatic space around Richard, framing him in starker, expansive terms, as the true master of his own misrule and undoing, despite the protestations of the angry aristocracy. Additionally, the audience's provisional sympathy with Bolingbroke's overthrow of Richard depends on the king's independence: "Richard, dominated and misled by his minions, would be less responsible for his misgovernment, and his dethroning would be correspondingly less acceptable to an audience; Bolingbroke, validated in his view of the favorites, would be justified in sentencing them to death, but hardly warranted in proceeding further against the King."³⁶ Shakespeare's ability to cultivate audience sympathy with Gaunt and

³⁵ Gaudet, 145.

³⁶ Ibid., 154.

Bolingbroke, even as they rail against the three men for offenses that haven't occurred on the stage, can diagnose our own tendencies toward blame-shifting.

Gaudet's argument also helpfully diagnoses the difficulty many critics encounter in trying to account for Richard's rash and tyrannical behavior. Any accounting must take stock of the historical and dramatic influence of Bushy, Bagot, and Green, deciding how much blame to apportion to them. Gaudet's criticism that Tillyard, Ribner, and Rossiter simply took the historical record for granted seems not to have significantly altered the popularity of their position and methodology. Much current criticism continues to accept the charges against Bushy, Bagot, and Green despite the absence of evidence.³⁷

Yet audiences need not have held a "rigid and uniform view" of English history in order to both accept that flattery presents a problem to virtuous governance or to believe Gaunt and Bolingbroke characterize Bushy, Bagot, and Green accurately even if Shakespeare doesn't show us their guilt in action. Jessica Winston has argued, for example, that the numerous and increasingly popular publications of *The Mirror for Magistrates* demonstrates a shift in the reading practices and demographics of early modern audiences in England interested in problems and practices of governance: "the authors turned a kind of writing designed to speak *to* power into one that depicted and fostered a conversation *about* power, about the obligations and responsibilities of those who rule the commonwealth."³⁸ This shift in audience that Winston describes—one in which authors gradually reoriented the address of their texts from wealthy and elite patrons to a broader, multi-class readership—parallels Whigham's argument that the publication of courtly literature, originally designed to shore up apparent breaches in the social

³⁷ See McEleney's "Bonfire of the Vanities," Menon's "*Richard II* and the Taint of Metonymy," and Lake's *How Shakespeare Put Politics on the Stage*.

³⁸ Winston, "A *Mirror for Magistrates*," 381-400. Emphasis Winston's.

borders, in fact only functioned to energize lower classes to claim the powers of rhetoric and persuasion.

Winston argues that the *Mirror for Magistrates* ultimately came to appeal to an enormous audience that included “nobility...as well as women and merchants” through several features, including through the ways that the work draws attention to the nature of its own collaborative authorship. Additionally, the apparent conflict between the *Mirror’s* episodes concerning, for example, the justifiability of rebellion, creates an ambivalence that establishes a tone of debate and dialogue between the different components of the text. This debate and dialogue began to characterize the *Mirror’s* audience in a way that “fosters a public conversation about governance.”³⁹ And just as aristocratic attempts to barricade and enclose class privilege through courtly literature contributed to its vulnerability, the *Mirror’s* popularity also seems to have surged in response to governmental anxiety that the monarchy’s authority could be compromised by public debate. Winston notes: “In the first fifty years of its history, the *Mirror* drew more and more people into its conversation about the rule of the realm. In 1554/5, in a move that suggests some concern about what it meant for the public to read and respond to the political ideas of the text, the Privy Council suppressed the volume.”⁴⁰

While the emergence of a broader, inter-class conversation about the mechanics and values of governance would by no means have resulted in adoption of a “rigid and uniform view of English history,” the *Mirror’s* attention to the hazards of flattery, particularly with reference to its treatment of Richard II, would have directed this national conversation toward Bushy, Bagot, and Green whose depiction in chronicles, poetry, and drama is staggering both in volume and consistency of disdain. One indication of this comes from the poem, “Ther is a busch that is

³⁹ Ibid., 397.

⁴⁰ Ibid. 399.

forgrowe,” whose political allegory documents and bemoans the influence of the three men.⁴¹ Its authorship was likely anonymous and dates to roughly 1400, almost immediately following Richard’s deposition and the execution of his intimates. The poem begins with imagery of overgrown plants, Bushy’s name all too easily lending itself to the obvious pun. The ecological suggestions of shared sin and vice emanate from the way his name implies a loss of order and boundaries simultaneous with the overconsumption of resources. A plant grown bushy wants trimming and threatens to overtake the spaces and plants reserved to the nurture of other life:

Ther is a busch that is forgrowe;
 Crop hit welle, and hold hit lowe,
 Or elles hit wolle be wilde.
 The long gras that is so grene,
 Hit most be mowe, and raked clene--
 For-grownen hit hath the fellde.

Overgrown
Keep it

Most likely punning on Henry Green
Mowed
It has overgrown the field

The grete bagge, that is so mykille,
 Hit schal be kettord and maked litelle;
 The bothom is ny ought.⁴²
 Hit is so roton on ych a side,
 Ther nul no stych with odur abyde,
 To set theron a clout.

Bagot, mighty
Quartered

Thorw the busch a swan was sclayn;
 Of that sclawtur fewe wer fayne.
 Alas that hit be-tydde!
 Hit was a eyrer good and able,
 To his lord ryght profitable;
 Hit was a gentel bryde. (1-18)

The overgrown condition of the bush and grass quickly assumes a more threatening aspect when

⁴¹ Dean, “Literature of Richard II’s Reign and the Peasant’s Revolt: An Introduction.” *Medieval English Political Writings*. The poem’s translation and transmission have been both peculiar and amusing. Dean notes, “The manuscript’s current whereabouts is a mystery. [Thomas] Hamper transcribed the poem and sent it to the Society of Antiquaries in a letter dated “Deritend House, Birmingham, Dec. 5, 1823,” and he provided the somewhat cumbersome title, “Sarcastic Verses, Written by an Adherent to the House of Lancaster, in the last year of the reign of Richard the Second, A.D. 1399.” For some of the terms, especially in decoding the animal heraldry, Dean has deferred to Hamper’s suggestions. I have reproduced some of these notes in italics, as Dean has done, for convenience in reading translation.

⁴² The bottom [of the bag] is almost gone.

the last line of the first stanza notes that they have overgrown the field, insinuating that Richard's indulgence of Bushy and Green has both stripped England of its resources and also prevented it from achieving and maintaining a natural fecundity. The overgrown nature of the bush and grass, too, implicitly criticize the unbridled mobility and movement of men whose greed and unchecked freedom have violated the harmony and hierarchies of nature, perhaps setting a dangerous precedent for other weeds that might want to move beyond their station. In the second stanza, the poem moves on to identify Bagot and calls for a gruesome death via quartering. The author here, too, puns on his name, and where Bushy is imagined as an overgrown weed, the poem renders Bagot as a rotten rucksack on the verge of falling apart, each stitch disintegrated. As with Bushy, the poem portrays Bagot as someone who hoards and then wastes England's valuable resources. The third stanza clarifies the vices of Richard's favorites: through Bushy a "swan" was slain. Dean argues that the poem holds Bushy responsible for the murder of Thomas of Woodstock, the Duke of Gloucester, noting that Gloucester had adopted the badge of a swan from his father, Edward III.⁴³

The poem moves on to celebrate Bolingbroke's triumph over the three men and his rallying of other nobles to his cause, identifying him with the heraldry of the heron.

A heron is up and toke his flyt; In the north contré he is light (Thus here ye alle men saye). The stede colt with hym he brynges; These buth wonder and y thinges To se hem thus to playe...	<i>heron</i> <i>Thomas, Earl of Arundel</i>
--	--

Upon the busch the eron wolle reste, Of alle places it liketh hym beste, To loke aftur his pray. He wolle falle upon the grene; There he falleth hit wille be sene,	<i>Prey</i>
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⁴³ Dean, *Ibid.*

They wille not welle away. (43-48, 55-60).

Portrayed as the heron, Bolingbroke's arrival in the "north country" signals a welcome change: he brings hope of order back to England, and does so with the air of seeming recreation. As though with the ease of play, assuming command seems to suit him. His dispatch of Bushy and Green, in similar fashion, seems a simple fashion of the heron merely alighting upon the bush, the top-down movement gesturing toward a re-ordering of proper hierarchies and class. With the line "[Where] he falleth hit wille be sene," the poet seems especially to relish not just the fact of Bolingbroke's victory, but the public spectacle he makes in his triumph over Green.

Bolingbroke's representation as a bird again calls attention to the ecological dimensions of political sins—his ability to traverse air and land provides him with the sense of perspective to recognize the extent of the damage and disorder resulting from the Green infection. His alighting upon the bush and fall upon "grene" modifies the heron's more hawkish tendencies with the promise of order that comes through the implication of nest-making even as his victory over Green also offers him a vantage point to survey the landscape for further "pray."

What Shakespeare perhaps insinuates with Bushy's excited news regarding Gaunt's failing health in Act 1 Scene 3 grows clearer from sources like Edward Hall's *Chronicle*. He reports that Richard surrounded himself with a few friends whose sycophancy he seems to have richly rewarded. Following Bolingbroke's exile, Hall writes: "[Richard] defrauded [Bolingbroke] of his lawfull inheritaunce, receauyng the rentes and reuenues of all his patrimony, & geuyng to other that which was not his, distributed the dukes lands to his paresites and flattering foloers. This facte was adiudged of all the nobiltee to bee vnlawfull, vniust and vngodly."⁴ Popular consensus among the nobility against the unlawfulness of such an outrageous

⁴ Hall, *Hall's Chronicle*, 5

action seems not to have entered Bushy's mind, and indeed appears consistent with a political career that Carole Rawcliffe considers indicative of a "self-seeking opportunist, ready to sacrifice old loyalties in the interests of expediency."⁴⁵

Holinshed goes further than Hall, and on numerous occasions identifies Bushy, Bagot, and Green as the principal flatterers partially responsible for Richard's largesse and tyranny. Bushy, for example, seems to have been particularly inventive in appealing to Richard's vanity:

Sir Iohn Bushie in all his talke, when he proponed any matter vnto the king, did not attrIBUTE to him titles of honour, due and accustomed, but inuented vnused termes and such strange names, as were rather agreeable to the diuine maiestie of God, than to any earthlie potentate. The prince being desirous inough of all honour, and more ambitious than was requisite, seemed to like well of his speech, and gaued good eare to his talke.⁴⁶

Holinshed's account bristles at the ways that Bushy and Richard both appear have transgressed the limits of their proper stations, which he hastens to define through syntactic sequence and juxtaposition: the divine majesty of God takes clear primacy over *any* "earthlie potentate." A moment later, Holinshed repeats his insistence that good governance depends on recognizing and respecting the limits of one's divinely appointed station: Richard had more ambition than was "requisite." One wonders what "unused terms" and "strange names" Bushy might have invented to praise Richard, and their absence suggests that Holinshed condemns both the names as well as the very impulse of the speech act.

Much more could be revealed from historic sources regarding Bushy, Bagot, and Green, whose relationships with both Bolingbroke and Richard supply significant intrigue. The substance of these records largely justifies Bolingbroke's and Gaunt's animus.⁴⁷ It is true that

⁴⁵ Rawcliffe, "Bussy, Sir John"

⁴⁶ Holinshed, *Holinshed's Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland in Six Volumes*, 840.

⁴⁷ For primary sources, see Walsingham, *The Chronica Maiora of Thomas Walsingham 1376-1422*. For secondary accounts, see Bennet, *Richard II and the Revolution of 1399*, Jones, "Was Richard II a Tyrant? Richard's Use of the Books of Rules for Princes." and Rawcliffe, "Bussy, Sir John."

Shakespeare does not give his audience much opportunity to witness Bushy, Bagot, and Green performing the deeds that earn their hatred and executions. But even as their relatively tame dramatic conduct creates a space around his misbehavior, assessing Richard's guilt requires locating his deeds and motives in a larger moral ecosystem. It is my contention that audiences would have recognized Bushy, Bagot, and Greene as guilty and would have regarded Bolingbroke and Gaunt as valid in their criticisms, *even if* Bolingbroke's ambitions regarding the throne cloud his judgment. I also argue that audiences would have recognized the shared and interdependent nature of guilt that Shakespeare stages. His drama subsumes the ethical nuances of *Richard the Redeless* which renders the political sins of Richard's court as the violation of ecological balances and orders. And as Richard's guilt depends on the silence or advice of others, *our* recognition of this guilt may depend on occasionally taking the heron's wider view above a literary and historical ecosystem where the motifs in Shakespeare's drama join larger patterns.

Our Sceptre's G(u)ilt – Flattery and the Ecologies of Sin

Gaunt's final criticisms of Richard seem to have absorbed some of the motifs and criticisms made by "Richard the Redeless," for Gaunt too links Richard's crown with flattery, and depicts the king as having violated a sacred symbol of heaven's authority. For convenience, I will re-quote the lines.

And thou, too careless patient as thou art,
Commit'st thy anointed body to the cure
Of those physicians that first wounded thee:
A thousand flatterers sit within thy crown,
Whose compass is no bigger than thy head;
And yet, incaged in so small a verge,
The waste is no whit lesser than thy land. (2.1.97-103)

Gaunt emphasizes Richard's misrule and poor choices by casting the crown as infected and

corrupted by a “thousand flatterers” that “sit within the crown,” replacing the valuable gems and pearls that were once there, helping compose the crown’s dignity as a testament to glory of the monarchy. Gaunt juxtaposes the small “compass” of the crown around Richard’s head to the disastrous and far-reaching consequences of his crown’s violation: “the waste is no whit lesser than thy land,” casting the crown as a metaphor for Richard’s flattery-corrupted court. Anthony B. Dawson and Paul Yanchin suggest: “Flatterers occupy the space within the court, which is likened to the circumference (*compass*) of the King’s head, yet even though they take up ‘so small a verge,’ the waste...they create is as great as the whole nation.”⁴⁸

Shakespeare suggests the extent to which the wasting effects of flattery extend not only geographically but dynastically by pivoting the scene’s dramatic focus from Gaunt’s confrontation with Richard to the conspiratorial ambitions of Northumberland, Ross, and Willoughby. Their seemingly spontaneous meeting and conversation initiates the beginnings of Bolingbroke’s own court. Shakespeare invites us to see Northumberland and his peers initially as the anti-courtiers—polar opposites to Bushy, Bagot, and Green—with language that reflects not only sympathy for Bolingbroke but does so with royal terminology, anticipating his monarchical ascension.

LORD WILLOUGHBY: Tends that thou wouldst speak to the Duke of Hereford?
If it be so, out with it boldly, man;
Quick is mine ear to hear of good towards him.
LORD ROSS: No good at all that I can do for him;
Unless you call it good to pity him,
Bereft and gelded of his patrimony.
NORTHUMBERLAND: Now, afore God, 'tis shame such wrongs are borne
In him, a royal prince, and many more
Of noble blood in this declining land.
The king is not himself, but basely led
By flatterers; (2.1.232-242)

⁴⁸ Shakespeare, *Richard II*, 173.

Northumberland's identification of Bolingbroke as a "royal prince" anticipates increasingly glorified titles for Bolingbroke. Northumberland connects England's "decline" with Richard's corrupted identity, blaming his compromise on the influence of flatterers. This judgment accords with Gaunt's diagnosis, but differs significantly from Gaunt's motivations and perception of the conditions of monarchy. When Gaunt alleges that a thousand flatterers sit within the compass of Richard's crown, he blames Richard for the violation that begins in the court and then spreads to the rest of England. Gaunt acts as instructor and observer, and through his advice proposes an alternative to the flattery of the "physicians." Gaunt's liberal invective considerably contrasts to Northumberland, Ross, and Willoughby, who wait for Richard's departure before airing their grievances and pity for Bolingbroke.

NORTHUMBERLAND: Well lords, the Duke of Lancaster is dead.

ROSS: And living too, for now his son is Duke.

WILLOUGHBY: Barely in title, not in revenues.

NORTHUMBERLAND: Richly in both if justice had her right.

ROSS: My heart is great, but it must break with silence

Ere't be disburdened with a liberal tongue.

NORTHUMBERLAND: Nay, speak thy mind, and let him ne'er speak more
That speaks thy words again to do thee harm. (2.1.224-231)

Ross makes a show of calling attention to the conflict between his "great heart" and "liberal tongue" and does so to perform the appearance of loyalty to Richard in front of Northumberland and Willoughby. But the calling of attention to his own silence is, of course, disingenuous, since his performed silence works, in fact, to sound out the potential sympathies of the other two men. Were he truly loyal to Richard, he would have remained silent without feeling compelled to announce his silence to Northumberland and Willoughby.

The three men quickly discover themselves compatriots for Bolingbroke's fledgling faction, rehearsing the same accusations that Gaunt did not hesitate to make to Richard's face. Unlike Gaunt, however, who orients his discontent toward shaping Richard into a king capable

and worthy of serving England, Ross, Northumberland, and Willoughby's grievances lead them to abandon Richard and make plans to join Bolingbroke. Northumberland suggests "If then we shall shake off our slavish yoke / Imp out our drooping country's broken wing, / Redeem from broken pawn the blemished crown, / Wipe off the dust that hides our sceptre's gilt / And make high majesty look like itself, / Away with me in post to Ravenspur." (3.1.291-296). Whereas Gaunt's criticism of Richard's court assigns the crown's undoing and blame to the king, Northumberland and his conspirators assume they have both the agency and the mandate to unburden themselves of Richard's rule. But more importantly, Northumberland's rhetoric betrays the belief that they can *choose* to confer the conditions of kingship—or, rather, conditions of *a* form of kingship—on Bolingbroke. In shifting from "shake off our slavish yoke" to "Imp out our drooping country's wing," Northumberland signals the possibility of redefining his rebellion not merely as resistance to Richard but replacing him in order that they "might make high majesty look like itself."

Northumberland and his friends may hope that Bolingbroke will both replace and excel Richard, but their rebellion against Richard *cannot* set Bolingbroke up as a one-for-one exchange if all that Bolingbroke requires is merely "looking" like "itself." Yet it's clear from Northumberland's sequence of metaphors that he imagines the appearance of high majesty as sufficient for the installation of a new monarchy. His speech directs our attention to the crown as an artifact constituted by vision in describing it as "blemished." His description of the sceptre maintains this motif, suggesting that Richard's misrule has "blemished" the sceptre with a layer of dust that "hides the sceptre's gilt." Northumberland imagines that his defection to Bolingbroke will, as though through a good cleaning, restore the majesty of the sceptre and thereby restore the monarchy to its original dignity. Northumberland's logic works against itself,

however. His regimen for restoring high majesty means to divorce Richard from his office, but attempts to secure high majesty as a stable condition. Northumberland cannot avoid invoking Richard's figure as king—the descriptor “blemished” modifies “crown,” and both words imply Richard's face. The sceptre too extends, via synecdoche, to Richard's hands, but Northumberland carefully avoids naming Richard, using instead the symbols of monarchy. His proposals to “redeem,” “wipe off,” and “make high majesty look like itself” all articulate the hope of returning the monarchy to an original condition which Richard has violated even as he imagines that this original condition can stably pass to Bolingbroke without corruption or compromise.

Northumberland's formulation between “blemish” and “dust” proposes that the outer layer of grime that infects the monarchy may simply be wiped away in handing the kingdom and its symbols over to Bolingbroke, but the layer of dust that he plans to clean off *also* emphasizes the layered thinness of “our sceptre,” whose majesty is “gilt.” Northumberland's concern with the scepter's gilt reinforces the appearance of majesty rather than its essential condition. Appearance in this case is also particularly tenuous. Though gilding as a metallurgical practice spans thousands of years and dozens of cultures, the process of gilding nonetheless confers ornamental or decorative value upon an object through the careful application of a very thin layer of precious metal—sometimes 1/280,000 inch.⁴⁹ According to Conservation and Design International, this thinness unsurprisingly results in a peculiar fragility in the application process: “A sheet of gold leaf is so fragile that it is impossible to handle barehanded without it tearing and collapsing, practically into thin air. Gold leaf is so fine that it is incapable of supporting its own weight.”⁵⁰ Gilder Fabrice Gohard and his apprentice, Laura, demonstrate this fragility at the 3:40

⁴⁹ The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, “Gilding.”

⁵⁰ Bernacki and Associates, Inc. “The Art of Gilding.”

mark of this [video](#)¹ which briefly details the work of restoring a significant portion of the gilt surfaces at Versailles. Gilding “flatters” the object to which it is applied—it does not change the essential condition of the object underneath; it rather masks or hides it, ennobling the object through an amelioration of appearances. Northumberland’s promise to “make high majesty look like itself,” connected with the scepter’s “gilt” reconstitutes “high majesty” from a monarchical quality that proceeds from the guarantee of divine right to a manufactured condition—bestowed or taken by adequately ambitious people.

Northumberland’s ambition for high majesty carefully sanitizes his proposal from any indecorous or forward mention of deposition by focusing on the disembodied crown and sceptre. He flatters himself as something of a housecleaner or artifact restorer. Critically, Northumberland’s evaluation of Richard’s guilt also asserts an ecological vision of political sins. This appears perhaps most clearly in the way that Northumberland represents England’s injury as through the victimized metaphors of the “slavish yoke” and “broken wing.” One he means to throw off and the other “imp out,” but these actions enjoy rather less political stability than the restoration of balance and order that Bolingbroke seems to herald as the heron in *Richard the Redeless*. The author of the poem can sanction and applaud these actions because Bushy and Green are merely bad courtiers. But if “yoke” and “wing” are read as in the same lexicon of bruised monarchy with “blemished crown,” Northumberland’s visions of transfer the implications of hostility and rebellion from Richard’s subjects to Richard himself. Thus, in his attempt to dismiss Richard’s haunting political presence, Northumberland’s attention to the symbols of state only intensifies the impossibility of restoring high majesty while awarding it to

Bolingbroke. This impossibility occurs because of the way his rhetoric attempts to distinguish the crown and sceptre as material objects that can maintain their authority even if separated from the dynastic succession that ensures Richard's legitimacy. Ernst Kantorowicz explains that this expectation emerged from a long history of Biblical and classical precedents that understand objects like the crown to possess a dual nature, both material and spiritual.

In ancient times, writes Baldus, when the Roman Empire was in its prime, one used to say that the emperor, whose "material and visible crown" consisted of a diadem, had his "invisible" crown imposed by God... There was a visible, material, exterior gold circle or diadem with which the Prince was vested and adorned at his coronation; and there was an invisible and immaterial Crown—encompassing all the royal rights and privileges indispensable for the government of the body politic—which was perpetual and descended either from God directly or by the dynastic right of inheritance.⁵²

Kantorowicz argues that the material crown directs attention to the *spiritual* crown, and it is *this* crown that God creates and endows with the "rights and privileges" that enable and legitimize the conditions of governance. The fine materials like gold and silver that comprise the material crown serve as analogues that testify to the glory and authority with which God has invested the monarch, deputized with God's glory to help order the cosmos. Thomas Elyot testifies to this material and spiritual order in *The Boke of the Governour* when he writes:

And like as the angels whiche be most feruent in contemplation, be highest exalted in glorie and also the fire which is the most pure of elementes, and also doth clarifie the other inferiour elementes, is deputed to the highest sphere or place; so in this worlde, they which excelle...oughte to be set in a more highe place than the residue where they may se and also be sene; that by the beames of theyr excellent witte shewed through the glass of auctorite.⁵³

Elyot's presentation of the prince and his hierarchy emphasizes the visual nature of divinely-sanctioned authority. In their "high places," princes, like the angels animated with fire, perform their governance partially through "beames" that display their authority. The crown, like the

⁵² Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Medieval Political Theology*, 336-337.

⁵³ Elyot, *The Boke of the Governour*, 5.

king, is understood to compress the invisible and visible together, acquiring divine sanction and power from the order of the angels, but also belonging to the realm of the visible in order to properly inspire reverence and fear among the king's subjects.

Kantorowicz also notes that some European monarchs were anxious about the foundation of their authority and sought to render the divine mandate of their authority in more visible terms while blurring the line between the crown's status as a physical object and as divine signifier. A French crown accomplished this ambiguity, for example, because it "contained a thorn from the Crown of Thorns and therefore indeed was also a holy relic...in this case material and immaterial crowns were merged into one another."⁵⁴ The crown and family of royal objects to which it belongs thus possess a very specific agency: the power of witness to a monarch's authority, and specifically that authority as a perpetuating condition of both human and divine lineage. Further insight can be gained in considering relics more specifically, since their agency and narratives overlap with those of the crown, as Kantorowicz has noted. Cynthia Hahn has argued, for example, that reliquaries perform an inherently social role through their simultaneous presentation and concealment of relics in order to *locate* an audience—or congregation—in a specific historical and spiritual narrative whose values and traditions the reliquary reasserts:

An object of continuing power, the reliquary...was created to be a dynamic part of the chorus of saints in company with other relics and reliquaries, representing the Church and its saints and their powers. It has been used, throughout its history, as an object to be carried and manipulated, displayed and presented...a relic is a physical object that is understood to carry the *virtus* of a saint or Christ, literally the virtue but more accurately the power of the holy person...relics are defined through the recognition by some audience of the presence of a power that leads to a certain desirability.⁵⁵

The public display and parading of the reliquary orients the community in which it is displayed to a contemplation of either the life of Christ or the life of the particular saint whose relic the

⁵⁴ Kantorowicz, 339.

⁵⁵ Hahn, "What Do Reliquaries Do for Relics?" 290-291.

reliquary contains. Communal and individual desires for the acquisition of virtue, power, or other spiritual goods correspond with the way the reliquary testifies to the relic's specific history and the extent to which the audience *grants* credulity to the testimony. Kantorowicz and Hahn demonstrate that crowns and relics acquire their social agency through a fusion of the material and the spiritual in ways that Northumberland's rhetoric uncouples. He suggestively invites the audience to imagine him and his friends presenting it to Bolingbroke with the sceptre, both objects having been cleansed of the dust that lingers from an unnamed, previous owner. But Northumberland's omission of Richard's name and office cannot disconnect the crown from the material history of human succession, nor can he confer new legitimacy upon the crown in place of God's. James Funk has persuasively argued that Northumberland's conspicuous attempts to sanitize high majesty of Richard in actuality draws attention to what he calls an "ontological gap" between the person of the king and the divine authority he is supposed to represent. Funk argues, "Northumberland's language...similarly exposes and attempts to conceal the space between the person of the king and the God-like majesty that he represents...the illegitimate king must be re-named as legitimate through the deliberate misuse of language, a linguistic impropriety that threatens Bolingbroke's rise even as it ensures Richard's fall."⁵⁶

Northumberland's invitation to Ross and Willoughby to ride with him to Ravenspur curiously performs the warning and diagnosis that Gaunt delivers to Richard regarding his court of flatterers and does so in terms that again invoke the ecological implications of political sins that prove transgressively mobile, degrading both person and space: "A thousand flatterers sit within thy crown, / Whose compass is no bigger than thy head; / And yet, incaged in so small a verge, / The waste is no whit lesser than thy land." (2.1.109-113). The telescoping from the

⁵⁶ Funk, "Making High Majesty Look Like Itself."

seemingly limited and intimate compass of Richard's crown and court to the waste of his land imagines an outbreak or torrent of devastation that Northumberland and his friends embody a sickness that begins with Richard. Their departure to Ravenspur extends the consequences of the flattery that Gaunt's desperate and final attempts could not staunch. As Richard entertains Bushy, Bagot, and Green to his calamity, Northumberland, Ross, and Willoughby, with their promises to restore "high majesty" go to flatter Bolingbroke into believing that he can reign with just as much authority and right as Richard.

Flattery's infectious spread from Richard to Northumberland and then to Bolingbroke comes, further, through the homophonic suggestiveness of the phrase "our sceptre's gilt" where "gilt" also suggests "guilt." "Our sceptre's guilt" returns us to one of the play's thematic concerns with determining where to assign culpability in understanding Richard's misrule and deposition. I would argue that Gaunt's connection of Richard's court to the waste of England's land asserts an understanding of sin and guilt that operates as an ecosystem; a moral universe characterized by the possibilities of shared and communal sin. Gaudet's argument that Shakespeare crafts an "oblique rendering" of Bushy, Bagot, and Green helpfully highlights Richard's own willfulness and vice, but also treats sin and culpability a bit like Northumberland treats high majesty; as an object or condition that must belong to one person or another that defies co-ownership. Yet the play's persistent interest in flattery—whether invoked, alleged, or staged—suggests understanding sin in more complicated ways; to repeat *Yuval Eylon and David Heyd, as* "essentially *inter-personal or social.*"⁵⁷

Northumberland's reception of Bolingbroke and their ensuing relationship stages the nearness of flattery and self-deception, establishing the conditions necessary for Bolingbroke to

⁵⁷ Eylon and Heyd, "Flattery," 687.

weasel his way to the crown. Indeed, from the very outset, Northumberland seems only too happy to fawn over Bolingbroke as his new, prospective king.

BOLINGBROKE: How far is it, my lord, to Berkeley now?

NORTHUMBERLAND: Believe me, noble lord,

I am a stranger here in Gloucestershire:

These high wild hills and rough uneven ways
Draws out our miles, and makes them wearisome,
And yet your fair discourse hath been as sugar,
Making the hard way sweet and delectable.

But I bethink me what a weary way
From Ravenspurgh to Cotswold will be found
In Ross and Willoughby, wanting your company,
Which, I protest, hath very much beguiled

The tediousness and process of my travel:
But theirs is sweetened with the hope to have
The present benefit which I possess;

And hope to joy is little less in joy
Than hope enjoy'd: by this the weary lords
Shall make their way seem short, as mine hath done
By sight of what I have, your noble company.

BOLINGBROKE: Of much less value is my company
Than your good words. But who comes here? (2.3.1-19)

Bolingbroke's question, which could have been answered expeditiously with something like "I know not" instead results in a giddy outpouring from Northumberland, weary of his travels. But the "wild hills" and "wearisome" miles melt have melted away from his care under the balm of Bolingbroke's sugar-sweet discourse. Assailed with similar hardships, Ross and Willoughby cannot possibly enjoy the same "delectable" conditions that Northumberland does in sharing Bolingbroke's fellowship, but he argues that even the mere hope that they shall soon be united with Bolingbroke's company likewise sweetens the hardship of their sojourn. Bolingbroke catches on, and returns the favor: "Of much less value is my company / Than your good words." Bolingbroke takes a shine to his newest courtier and, essentially, encourages him to *continue* speaking.

A few moments later, when Ross and Willoughby arrive, the flattery continues and Bolingbroke gestures toward the rewards of their service without being so gauche as to suggest that their rewards will come at Richard's expense:

NORTHUMBERLAND: Here come the Lords of Ross and Willoughby,
Bloody with spurring, fiery-red with haste.
HENRY BOLINGBROKE: Welcome, my lords. I wot your love pursues
A banish'd traitor: all my treasury
Is yet but unfelt thanks, which more enrich'd
Shall be your love and labour's recompense.
LORD ROSS: Your presence makes us rich, most noble lord.
LORD WILLOUGHBY: And far surmounts our labour to attain it.
HENRY BOLINGBROKE: Evermore thanks, the exchequer of the poor;
Which, till my infant fortune comes to years,
Stands for my bounty. But who comes here? (2.3.57-67)

Northumberland hurries to help Bolingbroke recognize Ross and Willoughby as cut from the same loyal and eager cloth as he: "bloody with spurring, fiery-red with haste." He means to sound eager and ready for action, though a more conscientious Bolingbroke might have taken pause to consider that haste proves a poor metric for evaluating loyalty. As their abandonment of Richard might suggest, "haste" seems more the mark of the fair-weather courtier. But Bolingbroke greets them with the same welcome and grace that he extended to Northumberland, promising vague rewards that "shall be your love and labour's recompense." His phrase "shall be" acts as an invitation to do more, yet stops short of naming which labours he hopes they might accomplish. Ross falls in step with Northumberland, exclaiming the riches of Bolingbroke's mere presence.

Bolingbroke's reiteration of thanks, again, encourages both the continuation of their labors and the continuation of the kind of speech that, while lacking specifics, makes room for Bolingbroke's budding, though unspecified, ambitions. His amiable tone continues to defer any articulation of clear ambition. When he remarks "till my infant fortune comes to years," he

means, on one level, he hopes for the recouping of his ancestral estate, lands, and goods, yet his naming of fortune also seems to imply he has submitted to cosmic and unpredictable forces beyond his control. His formulation regarding fortune stands independent of his action or intervention, as though its fulfillment might come about of its own accord. Early modern audiences might have believed the invocation coming from someone else whose prospects were less clear. Phyllis Rackin notes that notions of the caprice and power of Fortune permeate Shakespeare's histories: "The first tetralogy begins with a loose chronicle structure that depicts a confused and confusing world where force and fortune are the only arbiters of events."⁵⁸ Yet knowing Bolingbroke's eventual seizure of the monarchy, his naming of "fortune" seems more an attempt to distance himself from the agency and motivations required to attain the means to repay his followers with more than gratitude.

Northumberland and his fellow courtiers continue with Bolingbroke to address each other with ambiguous yet suggestive language that typifies their relationship for the rest of the play. Peter Lake observes: "From the outset, Northumberland and the others treat Bolingbroke with rather more respect than a returning duke of Lancaster might expect. In return, Bolingbroke is both elaborately courteous and knowingly coy. But if they start to treat Bolingbroke like a king, the rebels also start to refer to Richard as something less than their sovereign."⁵⁹ Lake points to Act Three Scene Three where Northumberland speaks with surprising informality:

NORTHUMBERLAND: The news is very fair and good, my lord:
Richard not far from hence hath hid his head.

DUKE OF YORK: It would beseem the Lord Northumberland
To say 'King Richard:' alack the heavy day
When such a sacred king should hide his head.

NORTHUMBERLAND: Your grace mistakes; only to be brief
Left I his title out.

⁵⁸ Rackin, *Stages of History*, 27-28.

⁵⁹ Lake, *How Shakespeare Put Politics on the Stage*, 255.

DUKE OF YORK: The time hath been,
Would you have been so brief with him, he would
Have been so brief with you, to shorten you,
For taking so the head, your whole head's length.
HENRY BOLINGBROKE: Mistake not, uncle, further than you should.
DUKE OF YORK: Take not, good cousin, further than you should.
Lest you mistake the heavens are o'er our heads.
HENRY BOLINGBROKE: I know it, uncle, and oppose not myself
Against their will. But who comes here? (3.3.5-20)

As Bolingbroke's rhetoric in Act Two uses ambiguous language to make space for his ambitious courtiers, Northumberland responds by flattering Bolingbroke's ambitions with a similar space, created by the evacuation of Richard's title. His pathetic excuse "only to be brief / Left I his title out" signals his readiness to offer Bolingbroke the title he refuses to Richard. York's castigation of Northumberland, particularly his inventive wordplay with "brief" and "shorten" means to recall the dueling rhetoric of Gaunt and Richard. Here the pattern of wisdom, caution, and dismissal repeats, and Bolingbroke sanctions Northumberland's implied flattery by rebuking his uncle. His warning "mistake not, uncle, further than you should" audaciously cautions York against a vaguely defined transgression of his station even as Bolingbroke's and Northumberland's transgressions dominate the scene. Despite his declaration to remain as "neuter" in Act Two, Scene 3, York's conscience stings him enough to remind Bolingbroke of the prospect of divine witness and judgment: "Take not, good cousin, further than you should / Lest you mistake the heavens are o'er our heads."

Bolingbroke's eventual transformation into Henry IV suffers more and more compromises and embarrassments; his attempts to shore up and legitimize his monarchy—of his followers attempt to remove the sceptre's "dust"—often only emphasize the artificiality of his "high majesty;" as if he were looking into Richard's poorly reassembled mirror to reassure himself of his royal visage. Though by comparison *Richard III* possesses far more explicitly

theological language to frame the characters' moral crises, *Richard II* occurs in the same moral universe and, if anything, expands the limits of that universe while complicating the stakes. If in *Richard III* we witness characters like Richard and Clarence who testify to the connections between individual agency and individual judgment, *Richard II* both confirms and recontextualizes that correspondence within a much larger moral ecosystem. By tracing flattery's influence from Richard's court to Bolingbroke's, Shakespeare justifies Gaunt's vision of England as a land laid to waste. But whereas Gaunt assigns this guilt primarily to Richard and secondarily to Bushy, Bagot, and Green with their evil counsel, Shakespeare demonstrates that Richard's failings constitute a communal combination of vicious action and *failure* to act; that England's descent into civil war depends as much on the *silence* of Bushy, Bagot, and Green as upon their flattery and poor counsel. Moreover, these failures cannot be quarantined with Richard's ailing monarchy. Shakespeare's establishment of Ross, Northumberland, and Willoughby as Bolingbroke's anti-courtiers demonstrates the mysterious and unpredictably transgressive power of sin to corrupt even the best of intentions. Bolingbroke's immediate entertaining of flattery upon return from his exile and his willful self-deception repeat the very same mistakes that provided precedent for Richard's deposition. If *Richard II* makes an argument in favor of divine right, that argument must be that God's authorization of monarchy confers sanction, but not necessarily *sanctification*. The justified are not necessarily just; those who wield the right are not necessarily righteous. Shakespeare squints at the glories of monarchy with a little more reservation than Elyot's enamored gazing up at the purity of majesty. Bolingbroke reveals the danger of insisting on the perfection of character as a prerequisite for his submission, little suspecting that his own mistakes and foibles will soon supply what *was* Richard's kingdom with similar grievances, and a legacy whose heritage of sin

will dramatically shape—and misshape—the reigns of his son and grandson. Henry V and Henry VI also belong to a moral world where the individual conscience is charged to justify every word and action—every silence and inaction—and where the failure to reckon these things rightly can result in both immediate or delayed consequences for the self, for the community, and for the nation.

Chapter Four - All the Perfumes of Arabia: *Macbeth* and the Burden of Knowledge

In my introduction, I argued that Shakespeare's dramatic theology stages sin as a sequence of events that manifest across the spectrum of human experience—body, mind, and spirit—and from the individual to the broader community, and even into the physical spaces they traffic. This sequence of events begins with an epistemological crisis in which an individual judges himself as exceptional to the moral and legal laws that govern his world, in which God and monarch possess the right to create those laws and prosecute their transgression. In *Richard III*, Shakespeare demonstrates the role of the conscience in this prosecution where figures like Clarence and Richard suffer the overwhelming of their senses by saturated, phenomenological excesses. Their psychological fracturing, social isolation, and eventual death all follow from this encounter with an abundance of sin. In *Macbeth*, Shakespeare presents a similar set of concerns and agencies; supernatural figures and visions haunt Macbeth and Lady Macbeth along with the lurking specters of their harassed (if momentarily sublimated) consciences. But whereas in *Richard III*, the experience of sin presents as an overwhelming of the senses, in *Macbeth* Shakespeare sophisticates his approach by expanding his phenomenology to dissolve and disorient the senses in which Macbeth and Lady Macbeth prove willing participants.

Shakespeare signals Macbeth's ongoing and willed epistemological crises, so necessary to the self-deception and hubris that enable his bloodier ambitions, by presenting numerous sequences of sensory disorientation and self-destruction. That these linked conditions accompany Macbeth's transformation from man into monster has long been a convention of critical traditions surrounding the play. A.C. Bradley observes, for example, that disorientation and violence seem to arise as a quality of the play's very "atmosphere" rendered both dark and

bloody: “Darkness, we may even say blackness, broods over this tragedy. It is remarkable that almost all the scenes which at once recur to memory take place either at night or in some dark spot...It is as if the poet saw the whole story through an ensanguined mist...”¹ Atmospheric tumult opens the play and seems to correlate it with three witches—the first characters we meet. Because of theological, literary, and dramatic conventions, early modern audiences would have recognized the witches almost as a cliché of deception and evil with perhaps even the expectation that *they* serve as the principal authors of mischief and wickedness in the play’s proceedings.

Shakespeare does little at first to dispel the force of such assumptions. Indeed, the opening scenes juxtaposition of witchcraft and the powerful storm seems invite such speculations. Stagings of witchcraft in *Macbeth* signal Shakespeare and Middleton’s clear debts to a variety of mythological, literary, and theological discourses—their physical appearances, their cryptic knowledge of the future, their ritual, incantations, the conjuring of spectral phenomena, and their subservience to Hecate. In these traditions, witches emerge as figures of powerful female criminality, sexual predation, and diabolical enchantment. But Shakespeare’s witches significantly lack many of these more insidious conventions that repeat and maintain the trope of female aggressor/male victim. This evacuation of their expected agency makes room for Macbeth and Lady Macbeth to express and pursue the terms of their own doomed ambitions and the auto-dehumanizing decisions they knowingly make. This revelation of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth’s role in their own demise participates in a career-long interest Shakespeare maintained in the conditions of culpability as well as the creation and then subversion of audience

¹ Bradley, *Shakespearean Tragedy. Lectures on Hamlet, Othello, King Lear, Macbeth*, 333-336.

expectation.² Thus, as the play unfolds, Shakespeare persistently stages moments of blindness, numbness and other sensory failures that arise *from* Macbeth and Lady Macbeth as expressions of their aversion to moral knowledge and the prosecution of their consciences.

The play's opening immediately invites us to establish a cohesion of sensory disorientation and witchcraft. A storm thunders through the air and three witches emerge from a landscape only briefly illumined by flashes of lightning. Their cryptic exchange alludes to an upcoming meeting with Macbeth:

FIRST WITCH: When shall we three meet again?

In thunder, lightning, or in rain?

SECOND WITCH: When the hurly-burly's done,
When the battle's lost and won?

THIRD WITCH: That will be ere the set of sun.

FIRST WITCH: Where the place?

SECOND WITCH: Upon the heath.

THIRD WITCH: There to meet with Macbeth.

FIRST WITCH: I come, Grimalkin.

SECOND WITCH: Paddock calls.

THIRD WITCH: Anon.

ALL: Fair is foul, and foul is fair,
Hover through the fog and filthy air. (1.1.1-11)³

The scene passes quickly, charged with portent; the witches refer to the tumult of a hurly-burly, an upcoming battle, and Macbeth. As an introduction to the play, Act One Scene One proves confusing and jarring. Until the frenetic staccato scenes of Act Five that present Macbeth's final moments in flashes of battle, Act One Scene One remains—at least in the amount of dialogue—the shortest in the play, raising questions and resolving none.

² Paul Gaudet, for example, has shown that the weight of Richard II's culpability emerges in the play independent of dramatic evidence for the charges of flattery and sycophancy that Bolingbroke and John of Gaunt allege (see my longer discussion in Chapter Three, as well as Gaudet's essay, "The 'Parasitical' Counselors in Shakespeare's Richard II). Similarly, John Cooper has also argued that this subversion of audience expectation occurs with Shakespeare's revelation of Shylock's sympathetic dimensions over and against Jewish racial clichés. See his essay "Shylock's Humanity."

³ Shakespeare, *Macbeth*. All citations taken from *The Norton Shakespeare* edited by Stephen Greenblatt.

Besides the scene's employment of thunder and lightning, the witches' brief dialogue offers other modes of discombobulation, even as their incantatory end-rhymed speech aims to charm the audience as with music. The witches refer to the battle and Macbeth in ways designed to raise questions that go unanswered for the time: what battle? Who is fighting and why? When and where will it happen? Does the victory invite celebration or sorrow? Likewise, who is Macbeth? How is he connected, if at all, to the battle?⁴ In the midst of considering these questions, new ones arise that invite the audience to question the reliability of their senses. Macbeth's introduction also marks the breaking of the incantatory rhythm established with the first cycle of dialogue between the three witches. When the first witch again speaks, no rhyme accompanies her utterance of "place," whereas the half rhyme of "heath" and "Macbeth" reintroduces a pattern of speech which the audience has come to recognize but can no longer predict. To this confusion of questions and sound, the witches add their final declaration "Hover through the fog and filthy air!" The unity of their utterance briefly re-enacts the semblance of order established through their end rhymes even as it names conditions and elements that challenge the power of human sense to order and manage the physical world. The witches leave us with the words "fog" and "filthy air" ringing in the theater, invoking conditions that announce the uselessness of sight as a mode of knowledge and perception. The witches' departure invokes conditions that hamper sight as a mode of knowledge and perception. Indeed, the play returns our attention to consideration of the sensory with images which emphasize sight even as they prevent sight. To "fog" and "filthy air" we can add "bubbles," "smoke," and "fume. These elemental features that trouble Scotland's geography gesture toward the sensory, moral, and

⁴ Naturally, these questions achieve their greatest potency for someone who has not seen the play before.

epistemic fogs for toward which Macbeth and Lady Macbeth stumble, hoping to avoid witness from others and themselves.

Shakespeare continues to stage problems of perception, and it soon becomes clear that the “fog” and “filthy air” share their contaminated opacity with the moral and spiritual landscapes of Scotland. When Banquo and Macbeth encounter the witches on the heath, they hesitate to recognize them even as people. Macbeth greets them with hesitation: “Speak, if you can. What are you” (1.3.45). Their sudden prophecy of Macbeth’s promising political prospects fails to convince Banquo that the voices and vision supply enough evidence to certify personhood: “I’ the’ name of truth / Are ye fantastical or that indeed / Which outwardly ye show?” (1.3.50-52) The witches’ sudden manner of disappearance only leads to further troubled speculation about the elements that had once seemed known and stable:

...Say from whence
You owe this strange intelligence, or why
Upon this blasted heath you stop our way
With such prophetic greeting. Speak, I charge you.
 [*The*] WITCHES *vanish*
BANQUO The earth hath bubbles, as the water has,
And these are of them. Whither are they vanished?
MACBETH: Into the air, and what seemed corporal
Melted as breath into the wind. (1.3.73-79)

To Macbeth’s demands for clarification, the witches add further astonishment and simply vanish. Banquo compares their disappearance to bubbles, grasping for an explanation. Beyond approximating the swiftness with which the witches transition from presence to absence, the Oxford English Dictionary also suggests that figurative uses of “bubble” connotes: “Anything fragile, unsubstantial, empty, or worthless; a deceptive show.” The term thus, accompanied by the sudden disappearance of the witches, casts doubt on the nature of the “strange intelligence” that they provide. When Macbeth writes to Lady Macbeth of his encounter with the witches, his

reflection further emphasizes the instability and capricious power that authorize the prospect of his ambition: “When I burned in desire to question them further, *they made themselves air, into which they vanished.*” (1.5.3-4).⁵ The curious phrase has the effect of rendering the air as somehow complicit with the witches’ dark power—as if Macbeth (and the audience) might reasonably expect the witches to remake themselves *from* air at a moment’s notice. Banquo’s phrase “and these are of them” also unsettlingly links the witches in all their power and questionable motives to the earth itself. That the earth originates or harbors the witches further adds to the sense of collusion between the dark hierarchy to which the witches belong and the menace of Scotland’s environment. The witches’ manner of appearance and disappearance, combined with Banquo’s speculation, renders the boundaries between the supernatural and natural, the spiritual and the physical, as decidedly permeable.

While the scene’s action and dialogue serve to disorient our sense of sight and hearing, the presence of the witches themselves would have, in one sense, located and oriented early modern audiences to the extent that they would have recognized the witches themselves as figures of sensual and sensory confusion, as well as figures of transgression and malice that posed particular dangers to marriage and procreation. A long and colorful tradition of demonological texts, including the 1597 publication of *Daemonologie in the forme of a Dialogue & News from Scotland* by King James, made them a particularly conspicuous. In the same scene that Macbeth and Banquo encounter them, the witches recite a strange and horrible litany of deeds and promises of violence to come.

FIRST WITCH: I myself have all the other,
And the very ports they blow,
All the quarters that they know
I’th’ shipman’s card.

⁵ Emphasis added.

I'll drain him dry as hay.
Sleep shall neither night nor day
Hang upon his penthouse lid.
He shall live a man forbid...
Here I have a pilot's thumb,
Wrecked as homeward he did come. (1.3.13-20, 26-27)

The first witch possesses horrible power, and the inclination to practice it with deadly and ghastly effect. She also collects gruesome tokens or keepsakes of humans who suffer calamity.

These cryptic boastings seem to portend ill for Macbeth, but these promises never actually materialize on stage as actions taken against Macbeth or, indeed, anyone in the play.

Shakespeare introduces the possibility and potential for the witches to function as the play's principal antagonists, but this only remains a suggested rather than actual threat.

Macbeth absorbs and repeats many tropes and conventions of witchcraft rendered in popular works from literature as well as drama, but he decisively excludes elements that likely contributed to the enduring popularity of the witch as a figure of magical female aggression. Some critics have noticed that Shakespeare's staging of witchcraft revises their conventional powers and moral bearing. But the full force of the play's invocation and then neutering of witchcraft in light of a traditional representations reaching back to Greco-Roman literature has not been a prominent feature of recent criticism.⁶ For early modern crowds familiar with the "witch craze," Shakespeare's refusal to criminalize his "weird sisters" in the explicit and bold

⁶ James Calderwood observes: " 'Soliciting,' however, is Macbeth's word (1.3.130). The witches solicit no one. They merely reveal the future. Macbeth's imagination invents the murder of Duncan." Marvin Rosenberg similarly asserts that "Macbeth offers no confirmation, explanation, or rationalization of any demonological scheme." These observations have perhaps not been forceful enough to clarify the play's ambivalence about the conventional power of witchcraft. More recently, for example, Laura Annawyn Shamas cites Rosenberg, but goes on to herald *Macbeth's* staging of witchcraft as one which powerfully fuses Christian and pagan iconography: "Thus, in *Macbeth*, Shakespeare joins an Anglo-Saxon mythological trio to a Greco Roman three-headed deity, fusing together aspects of two separate pantheons in order to create a unique cosmology involving female trinitarian archetypes." Stephanie Irene Spoto, too, largely accepts witches in *Macbeth* as conventional: "The witch occupies the wicked opposite of the ideal mother/housewife... representative of a female power that disturbs predominant societal norms."

terms that had come to typify them elsewhere represents a powerful departure from a variety of representational traditions. This limitation of diabolic agency underscores and highlights the catastrophe and tragedy of Macbeth's choices which Shakespeare stages as ultimately free and uncompelled, a victim of his own burning desire.

Shakespeare's refusal to stage the witches according to the tropes of their popular villainy signals a bold and independent act of omission at a time when traditional fears of witchcraft had only been intensified by royal attention. In his short and intense book, *Daemonologie*, King James aims to educate and caution his readers. In his introduction, James warns that witches can both cure and render diseases for whom they will, as can also afflict some men with impotency. Their power to perform these acts proceeds from their submission to the devil who, according to James, endows the witches with all his significant powers of illusion. It is by his power, for example, that witches can deceive the senses through the manipulation of the elements:

For if the deuill may forme what kind of impressions he pleases in the aire, as I have said before, speaking of *Magie*, why may he not far easilier thicken & obscure the air, that is next about them by contracting it strait together, that the beams of any other mans eyes, cannot pearce thorow the same, to see them?...that being transformed in the likeness of a little beaste or foule, they will come and pearce through whatsoever house or Church, through all ordinarie passages be closed, by whatsoever open, the aire may enter in at.⁷

This passage is careful to describe the experience of sensory disorientation as a product of diabolical powers applied against human subjects through control exerted over the environment so that the "beams" of a man's eyes can't penetrate the air. The second form of deception comes through the same means—as the devil or a witch can prevent the operation of sight by rendering the air too dense for light or vision to penetrate, the air may similarly be molded into deceptive shapes like animals and birds that fool vision through the presentation of a persuasive image.

⁷ James I. *Daemonology*, 39.

Shakespeare clearly maintains some of these conventions of deceptive optics in his presentation of the witches. The modes of their appearance and ability to vanish (“they made themselves air”) accords with James’ description. But as I will later demonstrate, Macbeth and Lady Macbeth are in of themselves *far* more responsible for sensory disorientation than the witches.

James’ rendering of the witches essentially repeats early modern and medieval tropes of witchcraft with emphases on sensory deception, violence, and female transgression combined with the myth of masculine innocence. These stereotypes were powerfully communicated across the continent to England and across denominational division by the immensely popular *Malleus Maleficarum*, first published in 1486 by German inquisitor Heinrich Kramer. Fewer than 40 years after its initial publication in 1487, *Maleficarum* was devoured by readers in the course of 13 editions, offering to a public ravenous for the scary, sexy, and supernatural in what Sydney Anglo has designated “scholastic pornography.”⁸ Though the original circumstances of its publication stand at significant remove from Shakespeare’s audience, Jeffrey Burton Russell has argued that the *Malleus* achieved an authority on the subject of witchcraft that faced little competition or revision: “its ideas were eagerly borrowed even by Protestants who wholeheartedly rejected other aspects of Catholicism. Witchcraft continued to develop in the following two centuries, but departures from and additions to the phenomenon as set forth in the *Malleus* were minor.”⁹ Kramer argued that witches could utterly deceive the senses through illusion *or* counterfeit their perceptions by tampering with the imagination. Kramer’s volume asserts authority by staging an almost clinical approach to the problem of witches, dividing the book’s scope and interests with a taxonomic precision as well as in the adoption of a question and answer format.

⁸ Smith, “The Flying Phallus and the Laughing Inquisitor,” 85, 90.

⁹ Russell, *Witchcraft in the Middle Ages*, 231.

The ability of witches to deceive the senses itself seems a function or extension of their own indeterminate nature: spiritually, biologically, and visually. Kramer opens the first part of his book addressing the question of whether or not belief in witches is essential to Catholic faith and asserts: "...certain angels fell from heaven and are now devils, and we are bound to acknowledge that by their very nature they can do many wonderful things which we cannot do. And those who try to induce others to perform such evil wonders are called witches."¹⁰ Current usages of "wonderful" tend to recognize certain events or phenomena as welcome and positive, but the English translation of Kramer here comes closer to the word's original meaning: "something that causes astonishment," which the Oxford English Dictionary further modifies with "a marvelous object; a prodigy."¹¹ Kramer's depiction of witches thus suggests their powers to overwhelm individuals with the performance of deeds and signs that dazzle and overwhelm the senses in ways suggestive of Marion's saturated phenomenon.

Kramer proposes that witches who *appear* to be mortal women were once immortal angels, but through a series of exceptionally bad decisions exchanged their eternal glories for ugliness and evil. Besides the fact that the witches are visually and spiritually indeterminate, Kramer also explicitly locates their wickedness and deceptive illusions in opposition toward the specifically visual nature of the divinely-instituted hierarchy of the universe and society: "When such an accusation is brought, any witness may come forward to give evidence, just as he may in a case of lese-majesty. For witchcraft is high treason against God's Majesty."¹² Kramer's concern for the threat of witchcraft against majesty renders magic as an explicitly social and political problem that threatens to disrupt hierarchies and confuse degrees through the creation of

¹⁰ Kramer, *Malleus Maleficarum*, 2-3.

¹¹ "wonder, n." OED Online. January 2018. Oxford University Press. Accessed March 28, 2018.

¹² Kramer, 6.

illusion and fantasy. Kramer's development of witchcraft as deceptive extends beyond the "merely" visual, however—witches in concert with the devil can, with the permission of God, invade and counterfeit the perceptions of any and all human senses in ways that Shakespeare seems to undertake in *Macbeth's* staging of sensory unreliability, confusion, and even synesthesia in ways I will later demonstrate. Kramer writes: "This evil of the devil creeps in through *all* the sensual approaches; he gives himself to figures, he adapts himself to colours, he abides in sounds, he lurks in smells, he infuses himself into flavours."¹³

Shakespeare's decision to evacuate the witches of some of their agency to highlight that of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth does not appear to have arisen without dramatic precedent. A similar limitation on witchcraft emerges in John Lyly's 1588 play, *Endymion*, where Dipsas, an aged witch, gives an account of her powers that cannot violate human will. Having been spurned by Enydmon, Tellus solicits the aid of Dipsas:

TELLUS: ...Is it possible by herbs, stones, spells, incantation, enchantment, exorcisms, fire, metals, planets or any practice, to plant affection where it is not and to supplant it where it is?

DIPSAS: There is nothing I cannot do but that only which you would have me do, and therein I differ from the gods, that I am not able to rule hearts; for, were it in my power to place affection by appointment, I would make such evil appetites, such inordinate lusts, such cursed desires as all the world should be filled both with superstitious heats and extreme love.

¹³ The visual, spiritual, and physiological ambiguity of witches serves as one of the core themes of the *Malleus* and was repeated in a variety of other early modern texts like Ludwig Lataver's *Of ghostes and spirites walking by nyght and of strange noyses* (1585) and Pierre Le Loyer's *A treatise of specters or straunge sights* (1605), both of which were translated into English, as well as Edward Topsell's encyclopedic volume *The History of Four-Footed Beasts* (1607). These texts maintain this ambiguity by classifying witches alongside predatory and mythical animals and figures like "vulticae," "empusa," "striges" and "lamia/La'mia." In ways I cannot pursue here, the conventions of predatory sexuality for early modern witchcraft also significantly predates Kramer. See, for example, the second century novel *Metamorphosis* or *The Golden Ass* by Apuleius.

TELLUS: Unhappy Tellus, whose desires are so desperate that they are neither to be conceived of any creature nor to be cured by any art! (I.4.16-32)¹⁴

Dipsas commiserates with Tellus over the woes of love and unfolds both her desire to help as well as revealing what seems to be extensive powers. These powers, however, exercise their sway principally over the realm of the material. She can cause or pervert cosmic or terrestrial change and alter the appearance of bodies and reverse the effects of aging, but in the creation or twisting of desires, her power falters. The human will she must hold inviolate.

While this limit on Dipsas' power predates *Macbeth's* representation of witchcraft by nearly twenty years, Lyly's subversion of witchcraft serves a different purpose than Shakespeare's interest in exploring the nuances of human evil and ambition. Diane Purkiss has argued that Lyly's political allegory, in its attempt to solicit the favor and patronage of Queen Elizabeth, weakens Dipsas on order to flatter the monarch refigured as Cynthia, Endymion's object of affection:

Consequently, Lyly's play also offers the real power of witchcraft as something that can easily be defeated by the particular constellation of virtues represented by Cynthia. To put it crudely, it is as if Lyly, far from fearing the witch, is offering her defeat as a kind of reassurance, overtly for those worried about the Queen's life, and covertly for those half afraid of Elizabeth's own power.¹⁵

It is thus the gravity of the monarch's apparent power (and concerns about its application) that ultimately render Dipsas ultimately ineffective. Purkiss goes on to argue that as the promise of Elizabeth's favor waned, Lyly's later plays like *Mother Bombie* (1596) abandon their determined reverence and reconsider the powers of witchcraft compared to the purity and power of monarchy: "*Mother Bombie* is almost a rude rewriting of *Endimion*, where Cynthia is

¹⁴ Lyly, John. *Endymion, Or the Man in the Moon*.

¹⁵ Purkiss, *The Witch in History*, 188.

deliberately and defiantly conflated with the cunning woman. What is so strenuously kept apart in *Endimion* is allowed to melt together.”¹⁶

By comparison, we can see that *Macbeth*'s weakening of witchcraft serves less to flatter the power or virtues of a particular figure or ideology than it does to emphasize the desires and inclinations of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth which, in of themselves, come to rival the evils and danger of witchcraft. This is not to say, however, that *Macbeth*'s composition occurs free of royal influence. But Lars Kaabar has argued that, while the play was probably performed for James I at a time when Shakespeare had been taken under royal patronage as part of the King's Men, the play would probably have inspired significant agitation for the king while catering to his anxieties about witchcraft:

Macbeth appears in many ways and places to poke fun at the Stuart monarch. James lived in constant fear of assassination, and Shakespeare gave him a play about the murder of a king seen almost entirely from the assassin's point of view; a drama in which a usurper is crowned only to be toppled in a coup...Furthermore, James was neurotically terrified of sharpened steel in general, and not only do knives and swords flash throughout all five acts of *Macbeth*, but the dramatist also devotes unprecedented attention to these weapons and describes the havoc they cause in gory detail.¹⁷

Macbeth thus pays homage to royal influence insofar as it stages a topic with figures that populated James' worried imagination, but the play's representations and conclusions can hardly have left him confident in his safety as a king from the threats of witchcraft, or indeed immune from a court where trusted friends could smilingly disguise evil and treachery.

As I claimed previously, even as *Macbeth* demonstrates clear debt to this long history of witchcraft, Shakespeare appropriates and subverts its agency to insist on the human capacity for evil. For Example, in Act Three, Scene Five, likely added by Thomas Middleton, Hecate appears as the play's preeminent figure of witchcraft and despite the potential for more active

¹⁶ Ibid.,188.

¹⁷ Kaabar, *Murdering Ministers*, Xxviii-xxix.

transgressions, instructs her minions to apply all their magical arts to enticing Macbeth to his doom.¹⁸

HECATE: Upon the corner of the moon
There hangs a vap'rous drop profound.
I'll catch it ere it come to ground,
And that, distilled by magic sleights,
Shall raise such artificial sprites
As by the strength of their illusion
Shall draw him on to his confusion.
He shall spurn fate, scorn death, and bear
His hopes 'bove wisdom, grace, and fear
And you all know security
Is mortals' chiefest enemy. (3.5.23-33)

Hecate's strategy here makes numerous references to magic and witchcraft as the power of illusion. But she insists on exploiting his curiosity, free will, and hubris as conditions that will render their victory over him most satisfactory even as her speech also revels in acts of deception and "sleights." The illusions, importantly, are not enchantments or charms that corrode Macbeth's will through an application of an external force that subdue him. Hecate shall "distill" and "raise" and "draw," but Macbeth shall "spurn" "scorn" and "bear." This moment importantly stages Hecate as the magical authority of the play limiting her and the witches' powers to modes of temptation. There is no trace here even of the desire to pursue the other more active or violent courses of action that typify other representations of witchcraft. Hecate's plan articulates a vision of magic that succeeds in exploiting Macbeth's uncoerced hubris. Michael Bristol has read the question of Macbeth's culpability over and against the deception of the witches as once which engages our sympathy partially because of the intimacy offered by the first-person perspective, but also because of his compelling portrait of the disunity between desire, knowledge, and action. For Bristol, this fragmentation of Macbeth's moral self continues

¹⁸ Erne, "Our other Shakespeare," 504.

to resonate with audiences because this experience of self-alienation, in various degrees, constitutes one of the tragedies of the human condition: “Macbeth has no definite ideas about power or why he wants it. His actions lack "motivational depth." Macbeth was careless of his own beauty, profligate in the expenditure of those virtues central to his identity as a person.”¹⁹

Hecate’s description of Macbeth and his “spurning” and “scorning” point us toward his climactic battle at Dunsinane when he cries out “Blow wind, come wrack!”, but it also gestures backwards in the play, pointing us toward other moments of conflict between will and knowledge. We see that Macbeth’s scorning of death and bearing of hopes against wisdom and grace depend even more on scorning the value of his own soul; the integrity of his mind. One of the clearest disjunctions of this nature occurs in Act Two Scene Two, as Macbeth and Lady Macbeth regroup after Duncan’s murder.

MACBETH: *[look at his hands]* This is a sorry sight.
LADY MACBETH: A foolish thought, to say a sorry sight.
MACBETH: 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.
LADY MACBETH: There are two lodged together.
One cried ‘God bless us’ and ‘Amen’ the other,
As they had seen me with these hangman’s hands.
List’ning their fear I could not say ‘Amen.’
When they did say ‘God bless us.’
LADY MACBETH: Consider it not so deeply
MACBETH: But wherefore could I not pronounce ‘Amen’?
I had most need of blessing, and ‘Amen’
Stuck in my throat. (2.2.18-31)

The circumstances of the scene should disincline us to feel any sympathy for Macbeth and his wife, but there’s something pitiable and pathetic in Macbeth’s anxiety. We find them literally red-handed and Macbeth finds himself suddenly arrested by the sight of his own body, disfigured

¹⁹ Bristol, “Macbeth the Philosopher,” 658.

with violence. His hands almost seem to hypnotize him, ushering him into a mood of somber reflection during which Lady Macbeth remains the cooler of the two and tries to persuade him to divorce knowledge from deed. Here, as elsewhere in the play, confrontations with moral knowledge tend to paralyze the individual and impede the clearer course of ambition. Macbeth's sudden sensitivity to his bloodied hands resonates with the eerie sensitivity of Duncan's attendants, one of whom seems to detect the murder of his lord and starts from his sleep. Macbeth's witness of their vulnerable anxiety followed by the impromptu prayer momentarily renders him almost paternal, watching pious children rehearsing their bedtime liturgy.

Lady Macbeth's injunction to "consider it not so deeply" implores him further to reject his mode of meditation, recommending numbness in the face of his apparent sensitivity. Macbeth finds himself more startled and disturbed by his inability to share in the attendant's pronouncement of "Amen," and seems to feel for a moment the peril of his condition: "But wherefore could I not pronounce 'Amen' / I had most need of blessing and 'Amen' / Stuck in my throat." Macbeth seems to be protesting against his wife's seemingly heartless instruction unaware that he's already obeying (and has obeyed) her command. Some part of him recognized the attendant's activity of prayer and blessing as good and beneficial, and he felt both the desire and need for blessing, even in the very midst of unforgiveable crime. This sense of disjunction between desire and ambition only heightens with the sense that his own body has been both externally and internally transformed and mutated by Duncan's murder. The same violence that covers his hands with Duncan's blood seems to have infected his throat and vocal chords, murdering, too, the sounds and utterances of a prayer he longed to make and could not.

The scene continues to stage recognitions and ruminations of moral monstrosity alongside attempts to ignore it. Lady Macbeth remains insistent and exasperated: "Infirm of

purpose...My hands are of your colour, but I shame, / To wear a heart so white” (2.2.50, 62-63). But Macbeth allows himself to be washed away in torrents of guilt and regret. “Will all Neptune’s ocean wash this blood / Clean from my hand? No, this my hand will rather / The multinous seas incarnadine” (2.2.58-60). Macbeth’s perception of his hands as not only uncleanable but aggressively toxic ironically resurfaces in Act Five, Scene One, when the maddened Lady Macbeth laments, “Here’s the smell of the blood still. All the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand” (5.1.42-43). Act Two Scene Two concludes with a juxtaposition of statements that characterize one of the play’s, and Macbeth’s, abiding tensions: “To know my deed ‘twere best not know myself. / *Knock [within]* / Wake Duncan with thy knocking. I would thou couldst” (2.2.71-72). Lady Macbeth’s admonishments finally seem to take hold of her husband—he seems to grit his teeth and make some effort of avoiding self-knowledge. But the sound of a single knock undoes his posture of determination, and he reflects ruefully that the sound would have been enough to rouse someone from sleep.

The sound of the knock ushers Macbeth *back* into himself as a man with senses and who experiences his senses as overwhelming after brief moment of successful desensitization. For Thomas de Quincey, the power of the sound to relocate Macbeth comes the way our senses register certain stimuli as intense or severe relative to great or horrible phenomena that precede them:

...if the reader has ever been present in a vast metropolis on the day when some great national idol was carried in funeral pomp to his grave, and chancing to walk near the course through which it passed, has felt powerfully in the silence and desertion of the streets, and in the stagnation of ordinary business, the deep interest which at that moment was possessing the heart of man -- if all at once he should hear the death-like stillness broken up by the sound of wheels rattling away from the scene, and making known that the transitory vision was dissolved, he will be aware that at no moment was his sense of the complete suspension and pause in ordinary human concerns so full and affecting as at

that moment when the suspension ceases, and the goings-on of human life are suddenly resumed.²⁰

Macbeth achieves the suspension of sense for a briefest of moments, one which may be his “happiest” to the extent that he experiences himself as “unknown” only for a sound to bring back to his mind the horrible images of Duncan’s body, and the evidence that contaminates his own. de Quincy’s formulation of the sudden resumption of stimuli renders Macbeth’s experience of the knocking also suggests a phenomenological intensity—and perhaps trauma—similar to that experienced by Clarence in his nightmare: “O, then began the tempest to my soul.” (*Richard III* 1.3.44).

This scene critically highlights Macbeth’s experience of his actions taking motivation apart from true moral knowledge *and* recognition of value. His recognition of prayer and blessing as valuable somehow fails to materialize in his own utterance. The end of Act Two Scene Two presents us with two portraits of Macbeth—one determined to divorce ambitious deeds from self-knowledge, and one who wishes that Duncan were merely sleeping. The transformation from one into the other comes in the instant of a simple sound.

This same unpredictable shifting between selves occurs again in Act Three Scene One, in a moment of solitude before Macbeth solicits the services of Banquo’s murderers. He considers his ambitions and the ambiguous prospects of extending his succession:

Upon my head they placed a fruitless crown,
And put a barren sceptre in my grip,
Thence to be wrenched with an unlineal hand,
No son of mine succeeding. It’t be so,
For Banquo’s issue have I filed my mind,
For them the gracious Duncan have I murdered,
Put rancours in the vessel of my peace
Only for them, and my eternal jewel

²⁰ De Quincey, “On Knocking at the Gate in Macbeth.”

Given to the common enemy of man (3.1.62-70)

Shakespeare's characterization of Macbeth masterfully combines a variety of contradictions that humanize Macbeth at one of his most unsympathetic moments. He begins by complaining about the limitations of his kingship. Having just gained the throne and crown, his mood turns sullen and peevish when he considers that his children might not succeed him, even though he currently doesn't have children. He fixates on the theme with variations of the same complaint: "fruitless crown" and "barren sceptre." In the midst of this, however, Macbeth unexpectedly acknowledges some of what his ambitions have cost—the loss and the perversion of that which makes him fundamentally human. He laments over the loss of his peace of mind and, what's more, the "vessel of his peace" and the "eternal jewel" of his soul. Invoking a similar register of imagery, his prolonged meditation recognizes these losses as far costlier than the crown or the sceptre. The sorrow over these elements makes the resistance to sympathy more difficult—an audience may have little patience or imagination for questions of succession, but this sudden switch asserts the perhaps more universal preoccupation with a clean conscience and the fate of the immortal soul.

But more, Macbeth grieves "gracious Duncan." That he should neither malign Duncan, as if to suggest that his former king deserved such a fate, nor shy away from acknowledging his action in such simple terms, proves a stark contrast to the Macbeth who moments later reverts, or devolves, to a more sinister self. *This* Macbeth comically maligns Banquo to incentivize his hired killers, as if they needed more motivation than money: "Do you find / Your patience so predominant in your nature / That you can let this go? Are you so gosselled / To pray for this good man and for his issue?" (3.1.87-90). Macbeth sneers at the possibility that a patient, gosselled nature that might prevent the murderers in their course. But his mockery can't help

but sound half-hearted. The nature he maligns is precisely the one that, though waning, compels him to lament Duncan and his own damaged soul. This scene provides an important view into the metaphysics that underwrite and anticipate Macbeth's optical and perceptual problems. It looks forward to the banquet in Act Three, Scene Four, where Banquo's ghost makes an unexpected and uninvited visitation, and Macbeth experiences a persistent, multi-stage failure to recognize what he *should* perceive. This scene (3.1.) critically anticipates this later breakdown between recognition and judgment because of the way that Macbeth seems, if only for a moment, to offer both candid and accurate assessments of Duncan's character, his ambiguous prospects in light of the witches' prophecy, and the cost to his own soul for the pursuit of his ambitions.

Beyond the recognition of his soul's value, however, Macbeth's imagery invites us to understand his perceptual and moral conflict in specifically contradictory, visual ways. The "rancours put into the vessel of peace" present us with an image of poison dissolved into a goblet, where the wine conceals the assassin's fatal, delayed attack which inflicts death or harm from the inside out. The image of the "eternal jewel" controverts the mechanics of the previous metaphor. Whereas poison introduced to the wine remains concealed both in taste and sight—invisible to the senses—the jewel amplifies and ameliorates any light introduced to its facets. These two irreconcilable metaphors gently characterize Macbeth's ambivalence of natures and perceptual powers throughout the play. What points us toward Banquo's misrecognition and other perceptual failures, however, is that *in spite* of Macbeth's unexpectedly canny assessment of his situation, this moment of epiphany fails to sufficiently provoke his conscience to alter his will or divert his ambitions. This is a cognitive dissonance that reveals the failure of the will to accept true knowledge as grounds for action. Shakespeare's staging of his problematic self-knowledge seems to invoke an image from the epistle of James: "For if a man be a hearer of the

word, and not a doer, he shall be compared to a man beholding his own countenance in a glass. For he beheld himself, and went his way, and presently forgot what manner of man he was.” The fragmenting of perception, knowledge, and action in this scene align Macbeth with Shakespeare’s dramatic theology staged in *Richard III*, where we see not only the power of sin to divorce an individual from God and his community, but also to estrange that individual from himself.

Sin’s power to alienate an individual from himself can also occur *because* of one’s community and environment, rather than in spite of it, as I explored in my previous chapter. *Macbeth* invites us to consider broader ecologies of guilt in ways that suggestively implicate both Scotland’s geography as well as its political systems. I earlier identified the menacing suggestion of a landscape that conspires with the witches to entice Macbeth to his doom. Banquo’s comparison of the weird sisters to “bubbles” of the earth joins with other elemental and atmospheric images that evoke a sense of collusion. But as Calderwood points out, “soliciting” is Macbeth’s word. As Shakespeare’s staging of Macbeth’s complicated guilt limits the power of the witches, we might also wonder too if the perils and portents of Scotland respond to Macbeth. Recent environmental criticism on *Macbeth* has registered the play’s ambiguity in rendering the landscape as well as the creatures that occupy it, like Duncan’s maddened horses and the hoarse raven. Gabriel Egan has noted ambiguity in the way that Macbeth and Lady Macbeth attempt to condition their ambitions by “following” examples set forth in nature: the serpent lurking beneath the flower. For Egan, however, these infusions of natured imagery emerge from their desire to perceive their ambitions as motivated by the forces of fate rather than merely their own agencies:

The play’s ubiquitous analogies from nature become its dominant tone once the central couple are together and Lady Macbeth counsels her husband to “look like the innocent

flower, / But be the serpent under't' (1.5.64-65). Nature's threat to humankind is to be emulated, but often the direction of the agency is unclear: are the evil things of the Earth sympathetic to the Macbeth's evil, or vice versa?...Human agency passing itself off as fate is one of the play's concerns and it starts in this scene with Lady Macbeth's conviction that 'fate and metaphysical aid' favor her husband's attempt at the crown.²¹

For Egan, the Macbeths' hermeneutic approach to nature tends toward the procrustean: they're all too willing to define nature and interpret its flora and fauna in ways that recast repugnant motives and wicked deeds as the result of instinct and design. We might notice too that Lady Macbeth's advice to her husband seeks to authorize certain behaviors by the mandate of nature, but that her selective formulations don't allow such a nature any stability. Her charge runs "*look like the innocent flower, / But be the serpent under't*" as opposed to being both flower and serpent. These analogies thus seek to commend both a theatricality in which the nature of the flower may be donned and discarded like clothing, but also an essential condition of malice and stealth.

I would argue that this yearning to reconceptualize human agency as fate occurs two scenes earlier, however, when Macbeth reflects on his recent political luck. He prefers to see himself as the recipient of good fortune, where the arrival of apparently felicitous circumstance preclude the problem of suspicious motives or deeds. Macbeth surmises: "If chance will have me king, why, chance may crown me / Without my stir" (1.3.143-144). Macbeth has every reason to hope that chance might crown him king without his stir—it made him the Thane of Cawdor "without his stir"—insofar as "stir" constitutes any active pursuit of a goal. His supposing that more favor may await him follows a rumination over the "supernatural soliciting" that renders him more as beneficiary than aggressor: "...This supernatural soliciting / Cannot be ill, cannot be good. If ill, / Why hath it given me earnest of success / Commencing in a truth? I

²¹ Egan, *Green Shakespeare*, 87.

am Thane of Cawdor” (1.3.129-132). Here, Macbeth’s passive posture assumes the unthreatening aspect of receiving a gift—the thanedom of Cawdor. But as his speech continues, passivity increasingly assumes tinges of vulnerability and danger: “If good, why do I yield to that suggestion / Whose horrid image doth unfix my hair / And make my seated heart knock at my ribs / Against the use of nature. (1.3.129-136). What he sees, but refuses to articulate, is the image of the slain Duncan—a product of his agency. It is this repulsion to a vision still contained by his horrified imagination that leads him to hope that he may not need “stir,” and which Banquo later confirms: “New honors come upon him” (1.3.142).

This yearning for passive reception of a mechanical agency that operates upon him to produces the conditions of fortune surfaces again in the very next scene where Shakespeare overlays Macbeth’s festering crisis of self-knowledge with other limitations of moral sight. Duncan frets over the corruption and betrayal of the former thane of Cawdor and Malcolm reports on his execution:

...But I have spoke
With one that saw him die, who did report
That very frankly he confessed his treasons,
Implored your highness’ pardon, and set forth
A deep repentance. Nothing in his life
Became him like the leaving it. He died
As one that had been studied in his death
To throw away the dearest thing he owed
As ‘twere a careless trifle.
KING DUNCAN: There’s no art
To find the mind’s construction in the face.
He was a gentleman on whom I built
An absolute trust.

[To MACBETH] O worthiest cousin! (1.4.3-14)

Malcolm's unsentimental summary of the thane's demise leads Duncan to speculate on the limitations of sight in judging a man's character. The failure belongs not to the eye as an organ of sight, but to the face's masking of the mind—precisely in the way that the fog and filthy air mask Scotland's landscape and prevent the perception of its features.

Duncan compounds the ironic failures of moral and physical sight by turning from his bitter contemplation on the thane of Cawdor's treachery to greet Macbeth with an exclamation of misplaced trust. He does not know, as the audience does, that Macbeth's gestating aspirations will repeat a cycle of violence which had seemed all but concluded. He makes further errors of judgment by announcing his plans for the succession of his throne—a jarring transition from grand promises about his investments in Macbeth's prosperity:

KING DUNCAN: Welcome hither.
I have begun to plant thee, and will labour
To make thee full of growing.—Noble Banquo,
That hast no less deserved, nor must be known
No less to have done so, let me enfold thee
And hold thee to my heart.
BANQUO: There if I grow
The harvest is your own.
KING DUNCAN: My plenteous joys,
Wanton in fullness, seek to hide themselves
In drops of sorrow. Sons, kinsmen, thanes,
And you whose places are the nearest, know
We will establish our estate upon
Our eldest, Malcolm, whom we name hereafter
The Prince of Cumberland; which honour must
Not unaccompanied invest him only,
But signs of nobleness, like stars, shall shine
On all deservers. (1.5.28-42)

Duncan makes a great show of acclaiming Macbeth for his service and, with metaphors that promise much, suggests that his warrior can only expect greater honors. Banquo, too, he heaps with praise, and clarifies that the honor he bestows upon Banquo and Macbeth comes because of their merit (“Thou hast no less deserved”). It is this merit that establishes the basis of their glorified reputation which Duncan helps to fashion and which can only stoke Macbeth’s hopes of being crowned “without his stir.”

Indeed, such thoughts and hopes very likely cross Macbeth’s mind because of his immediate and hostile reaction to Duncan’s pivot in political focus from Banquo and Macbeth to Malcolm. In another instance of poor judgment, Duncan suddenly interrupts his dispensing of honors to announce that the crown and throne will proceed to his son. His decision privileges family over merit in a way that seems both sudden and arbitrary—even contradictory to his earlier celebration of Macbeth and Banquo’s meritorious deeds. Arbitrary judgment in issues of succession or advancement motivate significant conflicts elsewhere in Shakespeare. King Lear’s division of his kingdom among his daughters proves both fatal and disastrous, and Othello’s passing over of Iago for the high-born but inexperienced Cassio likewise contributes to Othello’s fall. In both plays resentment boils over into rebellion and revenge. Here, too, Macbeth immediately perceives the Prince of Cumberland as an obstacle whereas in the previous scene he had surmised: “If chance will have me king, why, chance may crown me / Without my stir.” (1.3.143-144).

Macbeth's somewhat bewildered transition from warrior to thane occurs in a political climate characterized by tumult and rebellion in ways that seem alarming cyclical. Seen from one perspective, *Macbeth* documents the coming and going of men misfortunate enough to have names beginning with "Mac-": Macdonwald, Macbeth, Macduff. They seem to line up for their chance to scramble through a violent parade route that begins with a warrior's victory, includes honors from the king followed by the secretive growth of ambition, an explosion of rebellious crimes, and their predictable death. Well may we wonder at the security of Malcolm's position on the throne with Macduff perhaps only somewhat satisfied with the honors afforded to him by dispatching Macbeth. This is essentially the argument that Harry Berger Jr. proposes in his essay "The Early Scenes of *Macbeth*: Preface to a New Interpretation" and his attention to the historic violence that situates Macbeth's rise and fall helpfully clarifies some of the conditions of the play's quagmired moral economies, though at the expense of recognizing Macbeth's complicity.

Berger argues that Macbeth's transformation mechanically results from an essentially volatile set of political and social conditions. He is more victim than transgressor in a process where kingship persistently undermines its own autonomy by repaying the warrior's deeds with rewards that only whet and amplify the soldier's ambition:

what troubles Scotland is a settled instability and not merely a future harm; it is the instability which makes the harm probable, given the right circumstances. Macbeth is not the only threat: in the final segment of his speech the officer's uneasiness was coequally inspired by Banquo and Macbeth. In a society which sanctions violence, which relies on the contentiousness of its members no less than on their solidarity, and in which ferocity and praise mutually inspire, intensify, each other, the success of outstanding warriors must always be greeted with muffled concern as well as "great happiness."²²

The argument is that the lust for reward here is universally insatiable, and that any warrior who distinguishes himself enough to be rewarded for his actions will eventually crave the ultimate

²² Berger, "The Early Scenes of *Macbeth*," 14.

distinction of killing the rewarder. Berger sides with critics like John Holloway, who sees Macbeth in the rather unconventionally sympathetic guises of a “scapegoat” and “lord of misrule”—terms that situate his guilt as applied or conferred rather than self-contained. Macbeth here is to be understood as if he were coerced by external factors to don a costume and play a role that, though talented in its execution, he was ultimately ambivalent about undertaking. I resonate with much of Berger’s argument; Scottish politics and society critically enable Macbeth’s rebellion both in the conferring of “new honors” to repay his valor, but also in remaining too passive when suspicions of his criminality clearly occupy them. By Act Four, Macbeth’s aversion of moral knowledge seems to have become a national epidemic. Ross mourns: “Alas, poor country / Almost afraid to know itself” (4.3.165-166).

But this kind of reading attends too closely to the social and political conditions of Scotland while failing to meaningfully register the power of individual choices and agency even as those social and political conditions grease the doorways of ambition. Berger’s dissatisfaction with traditional accounts of Macbeth’s culpability overcorrects by awarding him essentially none at all. His approach to Macbeth’s regicide and tyranny provides a rather secular lexicon for problems that Shakespeare’s audience and peers would have understood in decidedly more theological terms. Berger cites Hobbes, for example, in characterizing Scotland’s mechanistic character that all but guarantees Macbeth’s criminalization: “The Scotland of Macbeth dynamically illustrates the working of the principle which Hobbes called war, the “war of every man against every man.”²³ But for Hobbes, this chaotic state of nature results mechanically *as* a result of various individual sins and vices. In the very next chapter of *Leviathan*, Hobbes writes:

If a covenant be made wherein neither of the parties perform presently but trust one another, in the condition of mere nature, which is a condition of war of every man against

²³ Ibid., 26.

every man, upon any reasonable suspicion, it is void; but, if there be a common power set over them both with right and force sufficient to compel performance, it is not void. For he that performeth first has no assurance the other will perform after, because the bonds of words are too weak to bridle men's ambition, avarice, anger, and other passions...²⁴

For Hobbes, covenants remain permanently vulnerable to the state of war because man's essential condition is sinful, and eventually this sin will manifest in hostility to those with whom an individual enters a covenant unless an external party forcibly compels the covenant's terms. The wrathful state of nature that Berger secludes unto itself Hobbes here locates in the midst of other passions that are otherwise conventionally understood (in Catholic if not Protestant theology) as deadly sins: avarice and wrath. That Hobbes characterizes these conditions as resulting from humanity's sinful nature appears earlier in the same passage when Hobbes ponders the difficulty of attaining to God's promise of paradise when humans have been "hoodwinked with carnal desires."²⁵

Thus, while Berger helps highlight conditions that *encourage* Macbeth's rebellion, the political and social qualities of Scotland, like the witches, cannot, cannot sufficiently account for Macbeth's metamorphosis from man into monster. In the same scene in which Duncan foolishly combines his largesse for Macbeth with announcements of Malcolm's royal future, Shakespeare emphasizes Macbeth's agency through expressions of hostility to the witness of Scottish society, of the cosmos, and his own conscience. The sensory and optical nature of Macbeth's aversion to witness presents a phenomenology of sin by linking physical and moral sight and distinguishing between species of blindness. Whereas Duncan's powers of perception prove limited because of naiveté and poor judgment, Macbeth voluntarily adopts moral blindness while urging the cosmos to refuse its power of witness to his actions. Shakespeare connects the two forms of blindness

²⁴ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 96.

²⁵ *Ibid*, 96.

through the two men's use of cosmic imagery. Duncan's invocation of stars, meant to modify "signs of nobleness," aims to reinforce Malcolm's establishment as the future king of Scotland by situating the other "sons, kinsmen, and thanes" within a hierarchy where the king and his subordinates participate in a shared glory. Duncan's proposition approximates Thomas Elyot's vision of glory and majesty that, as I argued earlier, establish and stabilize a correspondence between visual testimony and essential dignity: "In the gouernour *or* man hauynge in the publyke weale some greatte authoritie, the fountaine of all excellent maners is Maestie; which is the holle proporcion and figure of noble astate...whiche, like as the sunne doth his beames, so doth it caste on the beholders and herers a pleasaunt and terrible reverence."²⁶ Duncan's placement of Malcolm in a constellation of other majestic lords repeats Elyot's cosmic argument about the proper nature and network of authority. The relationship between the sun and its beams models the public nature of the glorified authority that the king, or governor, shares and administers among his deputies of the "publyke weale" and which are, critically, seen and seeing.

Macbeth's immediate rejection of the cosmic hierarchy that requires his submission perpetuates the play's larger themes of sensory confusion. His address of the stars casts them as both potential witnesses, but also as the sources of light that enable witness.

MACBETH [*aside*] The Prince of Cumberland— that is a step
On which I must fall down or else o'erleap,
For in my way it lies. Stars, hide your fires,
Let not light see my black and deep desires;
The eye wink at the hand, yet let that be
Which the eye fears, when it is done, to see. (1.4.48-53)

²⁶ Elyot, *The Booke Called the Governour* 121.

Macbeth asks the stars to do the impossible—to hide their fires; to go out—and rejects the hierarchy that Duncan proposes. What follows his request to the stars seems like a fit of sensory confusion. Modern medicine comprehends light as that which enables sight—not that which itself sees. Yet Macbeth’s formulation of the stars as both sources of light *and* entities of witness accords with medieval and early modern theories about the operation of the eye in the act of perception, as well as the link between sight, evil, and moral knowledge. Jackie Watson points to early modern authors like the French physician Andre du Laurens as well as Robert Burton in shaping public consensus on sight as an operation of “emission” versus “intromission.” The “emission” theory, linked to classical writers like Plato, Euclid and Ptolemy, held that “seeing was the result of rays being emitted from the eyes and falling upon an object in the outside world.”²⁷ Intromission, conversely, asserts that the eye’s reception of light facilitates the power of perception. du Lauren ultimately defended this theory on the basis of the eye’s “crystalline nature...and its being composed of water, rather than Plato’s proposal of the eye being composed of fire and capable of emitting beams.”²⁸ Macbeth’s simultaneous invocation of two contradictory modes of sight reinforces the play’s larger confusion of the senses and the very nature of their operation. The conflict between emission and emanation here undercuts the possibility of trustworthy knowledge linked to perception not only because the environment remains hostile to navigation, but, further, stages that same hostility and resistance to knowledge *as a feature* of the senses. I might also recall here that Elyot’s use of the sun’s radiation as “beames,” is also the term that James uses in his *Demonology* to refer to the power of sight, all too easily defeated by the deceptive powers of the devil and his witches.

²⁷ Watson, “‘Dove-like looks’ and ‘serpents eyes,’” 39.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 41.

While the nature of the sight as a physical capacity continued to inspire uncertainty, early modern writers—especially theologians—maintained classical and medieval wariness over the eyes as potential portals for moral contagion. Watson points to divines like Erasmus who links the action of winking—a self-imposed, momentary blindness—to modes of self-deception: “A human eye that is quite sound sees nothing in the dark, a blind one sees nothing in the light; thus the will though free can do nothing if grace withdraws from it, and yet when the light is infused, he who has sound eyes can shut off the sight of the object so as not to see, can avert his eyes, so that he ceases to see what he previously saw.”²⁹ Erasmus ponders sight in physical and theological terms that clarify the quality of vision and blindness that Macbeth pursues. For Erasmus, physical sight depends on a convergence of two conditions: the healthy eye which views the world, and the world which lies illuminated before it. His invocation of grace here, however, qualifies moral sight with certain contingencies. He seems to warn that the will which chooses not to see that which it finds displeasing or unpleasant may eventually suffer greater calamity when blindness has become a permanent condition.

Macbeth’s address of the stars combines his desperation for both physical and moral blindness; any witness at all endangers his aspirations. But more than the witness of the stars or the other Scottish lords, Macbeth’s true anxiety derives from the fear of his *own* witness to ambitions and actions that, in a different state of mind (or body) he might condemn and reject. His sense of exposure comes into view when his address moves from the distant stars to the intimacy of the body, where witness again endangers aspiration. He instructs: “The eye wink at the hand,” linking the eye not merely with sight as a physical mode of perception, but with judgment and condemnation, where all perceptions merit blame or praise. Where the eye once

²⁹ Ibid., 43.

guided the hand, the hand must rely on touch alone, exchanging the benefit of two senses working in concert for the dubious benefit of stealth. Certainly, the line could be read as reformulating “star” for “eye” insofar as Macbeth hopes that the other Scottish lords won’t detect his actions or ambitions. But there’s also a sense in which his speech attempts to sequester his own senses from each other; he’s eager to remove the witness of his own eye from the deed of his hand. The play confirms such a reading on numerous occasions (as I will later demonstrate), but I might also point to Macbeth’s refusal to use possessive language in describing *the* eye and *the* hand as opposed to *my* eye and hand.

Macbeth’s speech attempts not only to distance his eye from his hand, but also to distance himself as a being with moral knowledge from his own body and senses. The conclusion of his aside further proposes this: “yet let that be / Which the eye fears, when it is done, to see.” (1.4.52-53). Macbeth hopes for the success of his hand even in the absence of the eye’s guiding power—especially because the eye “fears” what the hand will have done. “Yet let that be” yearns for the accomplishment of his ambition even if the eye’s sight cannot guide, authorize, or constitute the hand’s actions. The passive construction “let that be” also tries to render the fulfillment of his aspirations isolated from his own action—a continuation of his desire to enjoy the crown “without [his] stir.” Even the syntax of this final couplet reinforces Macbeth’s attempt to distance himself and others from the knowledge of his ambitions and deeds. Shakespeare interrupts the clause “Which the eye fears to see” with “when it is done.” The disruption between the eye’s fear and the object of its sight syntactically stages Macbeth’s hope for pure action that exists without knowledge or witness. Even in the construction of the phrase “when it is done,” Macbeth has tried to sanitize any traces of himself, again using a passive construction for the

action (as opposed to “When I have done”) to achieve a lexical distance accomplished by the use of “the” eye and hand instead of “my” eye and hand.

This kind of estrangement combines with optical and perceptual problems with powerful expression in Act Three, Scene Four, in a scene which simultaneously invites individuals to both trust and doubt their senses. A feast begins with Macbeth greeting his newly subjected Scottish lords with instructions that require them to navigate the terms of his hospitality by trusting the report of their eyes:

MACBETH: You know your own degrees; sit down. At first and last
The hearty welcome.

LORDS: Thanks to your majesty.

MACBETH: Ourself will mingle with society
And play the humble host. (3.4.1-4)

These first four lines announce the specifically visual components of the feast in some of the boldest—and contested—terms available for articulating early modern perceptions about societal hierarchies and their divine authorization. The first of these critical terms is “degrees,” by which Macbeth alludes to the common knowledge shared between the Scottish lords and himself concerning the particular ranks and social distinctions enjoyed by each individual. These ranks and distinctions—designated perhaps in emblems and jewelry, determine where each lord is to sit at the table in respect to Macbeth’s supremacy as king. Macbeth trusts them to understand the terms of this hierarchy and to obey its dictates by sorting themselves into their appropriate, or just, seats.

Concern for degrees and the way they articulated a divine ordering of society came to preoccupy Queen Elizabeth as she reigned over an increasingly class-mobile society. One of the effects of this concern was her attempt to enact sumptuary laws and regulations in order to, among other things, maintain a visual correspondence between the professed and performed

degree of each individual, and the station in life to which God had assigned him or her.

Sumptuary laws were hardly an Elizabethan innovation—they were legislated in classical Greece in order to control, for example, ostentatious displays of clothing and mourning at funerals and wedding. Women, for example, were limited in the number of mourning shawls they could possess and were prohibited from lacerating their cheeks.³⁰ In England, sumptuary laws were adopted to discourage excessive and potentially rash expenditures on clothing and other sartorial manners while attaching the testament of color to social rank.

A variety of sumptuary laws were passed in the progression of Tudor monarchs, but Elizabeth seems to have shown a particular zeal for them and issued no fewer than eight royal proclamations supporting them between 1559 and 1597. Her proclamation of 1588 expresses a determination for the testament of witness to accord with fact so that that social hierarchies not be utterly confused:

THE QUEEN'S MAJESTY hath considered into what extremities a great number of her subjects are fallen by the inordinate excess in apparel, contrary both to good laws of the realm and her majesty's former admonitions by her proclamations, and to the confusion of degrees of all estates, amongst whom diversity of apparel hath been always a special and laudable mark, and finally to the impoverishing of the realm by daily bringing into the same of superfluity of foreign and unnecessary commodities not able to be answered with the natural merchandise of the realm...³¹

The proclamation's reference to prior proclamations seems to acknowledge that previous attempts at legislation have been unsuccessful as if not regarded with sufficient sobriety. The renewed scolding aims for qualified conciliation with a vague celebration of a "diversity" of fashions among the various estates of her commonwealth, but Elizabeth more explicitly bemoans the confusion of estates while "fallen" resonates with some nuances of moral degeneration.³²

³⁰ Hunt, *Governance of the Consuming Passions*, 18-19.

³¹ *Tudor Royal Proclamations*, 3.3.

³² Melnikoff, "The "Extremities" of Sumptuary Law in Robert Greene's "Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay," 231.

These proclamations seem to have done little to assuage Shakespeare's apparent skepticism about the link between royal vestments and identity. Gary Watts, for example, argues: "One of the recurring themes of Shakespeare's plays is that even the ceremonial vestments of kings are no sure proof of true kingship."³³ He points to *Henry V* where King Henry resolves to seize the French throne and sends the Duke of Exeter to announce his claim:

he demands that the French king should 'divest' himself and 'lay apart . . . / all wide-stretched honours that pertain / By custom and the ordinance of times / Unto the crown of France' (2.4.82, 86–8). The metaphor represents the royal title of the French king as a stretched-out layer of 'costumary' title with which he has been falsely invested. The dress dimension of Shakespeare's notion of kingship is confirmed later in the play when King Henry, reflecting on the nature of a king, observes that 'his ceremonies / laid by, in his nakedness he appears but a man.' (4.1.96) and wonders to himself if a king's ceremony is anything other than 'place, degree and form / Creating awe and fear in other men?' (4.1.200–1).³⁴

Henry's attraction to costumery metaphors in claiming the French throne arises from a political arc in which, beginning in *I Henry IV*, Henry emphasizes theatricality as essential to his ambitions. Indeed, his eventual victory over the French partially depends on their *failure* to suspect a division between his masquerade of degeneracy and the canny warrior underneath. Shakespeare anticipates this revelation with Henry's speech in Act One, Scene Three, which explicitly renders the revelation as a manner of wardrobe change: "when this loose behaviour I throw off" (1.3.182).

The degeneration in the correlation between appearance and identity also signaled threats to the conditions of hospitality—like those that Macbeth tries to establish. The proliferation of Elizabethan decrees alongside major changes in England's economic character: Wilfrid Hooper observes:

sons of capitalists, who had invested their money in land, were in many cases converting it back to money, and were forsaking the hospitable life of country squires to squander

³³ Watt, *Dress, Law, and Naked Proof*, 55.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 55.

their patrimony in the gay round of the capital. Servants were now fed and clothed on a scale that surpassed that of masters a generation before, and ranks became worse confounded than ever. These twin evils—the decay of hospitality and the confusion of degrees—are dwelt upon in the last proclamation of Elizabeth...³⁵

Hooper's use of "hospitality" here is nuanced but implies the traditional expectation that on occasion, land as both place and space should be reserved and consecrated to confirm the terms of a hierarchy by imposing the roles of host and guest upon different individuals through the both symbolic and material exchanges of courtesy and gratitude. Julia Reinhard Lupton has more recently suggested understanding hospitality as a process which entails "making room" for a kind of "*social theater*: a way of soliciting and orchestrating forms of appearing that gather humans, objects, and animals, as well as deities and dust bunnies, in a single if self-divided ensemble of encounter, experience, and recognition."³⁶ Macbeth invokes precisely these modes of appearing and recognition when he plays "humble host" and instructs the Scottish lords to seat themselves according to their degrees. At this point, the lords might suspect what the audience perceives all too clearly—that Macbeth's hospitality and respect for degrees have utterly dissolved with his murder of Duncan.

Hooper also points to a shift in the ways that wealth in England shifted both in terms of its acquisition as well as its expenditure, and in the sequence of a generation. The willingness to regard land as a commodity which could be freely converted without serious consequence to cash represents an unthinkable and paradigm shift that establishes one of the deepest conflicts in *Richard II*. When Bolingbroke confronts Bushy and Green in Act Three, Scene One, his

³⁵ Hooper, "The Tudor Sumptuary Laws," 445.

³⁶ Lupton, "Phenomenology and Hospitality," 373.

accusations represent his sense of public identity as contingent on maintaining his ancestral land which they have plundered and violated:

Whilst you have fed upon my signories,
Dispark'd my parks and fell'd my forest woods,
From my own windows torn my household coat,
Razed out my imprese, leaving me no sign,
Save men's opinions and my living blood,
To show the world I am a gentleman. (3.1.22-27)

Bolingbroke juxtaposes images of their gluttony next to wanton destruction of forests. His allegation “dispark’d my parks” in particular articulates a profound sense of injury and violation because of the suggestion that land (and all its flora and fauna) once reserved to Bolingbroke has been, as the Oxford English Dictionary suggests, “divested of its character, thrown open, and converted to other uses.”³⁷ These images of ecological destruction as well and transgression of boundaries give way to more symbolic, though still violent, gestures of identity erasure: the household coat and imprese too fall away.³⁸ These elements—the land and the symbols they accommodate—express and perform Bolingbroke’s identity. Bolingbroke argues that their abolition renders him, essentially, as almost imperceptible both in person and rank save for his own body and the flimsy testimony of “men’s opinions.”

³⁷ "dispark, v." OED Online. January 2018. Oxford University Press. Accessed March 28, 2018.

³⁸ We might also fruitfully apply the term to the violence with which Birnam Wood is “disparked” to camouflage the Scottish soldiers who siege Macbeth’s castle in Act Five, Scene Seven.

Bolingbroke's outrage, as well as Elizabeth's, also dovetail with larger expectations about the way that identity and degree themselves depended upon God's divine authority which was communicated through emanations of his majesty. Political philosophers like Thomas Elyot understood God's majesty as foundational to the divine right of monarchs and his description emphasizes the critical relationship between visual markers and glorious identity conferred upon God's chosen authorities:

And like as the angels whiche be most feruent in contemplation be highest exalted in glorie (after the opinion of holy doctours,) and also the fire which is the most pure of elementes, and also doth clarifie the other inferiour elementes, is deputed to the highest sphere or place; so in this worlde, they which excelle...oughte to be set in a more highe place than the residue where they may se and also be sene; that by the beames of theyr excellent witte shewed through the glass of auctorite... In the governour *or* man hauynge in the publyke weale some greatte authoritie, the fountaine of all excellent maners is *Maiestie*; which is the holle proporcion and figure of noble astate, and is proprelie a beautie or comelynesse in his countenance, langage and gesture apt to his dignitie, and accommodate to time, place, and company; whiche, like as the sunne doth his beames, so doth it caste on the beholders and herers a pleasaunt and terrible reverence.³⁹

Elyot portrays God's glory as indivisible from his authority. This marriage of qualities animates the entire universe, extending from the eternal and celestial to the temporal and political. Elyot maintains a lexicon and vocabulary of visual metaphors in moving from describing the hierarchy of the cosmos to his description of majesty as the fountain of "all excellent maners" on earth. The visual majesty of authority is meant to help order and stabilize society through the radiant performance of "beames." When perceived by "beholders and herers," a "pleasaunt and terrible reverence" results from their recognition and affirmation of the correspondence between sensory testimony and ontological reality.

While sumptuary laws and proclamations endeavored to render the report of the senses as stable and fuse it to other forms of knowledge, Shakespeare's populating of *Macbeth* with

³⁹ Elyot, *The Boke Named The Governour*, 5,121. Emphasis added.

witches, ghosts, apparitions, and illusions work to undermine them and disorder the networks of knowledge that they help constitute. In the same scene that Macbeth urges the Scottish lords to trust their eyes and manage the hierarchy of their degrees, he encounters Banquo's ghost. In ways I will later explore in greater detail, Banquo's ghost causes him to question his senses, for the guests to question his sanity, and for Macbeth in turn to question the stability of the degrees he had previously invoked and the power of his hospitality to maintain them. While elsewhere he likewise wonders about the soundness of his mental fitness in shaping his perceptions ("or art thou but / a dagger of the mind, a false creation, / Proceeding from the heat-oppresdèd brain") here he suspects the other Scottish lords of trying to trick him with an optical illusion when he sees Banquo's ghost: "Which of you have done this!" (2.1.37-39, 3.4.47).

Throughout the play, Shakespeare adopts a conventional representation of witchcraft in its power to deceive through illusion and fantasy, but perceptual problems and deception rely just as much on the way that Macbeth and Lady Macbeth work to avoid the possibility of witness by others, or work to desensitize themselves and each other in order to avoid the prosecuting witness of their own consciences. Indeed, the illusions and visions conjured by the witches and Hecate through the distillation of vaporous drops and "the juice of a toad, the oil of adder" (4.1.55), Macbeth and his wife approximate through a series of, essentially, curses leveled against their own senses and nature. In this Lady Macbeth initially proves more resolute in the determination to prevent witness and deform herself in the service of ambitions. When she receives her husband's letter, she perceives his own humanity as an obstacle:

Yet do I fear thy nature.
It is too full o'th' milk of human kindness
To catch the nearest way. Thou wouldst be great,
art not without ambition, but without
The illness should attend it. (1.5.14-18)

Lady Macbeth's reflection on the steps necessary to achieve their ambitions displays traces of the epistemological crises to which I earlier referred, though their damage seems to have been utterly flattened by the force of her determination. Her speech maintains moral polarities in recognizable terms: the milk of human kindness opposes the expedience of the "nearest way." Her vision of ambition depends on the presence of "illness." These value judgments make no effort to equivocate, justify, or disguise the quality of the motives or deeds necessary for Macbeth to achieve "greatness." Instead, she seems to accept without argument or hesitation the true evil of her aspirations both for the crown and for the corruption she seeks to confer or inspire in her husband. Here, as I argued earlier with Macbeth's perception of the vessel and the jewel, Lady Macbeth has access to true moral knowledge, but it fails to produce—or, rather, prohibit—a corresponding action. The knowledge is sufficient merely in the creation and naming of categorical distinctions between good and evil.

As if detecting cracks in her own composure's foundation, however, Lady Macbeth summons some outside help to further mend her own frailties. She sounds cavalier when theorizing about "the nearest way" and "illness," but seems to quaver when she considers the practical demands of that illness: killing Duncan. Her invocation of the "mortal spirits" reveals the crisis of knowledge as less resolved than previously suggested, and the simultaneous attempt to denature her own femininity while rebuking perception demonstrate her felt sense of urgency to avoid confrontations with moral knowledge and even the avenues of experience that supply it.

Come, you spirits
That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here,
And fill me from the crown to the toe top-full
Of direst cruelty! make thick my blood;
Stop up the access and passage to remorse,
That no compunctious visitings of nature
Shake my fell purpose, nor keep peace between

The effect and it! Come to my woman's breasts,
And take my milk for gall, you murdering ministers (1.5.38-46)

Lady Macbeth here perceives her femininity as a vulnerability and impediment to killing Duncan, whose death she understands as necessary for Macbeth to achieve the witches' prophecy of the monarchy. In addition to the provision of cruelty, she urges the spirits to modify her physical composition, fearing that open passages and blood of natural viscosity will in turn maintain a character and temperament unsuited for the violence she anticipates. Jenijoy LaBelle has read this moment as Lady Macbeth's rejection of the feminine in specifically maternal terms:

To free herself of the basic psychological characteristics of femininity, she is asking the spirits to eliminate the basic biological characteristics of femininity. Since there is a bond between mind and body, one way for Lady Macbeth to achieve an unfeminine consciousness capable of murdering Duncan is for her to attain an unfeminine physiology... Like the Scotland described by Ross, Lady Macbeth is not the mother of her children, but their grave.⁴⁰

Lady Macbeth's opposition to her potential maternity arises in response to her political ambitions. Her conjuring of spirits and opposition to children/pregnancy aligns her further with conventions of witchcraft while demonstrating further corrosions of reason and even common sense. Her insistence on cruelty and sterility demonstrate a short-sighted failure to anticipate the problems of succession that must inevitably result from her inability to bear children. This possibility isn't lost on her husband who later frets over the implications of the witches' prophecy: "Upon my head they placed a fruitless crown, / And put a barren / sceptre in my grip, / Thence to be wrenched with an unlineal hand" (3.1.62-65). This dissonance in concern and resolution supplements the play's staging of marital strife and repeats a convention of

⁴⁰ LaBelle, "'A Strange Infirmity,'" 381, 385.

witchcraft's transgressive qualities, but Shakespeare relocates its origin from the external malevolence of a witch to internal disagreement and discord.

Lady Macbeth's invocation continues, and even as she displays a lack of foresight concerning the consequences of sterility, her speech proliferates in references to sight and blindness.

Wherever in your sightless substances
You wait on nature's mischief! Come, thick night,
And pall thee in the dunnest smoke of hell,
That my keen knife see not the wound it makes,
Nor heaven peep through the blanket of the dark,
To cry 'Hold, hold!' (1.5.48-52)

Still addressing the spirits, she locates them as "sightless substances," suggesting either their invisibility to normal human powers of perception or, conversely, that they themselves cannot see. She further connects their sightless substances to the environment—thick night and the smoke of hell. These formulations connect to other suggestions of perceptual/optical problems that result not merely from the weakness of the human eye in night, but from an environmental menace. In Act Two Scene Four, for example, darkness no longer simply means night and time for rest. Darkness itself proves violent and criminal: "By th' clock 'tis day /And yet dark night *strangles* the travelling lamp."⁴¹ (2.4.6-7) Here, thick night itself isn't dark enough for Lady Macbeth's yearning for blindness and conditions that thwart witness. The smoke of hell intensifies night's resistance to perception as a pall obscures visions of a dead body, but also as hell itself opposes the, presumably, heavenly, the holy, the moral, and righteous.

To these conditions of physical and spiritual blindness, Lady Macbeth yearns for further denaturing, addressing her knife as something of a sentient prosthetic where "keen" suggests

⁴¹ Emphasis added.

both the blade's razor edge, and also its own "sharpened" vision. The attribution of both sight and blindness to the knife represents Lady Macbeth's attempt to distance herself from culpability and moral knowledge by locating both perceptive and violent agency in the knife itself as opposed to her own eyes and hands. The danger that her knife could witness the infliction of mortal wounds—visions which might compromise its keenness or betray its wielder—correspond to her immediate rebuke of heaven's witness, peeping through "the blanket of the dark." Her metaphorical language here remains consistent with the earlier part of the speech—"blanket" reformulates the "pall" of smoke that hell supplies to thicken the night.

Lady Macbeth here idealizes ambition as the attainment of pure action divorced from motive or actor. The formulation of the knife here carries echoes of Richard III's idea of mechanical morality, where he's been "rudely stamped," the product of forces beyond his control. The desire for this mechanical, depersonalized universe of self-contained actions expresses the desire for moral exceptionality. The rejection of witness, sensory corruption, and a desire for mechanical passivity characterize other epistemic crises in the play. Their verbal patterns and metaphors work to uncouple the senses from each other and from the mind's judgment as a way of compensating with burden of repressed guilt. I would argue that these speech patterns more and more come to function as coping mechanisms for Macbeth and Lady Macbeth to the extent that they perceive the need for action in order to realize their ambitions—that to enjoy the crown according to witches' prophesy they must themselves *act*, rather than be acted upon. This desire for mechanical character shares some of the motivations that inspire Lady Macbeth to earlier encourage her husband to "look the flower / but be the serpent under 't'" (1.5.64-65). Both of these moments attempt to defer human agency—firstly upon a nebulously defined nature, and here upon "spirits" and "murdering ministers." Thus, as for Gabriel Egan

references to nature attempt to erase the conditions of human culpability, Julia Reinhard Lupton has argued that curses likewise attempt to manage a horizon of consequences and events whose human origin their authors often refuse to acknowledge:

If curses and blessings participate in a theological economy that posits God as the just distributor, they remain fundamentally *human efforts* that invoke divinity in order to sustain social relationships that arise out of the management of life processes and ripple outward into myriad causal conduits. Macbeth's act against sleep throws the hero into the landscape of curses, a teeming biosphere whose uncanny manifestation of agency everywhere reveals the incalculable consequentiality of the anti-hero's deeds.⁴²

The strain of the epistemic crises and the verbal strategies necessary to negotiate them achieves a particularly impossible and ironic expression in Act Three, Scene Four, before Macbeth's hired murderers dispose of Banquo. Throughout the scene, Macbeth agonizes over the threat he perceives in Banquo. Macbeth represents the experience of knowledge itself as torture: LADY MACBETH: "You must leave this. MACBETH: "O, full of scorpions is my mind, dear wife / Thou knowst that Banquo and his Fleance lives!" (3.2.38-39)." The scene maintains a dynamic typical of the first half the play; Lady Macbeth tries to calm Macbeth who seems to be in a perpetual state of agitation. But then, at the end of the scene, he performs an astonishing about face and *he* instructs Lady Macbeth when she wonders: "What's to be done? MACBETH: Be innocent of the knowledge, dearest chuck, / Till thou applaud the deed." Macbeth's provision of this comfort marks an unusual shift in his poise which, lines earlier, seemed impossible. But more, his use of the word "innocent" all the more proclaims the impossibility of their ambitions not only to enjoy the crown without contest, but to enjoy it without the agitation of guilt. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, "innocent's" suggestion of purity and morality derive from French words regarding injury: "*in-* (in- *prefix*)

⁴² Lupton, *Shakespeare Dwelling*, 111. Emphasis added.

+ *nocēnt-em*, present participle of *nocēre* to hurt, injure.”⁴³ Innocence thus requires not doing harm, and the term deployed in this scene stages the sheer hopelessness of enjoying such a condition both in their reference to Duncan’s murder (“We have scorched the snake, not killed it”), and their determination to kill Banquo and Fleance even as the experience of conscious thought proves excruciating.

Macbeth’s anguish and guilt only intensify when he attempts to assume the throne and put on the appearance of stable monarchy. In Act Three, Scene four, Macbeth and Lady Macbeth host a feast for the Scottish lords in order to publicly legitimize the new king through a display of royal hospitality. The bid almost immediately devolves, and the scene presents alarming corollaries between Macbeth’s political, moral, and sensory failures. In what might be read as a Freudian slip, Macbeth signals this instability early on: “Ourself will mingle with society / And *play* the humble host.” (3.4.4-5). The first public event in which Macbeth assumes the role of king, his feast attempts to mimic the late Duncan’s hospitality and largesse for the Scottish lords, but his use of the term “play” signals the widening breach between the ideal of kingship and the fact of his tyranny. Though Duncan and Banquo were dispatched quickly, securing the assent and obedience of the Scottish lords requires a more delicate touch—a bit of rapport and banter on the way to assuming the throne where Duncan recently sat. J.P. Dyson has observed that this entire scene crucially stages Macbeth’s futile struggle to legitimize the tenuous conditions of monarchy:

The murder of Duncan secured possession of the throne; the banquet scene is what we might call the formal or gestural attempt to enthrone himself, to become the true king. We have here a ceremonial, a social ritual at which all sit about under the aegis of "the good king". "The good king" here tries (with almost Scriptural overtones) to play the "humble host" and mingle with his people.⁴⁴

⁴³"innocent, adj. and n." OED Online. Accessed March 28, 2018).

⁴⁴ Dyson, "The Structural Function of the Banquet Scene in Macbeth," 371.

Macbeth's mingling here aims to reassure his countrymen through a bit of the common touch that, in spite of Duncan's recent and violent death, he aims to stabilize the culture and politics upon which their lives and networks depend. And while these factors may, as Berger Jr. argues, encourage rebellion, the Scottish lords recognize their maintenance as the monarch's responsibility. We get some sense this expectation two scenes later when Lennox meets with another lord who yearns for the stability apparently enjoyed under Duncan:

That by the help of these—with Him above
To ratify the work—we may again
Give to our tables meat, sleep to our nights
Free from our feasts and banquets bloody knives,
Do faithful homage, and receive free honours
All which we pine for now (3.6.32-37)

The complaint quickly spans the hierarchy of needs. On the one hand, the lord yearns simply for the essential components necessary for the preservation of human life—food, rest, and safety. Beyond this, however, is the more existential yearning for stable public identity. The desire for “faithful homage” in exchange for “free honors” gestures toward the fact that this lord has lost a sense of self by losing the opportunity to participate in a larger economy of loyalty, reward, and hierarchy all of which told him who he was and why he was valuable. This lord is, appropriately, never identified. He comes and goes in the scene without a name or identity.

As I claimed earlier, the banquet scene also stages the contingency of the senses—sight in particular—beginning with Macbeth's invocation of degrees. Mere moments after Banquo's murder, his ghost appears and sits in Macbeth's chair:

Enter the Ghost of Banquo, and sits in Macbeth's place...
MACBETH: Here had we now our country's honour roofed
Were the graced person of our Banquo present,
Who may I rather challenge for unkindness
Than pity for mischance.
ROSS: His absence, sir,
Lays blame upon his promise. Please't your highness

To grace us with your royal company?

MACBETH: The table's full.

LENNOX: Here is a place reserved, sir.

MACBETH: Where?

LENNOX: Here, my good lord. What is't that moves your highness?

MACBETH: Which of you have done this? (3.4.37-48)

The ghost's appearance induces experiences of displacement for Macbeth in multiple ways: physically, politically, and psychologically. These displacements track alongside problems of recognition that stage different levels of sensory corruption and failure. Macbeth's recognition of Banquo's ghost occurs in curiously slow gradations, beginning with Ross' invitation to Macbeth to take his place as host at the table *he* convened. But Macbeth doesn't appear to see his place open; indeed, he seems to have forgotten *where* at the table he should sit. The opening of the scene suggests that his place at the table should be clear: he commands the lords: "You know your own degrees; sit down." (3.4.1) His invitation instructs the lords to process and seat themselves according to their respective dignities and rank in which Macbeth presides in the place of honor as king, even if he engages in some schmoozing as the lords seat themselves. His place would seem to be, uncontroversially, at the head of the table—a place distinguished not only by location but also by the majesty of the throne itself, which excels the other chairs at the table.

One gets a sense of Macbeth's feeling of political dislocation from his reaction to Ross: "The table's full" is quite different from the more personal sense of anger and indignity *Duncan*, a rightful king, might be expected to feel and express at seeing his chair occupied by another. To observe that the table is full expresses, for a moment, the vulnerability a man who struggles to find a place among the Scottish lords as *peers*; not as subjects. Lennox has to remind Macbeth of his place as king: "Here is a place *reserved*, sir."⁴⁵ His term confirms the order and structure that

⁴⁵ Emphasis added.

Macbeth alludes to in the beginning of the scene. Among Ross and the other lords, at least, Macbeth's place at the table has always been clearly designated. They trust the report of their sight and expect their new king to trust his and to perceive that *they* trust their senses as well. The conditions of hospitality and hierarchy here depend mutually assumed stability of the senses. Macbeth's misperception continues, however, because he still fails to recognize the seat reserved for him. Ross' "here" either refers to a seat which he does not designate with a physical gesture, or the gesture's direction to an empty seat remains unclear to Macbeth because Banquo's ghost continues to occupy it, while yet unrecognized. That Macbeth still assumes Banquo among the other lords is suggested with his question to Lennox: "Where?" / LENNOX: Here, my good lord." (3.4.47). "My good lord" adds a tone of worried emphasis that the "sir" two lines previously does not carry. Lennox seems baffled and anxious that Macbeth could simultaneously occupy the role of host and yet fail to recognize his place at the table.

It is here that Macbeth has come close enough to the table—or looked closely enough at his seat—that he recognizes Banquo's ghost *as* a ghost *and* Banquo. The recognition utterly undoes him:

MACBETH: Which of you have done this!

LORDS: What, my good lord?

MACBETH [*to the Ghost*] Thou canst not say I did it. Never shake
Thy gory locks at me (3.4.47-50)

The marvel of Macbeth's loss and regaining of his perceptive powers here achieves a new level of horror. His identification of Banquo's "gory locks" suggests that up until this time the ghost featured the evidence of the murdered body through significant head trauma. That Macbeth could recognize the form of the ghost enough to count Banquo as one of the lords, yet not observe his "gory locks" (or his identity) testifies to a profound failure of sight. From a dramaturgical point of view, if Banquo's ghost is played by an actor visible to the audience, it would be odd direction

for the ghost to enter the scene without the evidence of his murder and then to suddenly reveal his “gory locks” the moment before Macbeth exclaims at their sight.⁴⁶ His sudden recognition of Banquo’s gory locks is all the more startling because, whereas he appears to miss what should be violent trauma in Banquo’s visage, only moments earlier he observes to the first murderer: “There’s blood upon thy face” (3.4.11). Macbeth’s notice of this detail, where his satisfaction at a job apparently well-done briefly submits to decorum, seems to present a man whose perceptive powers not only function normally, but exercise keen sensitivity. Both this health and sensitivity somehow utterly desert him at some point in the space of the next 25 lines.

Macbeth’s recognition of Banquo as the ghost and his equivocating recognition of his crime seems to inspire a larger recognition that the conditions of Macbeth’s hospitality and his ability to distinguish or maintain the degrees of his subjects has vanished, leading to an argument about the how to judge Macbeth’s apparent behavior. Dyson suggests: “...his crime has been one against degree. As kinsman, host, and subject, he has violated ties of blood, hospitality, and state. He has overturned the whole order of things; it is in this scene that his actions boomerang—the order of things turns on him.”⁴⁷ Thus, Ross rises above his degree to, perhaps, try and preserve any remaining vestiges of Macbeth’s dignity by interrupting the frayed theater of polite dinner: “Gentlemen, rise. His highness is not well” (3.4.51). What he means, of course, is that the dinner is over and that they should leave. He seems eager to avoid further witness and consideration of what his senses report, and also eager that his peers not witness their king any

⁴⁶ Though Banquo and Banquo’s ghost are typically played by the same actor, some productions have visually excused the ghost from this scene in order to emphasize Macbeth’s deteriorating mental health. The miniseries *Slings and Arrows*, for example, cuts the ghost, though the audience is encouraged to support the decision. The actor who plays Banquo’s ghost convulses and spasms with overly comic effect, flopping around the table. The director, played by Paul Gross, seems to conclude such a performance would distract from the audience’s perception of Macbeth’s embattled mental state.

⁴⁷ Dyson, “The Structural Function of the Banquet Scene in Macbeth,” 371.

more either. Ross implies that the conditions of hospitality have been too severely compromised to maintain and, moreover, that their perception of the situation obliges them to quit the table and break the company. Lady Macbeth immediately attempts to overrule him and maintain the illusion of normalcy by reformatting Macbeth's behavior in order to appease the concerned judgment of the Scottish lords:

Sit, worthy friends. My lord is often thus,
And hath been from his youth. Pray you, keep seat.
The fit is momentary. Upon a thought
He will again be well. If much you note him
You shall offend him, and extend his passion.
Feed, and regard him not. (3.4.52-57)

Lady Macbeth competes with Ross for the command over the Scottish lords by opening her appeal as Ross does—with an address and acknowledgement of their rank befitting a hospitable host: “worthy friends.” But even as her speech tries to allay their fears because of what they perceive, she ultimately tries to reformulate the operative mode of courtship as uncritical, even blind submission. “Feed, and regard him not” echoes Macbeth's rebuke of the stars—“hide your fires,” as well as her own attempts to desensitize herself and render herself morally blind in Act One, Scene Five.

Lady Macbeth's attempts to manage her husband's horror reprise her principal strategy in motivating his ambitions: appeals to (or rebukes of) his manhood. “Are you a man?...What, quite unmanned in folly.” (3.4.57, 73) Macbeth accepts the terms of her rebuke in addressing himself to Banquo's ghost:

MACBETH: What man dare, I dare.
Approach thou like the rugged Russian bear,
The armed rhinoceros, or th'Hycran tiger;
Take any shape but that, and my firm nerves
Shall never tremble. Or be alive again,
And dare me to the desert with thy sword.
If trembling I inhabit then, protest me

Who I myself struck down. (3.1.119-124)

Macbeth's insistence on his potential to exercise "barefaced power" comes in the midst of a conversation punctuated, as with other scenes, by invocations of masculinity as both a warrant to ambition and declaration of nature. One gets the sense his declaration aims at something like saving face. Yet in the next scene, the sense of masculinity that urged him to declare his strength to his murderers briefly appears for a momentary justification ("What man dare, I dare") before deserting him. His declaration, "Thou canst not say *I* did it!"⁴⁸ tries to assuage his own equivocating conscience as much as to send the spectral Banquo in search of the other murderers. It is only after Banquo's ghost leaves that Macbeth regains his composure, observing with relief, "Why so, being gone / I am a man again." Macbeth's difficult recognition of Banquo's ghost followed by his objection to the specifically *visual* elements of his former friend stages one of the play's strongest instances of Macbeth's reluctance to confront his moral condition even as he emphasizes those visual elements throughout their encounter ("gory locks," "any shape but that," "horrible shadow").

In all of this, Macbeth seems not to have realized that he alone sees the ghost—another failure of perception. He goes from not noting Banquo to failing to notice what must have been an awkwardly silent and increasingly horrified table of guests winged by Lady Macbeth's boiling poise:

MACBETH: Can such things be
And overcome us like a summer's cloud,
Without our special wonder? You make me strange
Even to the disposition that I owe,
When now I think you can behold such sights
And keep the natural ruby of your cheeks
When mine is blanched with fear. (3.4.109-114)

⁴⁸ Emphasis added.

Verbal imprecision here underscores optical difficulties. Macbeth seems to be addressing Banquo when he remarks with a dreadful wonder “You make me strange,” but then the pronoun shifts its object of address to Lady Macbeth when he says “you can behold such sights.” This address again stages a crisis of recognition and interpretation. He also seems not to have heard—or else disbelieved—Lady Macbeth when she previously rebukes him: “Why do you make such faces? When all’s done / You look but on a stool” (3.4.66-67). Here he recognizes Lady Macbeth *as* Lady Macbeth, but interprets the “natural ruby” of her cheeks as a testament to her fortitude and composure in the face of a phenomena that has left him visibly traumatized—“mine is blanched with fear.” As a final indication of the scene’s disorientation of sense and knowledge, Macbeth’s description of his cheek as “blanched” identifies his appearance in visual terms which he cannot certify with his own sight. He might *guess* he looks pale because of Lady Macbeth’s earlier phrase “very painting of your fear” (3.4.60), but her comparison in the line following to the “air drawn dagger” more likely intends to denote the fantastic object of his corrupted senses. If Macbeth knows his cheek is blanched, he must know because he feels the blood having drained from it, leaving his face cold. Under the circumstances of a ghostly encounter, we might well believe Macbeth pales in the sight of his murdered friend. Thus, if he has access to true knowledge, Shakespeare’s scripting of his reaction to Banquo and his wife reveal suggest a further disjunction between the operation of his senses and the way he interprets their perceptions.

When Ross interrupts this terrified reverie, Macbeth’s sense of isolation only deepens as he recognizes he alone has seen the ghost, and Lady Macbeth recognizes that her husband’s behavior has rendered any practice of hospitality utterly impossible, however loosely defined:

ROSS: What sights, my lord?

LADY MACBETH: I pray you, speak not. He grows worse and worse.

Question enrages him. At once, good night.

Stand not upon the order of your going,

But go at once. (3.4.115-119).

Ross' question about what Macbeth has seen insinuates that he, at least, has seen nothing out of the ordinary, and here the tenuous stability of the fractured degrees decisively topples. Stuart Clark argues:

For Macbeth, Banquo's apparition is not, like the dagger, an internal fooling of his senses; it is a true ghost (despite Macbeth's parting 'Unreal mock'ry hence'). For his wife it is merely 'the very painting' of a fear;...This difference and its political overtones are captured best of all not in any of her remarks but in a single question asked of Macbeth by the Thane of Ross—a compromising, even derisory, query that juxtaposes the visual equivocation of the moment with a title of honour.⁴⁹

In this question, Lady Macbeth recognizes a growing danger her and Macbeth's political power. Horror and wonder may arrest the lords briefly, but Lady Macbeth seems to anticipate that these conditions will metastasize into curiosity, doubt, conspiracy, and rebellion. She stages a final intervention for her husband's diminished appearance by issuing an evacuation order that explicitly forbids ceremony and order in favor of haste and the hope of regrouping.

This moment's conflict between confrontation and aversion occurs in a sequence of events where the phenomenology of optics and sight reveals the power of evil to violate not only the moral self, but the sensible and sensory self. Kevin Curran, for example, has argued Macbeth's vision of the dagger in Act Two, Scene One, posits a definition of criminality that depends as much upon physical experience as it does upon the posture or inclination of the mind and will:

Shakespeare stages the process of becoming criminal as one in which physical sensation is integral to mental conception. The initial question that Macbeth poses—"Is this a dagger which I see before me / The handle toward my hand?" (2.1.33-34)—has to do not only with *what* at that moment what Macbeth knows, but also, as we quickly discover, with *how* he knows it: through vision ("see") and through touch ("Come, let me clutch thee" [2.1.34]). These lines describe knowledge and thought as part of a larger sensual experience that extends beyond the mental or spiritual into a real, material world of things and actions.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Clark, *Vanities of the Eye*, 257.

⁵⁰ Curran, "Feeling Criminal in Macbeth," 393.

Macbeth's process of becoming criminal here features similar optical difficulties that attend his acknowledgement of criminality when he confronts Banquo's ghost. When the dagger appears, for example, the origin of its projected power remains mysterious even as Macbeth reaches out for it. Curran regards the dagger's origin as proceeding from outside the mind: "One would be hard pressed to find anything in this passage that describes the dagger as a product of the mind. If it is a product of anything, it is a product of the eyes, physical sense organs."⁵¹ The failure of the passage to betray evidence of the dagger's projection from the mind does not, however, therefore mean that it *doesn't* proceed from the mind. It's just not represented that way, and perhaps for the very understandable reason that Macbeth might prefer an alternative explanation. When Banquo's ghost appears, for example, he prefers to believe for a moment that one or some of the Scottish lords has deceived him with an optical illusion because that explanation would satisfy his desire to believe in his sanity and mental soundness and/or to refute the existence of ghosts.

Curran reads Macbeth's experience of the dagger as rejecting an account of criminality that proposes that intention and thought must proceed deed, and points to Lady Macbeth's conjuring of spirits in Act One Scene Five as another example of the way *Macbeth* seems to suggest that, in sensation, the body too seems to manufacture elements of criminality. He quotes from the scene and writes:

Come, you spirits
That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here,
And fill me from the crown to the toe top-full
Of direst cruelty! make thick my blood;
Stop up the access and passage to remorse,
That no compunctious visitings of nature
Shake my fell purpose, nor keep peace between
The effect and it! (1.5.40-47)

⁵¹ Ibid., 396.

As Lady Macbeth directs herself with increasing determination towards the murder of Duncan, we do not witness criminal malice evolving in any conventional sense from her mind. Lady Macbeth's "mortal thoughts" are thoughts, indeed, but, far from abstractions, they are presented as concrete things that "fill" the body "from the crown to the toe topful...thinking is also retheorized as a species of feeling, as something that takes place in and through a body."⁵²

This reading attributes an odd kind of agency to the thoughts themselves. I read the complete sentence as inviting spirits to fill her full of direst cruelty, while her mortal thoughts are merely phenomena that the spirits observe as they wait for the "right kind" of thoughts to exploit.

Macbeth elsewhere stages the possibility of perceptions from outside witnesses. Here, Lady Macbeth seems eager to be perceived in her thoughts as hospitable to the cruelty the spirits might offer whereas in the scene previous Macbeth worries that the stars might "see [his] "black and deep desires" (1.4.51). This too seems a moment of developing criminality, his desire to hide displays something of the moral knowledge necessary to certify his desires as "black" even as "desire" articulates the knowledge and perception of the crown's availability to him *if* he proves willing to perform Duncan's murder.

As the play approaches its conclusion, Shakespeare further develops his phenomenology of sin to reveal further parallels between Scotland's broader population and terrain while revealing unintended consequences for their regimen of desensitization and avoidance of moral knowledge. In Act Four, Scene Three, for example, Ross remarks on Scotland's condition under Macbeth's tyranny. He reveals that the perversion of sense and degree that Lady Macbeth had sought to spread to the Scottish lords has gone on to infect all ranks of citizens.

ROSS: Alas, poor country,
Almost afraid to know itself. It cannot
Be called our mother, but our grave, where nothing
But who knows nothing is once seen to smile;

⁵² Ibid., 397.

Where sighs and groans and shrieks that rend the air
Are made, not marked; where violent sorrow seems
A modern ecstasy. The dead man's knell
Is there scarce asked for who, and good men's lives
Expire before the flowers in their caps,
Dying or ere they sicken. (4.3.165-173)

Scotland as both a land and a nation has taken on the condition of its new ruler, and throughout his speech Ross identifies both the problem of knowledge and the disjunction between perception and judgment. But whereas for Macbeth and Lady Macbeth the attainment of the crown required them to “be innocent of the knowledge,” here ignorance itself has become the measure of happiness. Where Lady Macbeth had instructed the Scottish lords, “Feed, and regard him not” the disturbing display that animated Macbeth has here infected the air with “sighs, groans, and shrieks” that originate from unclear sources. The rending of the air seems to arise either spontaneously from the air itself, or from unnamed people. But these incredible, auditory phenomena fail to earn notice or consideration. The upheaval in social values and psychology that takes sorrow for ecstasy also repeats earlier equivocations that characterize numerous observations early in the play, as when Macbeth observes in Act One, Scene Three “So fair and foul a day I have not seen” (1.3.37). This scene’s staging of equivocation as well as the return to reconfigured trauma helps emphasize what Stuart Clark identifies as the play’s interest in *uncertainty* as a dominant mode of experience:

Many of the verbal paradoxes in the play themselves invoke visual ambiguity or even duplicity, including Macbeth’s own opening remark ‘So foul and fair a day I have not seen’... The uncertainty works in the opposite direction as well; encounters with visual images (witches, daggers, ghosts) and with visual instruments (mirrors, the imagination) cannot be resolved in language—‘reconciled’, in Macduff’s terms (4. 3. 139)—because they too ‘lie like truth’, leaving the observer unsure which way to interpret them.⁵³

⁵³ Clark., 254.

Ross' final reference to men who die before the flowers in their caps have wilted finalizes this sense of duplicity in part by upending the application of a fairly common metaphor for human frailty and mortality. Psalm 103, for example, figures leaves and flowers as reminders of life's impermanence: "man's days are as grass, as the flower of the field so shall he flourish." But here the flower, even plucked and cut off from its shoot and roots, maintains a vibrancy that shall outlast its owner.

The problem of knowledge achieves a particular poignancy in the very next scene where Lady Macbeth comes under the worried eye of the doctor, and I want to emphasize this scene for the way it characterizes sin as an epistemic crisis in conjunction with desensitization, but also adds some of the phenomenological dimensions that Shakespeare developed in *Richard III*. Here we find not only a fragmenting and degrading of the senses, but sin as an experience of dreadful abundance and overwhelming power. The doctor and Lady Macbeth's gentlewoman come to observe their queen, and she very quickly demonstrates that though she appears present to them bodily and spatially, *her experience* has come untethered from time, place, and sense.

DOCTOR: How came she by that light?

GENTLEWOMAN: Why, it stood by her: she has light by her continually; 'tis her command.

DOCTOR: You see, her eyes are open.

GENTLEWOMAN: Ay, but their sense is shut.

DOCTOR: What is it she does now? Look, how she rubs her hands.

GENTLEWOMAN: It is an accustomed action with her, to seem thus washing her hands: I have known her continue in this a quarter of an hour.

LADY MACBETH Yet here's a spot.

DOCTOR: Hark! she speaks: I will set down what comes from her, to satisfy my remembrance the more strongly.

LADY MACBETH: Out, damned spot! out, I say!--One: two: why, then, 'tis time to do't.--Hell is murky!--Fie, my lord, fie! a soldier, and afeard? What need we fear who knows it, when none can call our power to account?--Yet who would have thought the old man to have had so much blood in him. (5.1.18-34)

Lady Macbeth's connection to reality seems to be intermittent—when she's possessed of her location and authority as queen, she seems to have recognized her ability to command the presence of light, and acted upon it, fearing the dark that once she invited and urged join the pall of hell's smoke. The scene also subtly highlights the extremity of her condition by giving us access to her condition and behavior through a doctor and the gentlewoman that stand in for the harassed citizenry. Throughout their exchange, the doctor consults the Gentlewoman both to acquire information—which he receives and trusts—as well as to verify his own perceptions. DOCTOR: “*You see* her eyes are open.” GENTLEWOMAN: “Ay, but their senses are shut.” His persistent questions—first about the light and then about the rubbing together of Lady Macbeth's and the reception of the answers establishes a concord of perception which the play consistently renders provisional and which, in Macbeth's ascent to the throne, is threatened on a national level. Some facsimile of it was maintained for a moment when Macbeth made a formal acknowledgment of the degrees of his lords in Act Three, Scene Four, but by the time that Lady Macbeth has commanded them to “Feed, and regard him not” the culture and traditions of perception that constituted those degrees can no longer co-exist with Macbeth's monarchy.

Indeed, the shared, mutual perception that occurs in this scene seems contingent on Macbeth's absence—one imagines that were he present during his wife's episode, he would have intervened in order to prevent any witness of her all too revelatory behavior. A variation on this dynamic occurs in the next scene when Macbeth questions the doctor about his wife: “How does your patient, doctor?” (5.3.38). The doctor responds with vague and non-committal language: “Not so sick, my lord, / As she is troubled with thick-coming fancies / That keep her from rest” (5.3.39-41). The doctor's use of the word “fancies” here further participates in the play's thematic presentation of equivocation because, as a contraction of “fantasy,” the word can denote

“an illusory appearance” and allows the doctor to suggest mental illness without disclosing its cause. He also rejects the word “sick” in favor for the more ambiguous and less-severe sounding “troubled” while ultimately concluding “Therein the patient / Must minister to himself” (5.3.47-48) as though Lady Macbeth might ultimately simply *choose* to get better. But alone with the Gentlewoman, the doctor proves much more candid in his horror and assessment and knows he can do so safely. Even here, however, the doctor feels the testament of his senses too provisional and his memory to uncertain to document the strangeness of his encounter. When she says, “Here’s a spot,” he determines to take notes. Lady Macbeth reveals herself as somehow transported back to the moment immediately after Duncan’s murder, right before Act Two, Scene Two. But even then, her sense of location remains unclear; she complains, “Hell is murky,” and the reference remains ambiguous. Is she referring to the smoke of hell which she previously conjured to pall the night? Have they somehow been transported *to* hell for the time in which they murder Duncan? Or does their castle or situation assume Hell as a metaphor in which she can no longer see her way with the clarity she expected? Or, as I previously suggested with her intermittent connection to reality, time, and place, could this be a moment where Lady Macbeth briefly comes out of her trance to observe that her fractured senses and psychological state are, in their violation and ruin, themselves a hell to which she has been condemned?

Throughout the scene, Lady Macbeth addresses her husband—both present and absent to her—chastising him for his cowardice (“fie, a soldier and afeard”... “You mar all with this starting”), while her own condition and fretting reveals the irony of her own, greater vulnerability to fear. Macbeth seems to fear discovery, but throughout the scene her lament returns with greater and greater vexation to a spot of blood.

LADY MACBETH: The thane of Fife had a wife: where is she now?--
What, will these hands ne'er be clean?--No more o'

that, my lord, no more o' that: you mar all with
this starting.

DOCTOR: Go to, go to; you have known what you should not.

GENTLEWOMAN: She has spoke what she should not, I am sure of
that: heaven knows what she has known.

LADY MACBETH Here's the smell of the blood still: all the
perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little
hand. Oh, oh, oh!...

DOCTOR: This disease is beyond my practise: yet I have known
those which have walked in their sleep who have died
holily in their beds. (5.1.36-43, 49-51)

Macbeth's "murdering of sleep" is followed by Lady Macbeth's strange combination of insomnia and sleepwalking. John Calvin connects the loss and troubling of sleep to the loss of innocence in Adam and Eve's sin in the fall. He writes "the feeling of their evill was onely confused, and ioyned with dullnesse, much like unto a dreame in unquiet sleepe."⁵⁴ Calvin's use of the word "feeling" here emphasizes the phenomenological effects of the fall, and "unquiet sleep" provides an apt description of Lady Macbeth's condition here, according with the Doctor's lament earlier in the scene: "A great perturbation in nature, to receive at once the benefit of sleep and do the effects of watching." (5.1.8-9.)

To the same symptom of unquiet sleep Shakespeare adds Lady Macbeth's experience of her sin manifesting as both stain and stench. Her guilt overwhelms her senses. She laments, "Yet here's a spot" after her gentlewoman tells the doctor, "It is an accustomed action with her, to seem thus washing her hands. I have known her continue in this a quarter of an hour." (5.1.24-28). Lady Macbeth's frustrated observation "Yet" suggests the surfeit of her sin represented here less in excess of quantity—as with the shipwrecks in Clarence's dream or the dozen ghosts that haunt Richard—than in the strength with which the spot, though so small, resists all attempts at washing. Excess registers a few moments later, however, when Lady

⁵⁴Calvin, *Commentarie of John Calvine upon the first booke of Moses called Genesis*, 98.

Macbeth cries, “Here’s the smell of blood still. All the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand. O, O, O!” (5.1.43-44). Shakespeare amplifies the scale of Lady Macbeth’s sin and her experience by comparing the stain and stench of sin—putrefying her *little* hand—to the insufficiency of *all* the perfumes of Arabia. We get here a sense of the “intolerable burden” posed by her stricken conscience not just through the excess signaled by “all” but also through naming the perfumes as Arabian—here meant to signal the extreme exoticism of the perfume’s origin, and therefore significant—but insufficient—power to erase or obscure the smell.

This impossible desire to apply all the perfumes of Arabia to her hand represents one further variation on Lady Macbeth’s enactment of the problematic moral knowledge that underwrites the play’s consideration of ambition, the will, and sin. For as the scene begins, she initially desires “only” that she might wash her hands “What, will these hands never be clean?”). But in this later instance, the problem of the spot has shifted, or grown, from being an optical phenomenon which might announce their guilt to an olfactory harassment that violates her senses. And whereas Macbeth previously mourns the likelihood that his hands would turn the seas red in his attempt to wash them, Lady Macbeth here abandons the possibility of cleanliness and pure appearance and seems willing to settle for a modicum of personal comfort despite damning appearances. She desires not that she be made to look clean, but that the testament of her sin be rendered more bearable. Shakespeare’s presentation of sin and guilt here as sight and smell in particular seems to incorporate other tropes of representing the experience of moral sensitivity—particularly in regard to evil. Holinshed, for example, refers to the violated senses of the Scottish lords when Donwald, one of the inspirations for Macbeth, runs about his castle in a frenzied manhunt after murdering the king: “Finally, such was his over-earnest diligence in the severe inquisition and trial of the offenders herein that some of the lords began to dislike the

matter and to *smell forth* shrewd tokens that he should not be altogether clear himself.”⁵⁵

Holinshed represents their growing suspicion and distrust as the detection of an odor which, though perceived, can't be located.

To this abundance of smell of perfumes, Lady Macbeth cries “O, O, O!” Her cries here resonate with the theological expectation of the Confession of Prayer that the weight of sin should cause individuals to “bewayle” their “manifolde synnes and wyckednesse.”⁵⁶ Lady MacBeth further signals the impossibility of containing sin when she tries to reassure her absent husband that their deeds cannot be discovered: “Wash your hands, put on your nightgown, look not so pale. I tell you yet again, Banquo's buried. He cannot come out on's grave.” (5.1.52-54) Some vestige of the once-domineering Lady Macbeth remains, but the previous appearance of Banquo's ghost and her own inability to wash out the “damned spot” renders her commands for Macbeth to wash, dress, and “look not so pale” utterly futile and absurd.

In a final gesture towards the phenomenological weight of her sin, Lady Macbeth dies offstage in Act Five scene Five, but Shakespeare alerts us to the fact with the stage direction: “A cry within of women.” Macbeth hears the sound, but doesn't recognize it—he has to ask, and his servant, Seyton, tells him “It is the cry of women, my good lord.” (5.5.7). Macbeth observes, “I have almost forgot the taste of fears / The time has been my senses would have cooled / to hear a night-shriek.” MacBeth's inability to recognize the nature of the cries, and his own admission of his failing senses, stands in stark contrast to the phenomenological excess experienced by Lady

⁵⁵ Holinshed, “Duff and Duncan.” *Macbeth: A Norton Critical Reader*, 159. Emphasis added.

⁵⁶ As I have noted in previous chapters, critics like Bruce Smith have remarked that Shakespeare's use of the exclamation “O” occurs across several plays and, like the “bewayle” instructed in the Confession of Sin, implies the insufficiency of semantic agency through the excess of the auditory expression: “The semantic emptiness of these O's on the printed page...stands as a testimony to their embodied fullness. As Joel Fineman remarks in respect to *Othello*, the insistent sound of [o:] has the effect of undermining the traditionally admired power of literary language to create visionary presence.” *The Acoustic World of Early Modern England: Attending to the O-Factor*, 14.

MacBeth as well as the excessive “sighs, groans, and shrieks that rend the air” in Act Four, Scene Three. His numbness also accords, however, with the Geneva Bible’s gloss on 1 Timothy 4:2, which imagines the conscience becoming numb, because calloused, through prolonged exposure to un-repentant sin.

The numbness and desensitization that characterize Macbeth’s pursuit of ambition collapse suddenly and absolutely in Act Five, Scene Ten, when he encounters Macduff. Initially, Macduff seems in danger of losing the engagement to Macbeth, who emerges from their first skirmish emboldened and cocky:

MACBETH: Thou lovest labour.
As easy mayst thou the intrenchant air
With thy keen sword impress as make me bleed.
Let fall thy blade on vulnerable crests;
I bear a charmed life, which must not yield
To one born of a woman. (5.10.8-13)

Shakespeare renders this moment of defeat for Macbeth as contingent *not* on Macduff’s superior martial prowess, but upon the revelation of irresistible and clear knowledge which Macbeth can neither avoid or explain away. Fittingly, Macbeth here proves again the author of his own demise, taunting Macduff with the provisions of his apparent charm only for Macduff to reveal that he fulfills them.

MACDUFF: Despair thy charm,
And let the angel whom thou still has served
Tell thee Macduff was from his mother’s womb
Untimely ripped.
MACBETH: Accurséd be the tongue that tells me so,
For it hath cowed by better part of man;
And be these juggling fiends no more believed,
That palter with us in a double sense,
That keep the word of promise to our ear
And break it to our hope. I’ll not fight with thee (5.10.14-22)

Macduff recognizes that Macbeth cannot be defeated with the application of simply physical force. He combines the revelation of his birth with the command to despair in the hope that he can *persuade* Macbeth into a weakened or paralyzed state. He aims to induce an overriding crisis of belief that disables Macbeth's belief in his own exceptionality. As I have argued of *Richard III*, Macduff's invocation of "despair" here also resonates with theological tones that the term has lost in centuries' passage, but which would have been quite familiar to early-modern audiences still in the grip of English Calvinism. John Stachniewski writes about the correlation between religious despair and suicide:

In spite of the horrific deterrent (the deed itself guaranteed damnation) S.E. Sprott believes that the predestinarian temptation to suicide was, in the 1640's, 'the pre-eminent aspect of the problem of suicide'. And Michael MacDonald remarks in his study of Sir Richard Napier's medical practice that 'The resolution to kill oneself was routinely equated with the temptation to despair of God's mercy and to abandon all hope of salvation.'⁵⁷

Macbeth doesn't resolve to kill himself, but Macduff's revelation clearly cripples his convictions, and he lashes out in fear and rage. He makes his final reference to his ever-provisional masculinity, recognizing himself deserted by his strength and courage as he was when confronted by Banquo's ghost.

Macbeth goes on to admit plainly of the witches what he has known and tried to dismiss in their cryptic promises which he all too readily consumed and believed revealed no dangers. His brief summary of their work, aligning juggling with the double sense, acknowledges for a final time information that should have motivated a different path and set of actions. And though brief, this exchange distills many of the plays thematic attentions as well as conflicts. Macbeth's description of the witches with words like "juggling" and "palter" emphasize the

⁵⁷ Stachniewski, *The Persecutory Imagination*, 52.

phenomenological and sensory contingencies of perception, knowledge, and judgment and at last acknowledges the disaster they won him to through deception. “Juggling” and “palter” here approximate each other here as deceptions applied first to the optical and then the auditory powers. For while juggling now may be regarded as a certain mastery of eye-hand coordination, many early-modern writers regarded the practice as a type of prestige or illusion that, both in England and on the continent, was regarded as having demonic associations.⁵⁸ The Oxford English Dictionary likewise defines “palter:” “to say (or recite) something indistinctly; to mumble, babble” and “To shift, equivocate, or prevaricate in action or speech; to act or deal evasively, esp. for treacherous ends; to use trickery.”⁵⁹

Macbeth qualifies his meaning by describing the conflict between the information received by the heart and the ear, but the phenomenological sense of the word as pure noise likewise applies. Mumbling and babbling can only generate noise, but the determination to conclude certain meaning—especially beneficial meaning—requires an investment of credulity and hope the actions do not merit. Banquo demonstrates this caution almost immediately after their encounter with the witches: “to win us to our harm / The instruments of darkness tell us truths, / Win us with honest trifles to betray’s / In deepest consequence” (1.3.121-124.) Banquo

⁵⁸ “The often very negative attention given to actual conjuring and juggling in social contexts associated with ‘popular culture’—the alehouse, the fairground, and so on—and to the notion of visual duping that they obviously contained, is a further important aspect of the early modern history of the prestige. What might be enjoyed at court or in the houses of the aristocracy was not to be recommended for the general population. After the Reformation, popular illusionary practices for gain and entertainment were increasingly condemned as deviant by the social critics of the day who saw them as immoral, even demonic, ‘cozening’. In France the attack fell typically on the *joueurs de passe passe*—players with cups and balls—whose deceptions were the subject of Hieronymus Bosch’s *The Conjuror* and deemed in writings from the late 1570s by Pierre Massé, René Benoist, Pierre Nodé, and Pierre Crespet to fall under the prohibitions of Moses. For Richard Bernard, the Somerset minister, typical witches included ‘jugglers’, sporting with ‘resemblances’, and ‘tumblers’.” Clark, 82.

⁵⁹ “palter, v.”. OED Online. Oxford University Press. Accessed March 27, 2018.

perceives, even if he cannot yet articulate, the danger that the witches prophesy, and which forecasts the fatal conflict between him and Macbeth. Macbeth however, proves less critical:

Two truths are told
As happy prologues to the swelling act
Of the imperial theme...
This supernatural soliciting
Cannot be ill, cannot be good. (1.3.126-130)

It is this perhaps this moment that inaugurates Macbeth's attempt to occupy two fundamentally opposed epistemic positions. For even as he tries to suspend his judgment and dull his perception, he sporadically reverts back into his former nature and recognizes good and evil in his desires and actions. In his apparent ambivalence here he attempts to suspend judgment from a desire to seem himself as a passive beneficiary in the "imperial theme," and this same passivity resurfaces a few lines later with the notion the crown that might come to him "without his stir." But in between these two receptions hides a darker menace of ambition which he tries to obscure with the same passive language. For though he says, "If good, why do I yield to that suggestion / Whose horrid image doth unfix my hair," this yielding is not a submission to the external supernatural soliciting that gives him an "earnest of success." This yielding requires embracing a course of action which even in the instant of its suggestion he recognizes as "horrible imaginings."

This mode of epistemic crisis arises of his own making and continues to his last moment. Even when he faces Macduff, the figure of horrible epiphany, the perception of true knowledge fails to motivate a corresponding action. As with his recognition of Banquo, Macbeth's recognition of Macduff confronts him with knowledge he cannot reasonably deny, but he prevails stubbornly to the last. When Macduff invites him to "yield," Macbeth offers his final defiance:

MACBETH: I will not yield
To kiss the ground before young Malcolm's feet,
And to be baited with the rabble's curse.
Though Birnam Wood be come to Dunsinane
And thou opposed being of no woman born,
Yet will I try the last. Before my body
I throw my warlike shield. Lay on, Macduff,
And damned be him that first cries, "Hold, enough!" (5.10.28-34)

In *Macbeth*, Shakespeare returns to questions of religious experience that emerged early in his career, but here they're simultaneously more intimate and more horrific. In *Richard III*, Shakespeare stages two portraits of religion: one is that of Richard performing for London's citizens with a Machiavellian piety, and the other is that of Richard reduced to schizophrenic hysterics following a confrontation with his conscience and a procession of ghosts. Richard's transformation takes place suddenly, on the eve of his battle with Richmond. For most of the play, Richard's malice and ambition are known quantities, both predictable and unsurprising. But in *Macbeth*, Shakespeare tempers this theme and presents it throughout the play, showing us a man not merely seduced gradually by evil ambitions, but a man whose moral deterioration renders him unrecognizable and unpredictable both to himself and others.

Shakespeare's emphasis of Macbeth's culpability over and against that of the witches aligns him with *Richard II* and *Richard III* to the extent that plays likewise undertake the question of individual sin and culpability against a larger moral matrix in which the personal and individual interpolate the social and communal. All three plays take seriously the ecological metaphysics of sin, in which a community's actions or inactions contribute to the moral failings of an individual, but again, in all three, that individual is never merely victim. The introduction of the witches in the beginning offers convenient figures for blame who solicit our expectations of transgression. But even as Shakespeare rewards early-modern hunger for the supernatural, spectacle, and illusion, *Macbeth* fools the audience with its own dramatic prestidigitation,

revealing Macbeth's own potent and determined evil in the place of the bearded women.

Shakespeare presents Macbeth's determination to avoid moral knowledge through the annihilation of his senses *as* an impulse and power equal to that of witchcraft. It is this impulse and power that drive him to this death.

Critical traditions surrounding *Macbeth* have typically cast the play as one which perhaps most speaks to the human capacity for corruption and evil. Macbeth presents us with a variation on two familiar stories: that of the seemingly average man (both in morals and in station) trying to make his way in the world, and that of a man whose destiny takes a wild turn because of a chance encounter. That such a man could ultimately betray all his values and sacrifice his closest relationships on the altar of ambition has unsettled audiences and readers in every epoch. In his introduction to the play for Norton's 1997 anthology of Shakespeare's works, Stephen Greenblatt asserts this sense of Macbeth's "everyman" status in order to then suggest his all-too-nearness to "our own" tenuous moral fiber.

Far more than any other of Shakespeare's, more than the homicidal Richard III, the treacherous Claudius in *Hamlet*, and the cold-hearted Iago in *Othello*, Macbeth is fully aware of the wickedness of his deeds and is tormented by this awareness... somewhere beyond the immediate circle of order restored, the witches are dancing around the caldron, and, the play seems to imply, the caldron is in every one of us.⁶⁰

Greenblatt's descriptors of "homicidal," "treacherous," and "cold-hearted" all attempt to place the respective characters at some distance from the reader who, he implies, may resonate with the pangs of a guilty conscience (if not for the same reasons). These pangs are meant to signal the bubbling of that "caldron in everyone one of us" which might froth over. Yet Greenblatt's ominous warning about our inner caldrons seems not quite ominous enough. The danger isn't just that Macbeth shows us the rise and fall of a man who follows his ambitions and loses

⁶⁰ Greenblatt, "Introduction." *The Norton Shakespeare*, 2557, 2562.

everything, but that his political journey and personal metamorphosis both rely on unpredictable forces and precipitate bizarre, seemingly unrelated consequences. Macbeth's descent into depravity isn't a consistent downward plunge. His metamorphosis captures a bit of the horror one might expect of witnessing someone fight against drowning in dark waters. Every now and then, he flails to the surface to gasp for breath.

Epilogue – Nothing Worth: Toward Human Flourishing in *Henry V*

Most of Shakespeare's characters can't bear the moral epiphanies which suddenly announce the reality of their sinful condition. They tend to cast their gaze elsewhere, away from the horror and misery they perceive. Clarence can barely muster a moment of contrition before, with the arrival of the murderers, he returns to stratagems of self-justification and blame shifting. As I argue in Chapter two, these epistemic crises can only lead to other expressions of sin, either in the commission wicked deeds or the failure to stop them when given the opportunity. These crises of moral knowledge establish Shakespeare's abiding vision of human depravity and misery. But if we look to *Henry V*, we find a rare moment in which one of Shakespeare's characters comes, as it were, face to face with his true self. And rather than averting his gaze or making justifications, he acknowledges his troubled past—his possession of a legacy corrupted by ancestral, generational sins. This encounter comes, in some ways, at the worst possible moment as Henry awaits the morning light of battle and considers the prospect of rallying soldiers. He begins to pray, asking God to make his army bold and successful.

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

Imploring pardon. (4.1.271-287)¹

Nicholas Grene has identified this scene as Henry's "private Gethsemane."² Though he begins by addressing God more as a figure of Mars than Yahweh, the act of prayer seems to induce a renewed awareness of his delicate position as the son of a usurper. His father's deposing of Richard II constitutes an act of rebellion against divine order and Henry inherits this sense of spiritual debt and guilt. He begins to bargain with God, trying to exchange spiritual commodities for victory against the French. Henry's negotiating seems to take on a tone of growing anxiety as he lists his offerings attempting to compensate for Richard's death. These figures seem impressive perhaps on a human scale, but one gets the sense that when he says "five hundred," "twice a day" and "sad and solemn," he includes these details to console himself just as much as to persuade God.

The phrase "More will I do" brings Henry's desperation to a climax—he flounders in realizing that he can't think of more things to offer. Though alone, Henry has been performing—performing for a God whose favor he cannot be certain to secure. He grows self-conscious in recognizing the dramatic nature of his promises to institute mass-production piety for an audience that—unlike his friends, his enemies, and his soldiers—cannot be fooled or moved with theatrics. His performance crumbles with the admission: "though all I can do is nothing worth."

Kenneth Branagh stages the same dramatic turn in his 1989 film adaptation of *Henry V*. Gazing intently into the night sky, Branagh initially races along the speech with a tone verging on agony. But when he comes to the line "More will I do," Branagh's focus diminishes in

¹ Shakespeare, *Henry V*. *The Norton Shakespeare*.

² Grene, *Shakespeare's Serial History Plays*, 243.

intensity. The camera slowly closes in on his face as his voice softens and the pace of delivery decreases. Branagh's Henry seems to realize that the debt he confronts in the figure of Richard makes all his offerings paltry, hollow gestures. He concludes "imploring pardon," confessing that his prospects in battle depend entirely on God's mercy. This moment proves remarkable in Shakespeare's canon for the way that Henry "remains" in the moment of his moral epiphany. To the extent that the act of prayer reveals to him his true condition—personally and politically—the self he beholds *does* trouble him, but he doesn't attempt to manage this anxiety. As I suggested in my introduction, he rather seems to look to God, hoping in the possibility of his pardon, and thereby trusting in God's power to absolve him. To repeat Brian Gerrish:

Faith, for Luther, is nothing but the reflex of God's self-disclosure in Christ. It is confidence only because it perceives God as he is, that is, as he shows himself in his Word. A man thinks correctly about God when he believes God's Word, and the Word of the gospel is this: 'Take heart, my son, your sins are forgiven' (Matt. 9:2). Because the confidence of the heart thus rests entirely on instruction by the Word, Luther can say that he is righteous by faith *or by knowledge*.³

Henry *believes* in the possibility of his pardon, and rises at the call of his servant, Gloucester, to enter the fray of battle from which he emerges victorious. His confrontation with his sin and history does not result in despair, or excuse. He accepts his sin, seeks God's pardon, and seems to find it. The encounter returns him to himself, and he experiences himself as whole, as pardoned. It is in this confidence that he leads his army to victory and peace as a king, and into love and marriage as a man. This, I suggest, is at least one portrait that Shakespeare offers us of abundant, thriving human life and experience.

³ Gerrish, *The Old Protestantism and the New*, 86.

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