

‘Influencing the hearts and lives of all’: Shakespeare, the Church and the Victorians

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Introduction

'I will tell you the beginning; and if it please your ladyships, you may see the end'
As You Like It (1.2.119-20)

In a passing comment, tangential to his study on Joyce, Andrew Gibson recently claimed of the Victorian era that ‘with the distinguished exception of the remarkable A. C. Bradley [...] the Shakespeare criticism of the period did not provide interpretation, analysis, or philosophical investigation’.¹ To suggest that there was no interpreting, analyzing or investigation of Shakespeare with a learned or ‘philosophical’ bent, presupposes an absence of critical discourse or agenda in Shakespearean literary interpretations throughout the years of Victoria’s reign. This study, however, proposes that interpretation, investigation and analysis can be found within the most readily available critical framework of the period: religion. Indeed, in 1858, Rev. Thomas Ray Eaton of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge claimed that ‘in Shakespeare’s plays religion is a vital and active principle, sustaining the good, tormenting the wicked, and influencing the hearts and lives of all’.² Taking Eaton’s comment as a premise – that is, assuming the ‘vital’ nature of religion within the plays – this thesis explores the relationship between the Church and Shakespeare reception between the accepted parameters of the Victorian era: the 1830s to early 1900s.

While the term ‘Church’ indicates one cohesive institution, the ‘church’ in Victorian England encompasses Protestant branches of Christianity, particularly Anglicanism, High Anglicanism, Evangelism and Christian Socialism. As much of the religious debate and activity in the period between 1830 and the early 1900s pertained to the Church of Rome, a significant focus of this thesis is on English Protestant

¹ Andrew Gibson, *Joyce’s Revenge: History, Politics and Aesthetics in Ulysses* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 71.

² Rev. Thomas Ray Eaton, *Shakespeare and the Bible* (London: James Blackwood, 1858), p. 13.

responses to Catholicism as it appears in Shakespeare. Broadly speaking, neither Catholicism nor Protestantism is a static or even simple concept in Shakespeare Studies. Shakespeare himself wrote in post-Reformation England about historical Catholicism which, in turn, was interpreted in Victorian England by largely non-Catholic audiences. But while Shakespeare's contemporary Church was ostensibly the Church of England, there was no official Church in Victorian England to which all Christians were obliged to conform. It is important to be aware of these variables and tensions throughout this study, and to recall that Shakespeare is under discussion within a Victorian context.

From the Catholic Emancipation in 1829, the Oxford Movement in the 1830s, the re-instatement of papal hierarchy in 1850, and the Public Worship Regulations Act of 1874, there were constant debates about the role and motives of the Church of Rome, and widespread fears about ritualism and idolatry corrupting the Anglican Church. Catholicism is a useful point of critical reference because it forms much of the backdrop for the themes and characters within Shakespeare's plays. The focus, here, is not strictly on the polarity of the Anglican and Catholic Churches; rather on Protestant interactions with, appropriations and performances of Shakespeare's Catholic themes and characters.

With respect to the drama, five plays are used as case studies: *Hamlet*, *Measure for Measure*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Henry VIII* and *King John*. These plays offer representative Victorian responses to histories, tragedies and the emerging category of the problem play. Each play was discussed throughout the nineteenth century by critics and, with the exception of *Measure for Measure*, featured in the repertoires of professional actor-managers across the period. The first three plays have received much

critical attention both in the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, and certainly the Victorian era was no different. With respect to the history plays, however, from the 1830s to the end of the century, *Henry VIII* and *King John* were famously staged by the actor-managers William Charles Macready, Charles Kean and Herbert Beerbohm Tree. In other words, these plays took on a significance to Victorian theatre-goers; whether on the stage or page, both works received a level of critical attention that seems to have passed out of early twenty-first century scholarship and, as Richard Schoch has suggested, relevance.³

This study is split into two sections: critical readings and performances. The first part examines critical engagements with the themes of sin, disillusionment and redemption, exploring receptions of the plays' treatments of Catholicism through a Victorian Protestant lens. The second section focuses on the depiction of religion and morality on the stage itself. This part examines performances of the plays, together with their engagements with Catholic ritual and ideology, from a Protestant perspective. Using critical and theatrical engagements with Shakespeare's five plays over the Victorian period, this study explores religious themes in order to determine to what extent religion really was an 'active principle' in Shakespeare criticism.

Sources

Published criticism, performance editions, promptbooks and reviews from between the 1830s to the early 1900s, provide a broad and representative indication of interpretive patterns from the period. Critics are drawn from a range of ideological backgrounds

³ Richard Schoch, *Shakespeare's Victorian Stage: Performing History in the Theatre of Charles Kean* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 117-23.

from the Anglican Bishop Wordsworth, and Christian Socialist F. J. Furnivall, through to the atheist W. J. Birch and the former Evangelist actor-manager Henry Irving.

The Anglican editor Charles Knight published *The Pictorial Edition of the Works of Shakespeare* between 1838 and 1841. Knight's moral approach to the plays comes to the fore in his work *Studies of Shakespeare* (1840). In the same decade that Knight published *Studies*, George Fletcher, another Anglican essayist, produced a critical work also entitled *Studies of Shakespeare* (1847). Like Knight and Fletcher, in the 1840s, William John Birch published *An Inquiry into the Philosophy and Religion of Shakespeare* (1848). Birch's work highlights the plays' anti-religious passages in a bid to prove Shakespeare's own religious scepticism. Birch provides some important readings of characters like Friar Laurence and Isabella as he questions, rather than accepts, their actions and motivations.

The following decade, the literary scholar William Watkiss Lloyd produced critical introductions for Samuel Weller Singer's ten-volume edition of Shakespeare's collected works (1856). Religious institutions, particularly Roman Catholicism, and Christian issues such as pardon and judgement are prominent in Lloyd's introductions which he subsequently re-published in 1875. Another decade later, Bishop Charles Wordsworth published *On Shakespeare's Knowledge and Use of the Bible* (1864). Here Wordsworth compared passages and themes within the plays to extracts from the Bible. Wordsworth made the significant claim that Shakespeare was a 'Protestant against the errors and corruptions of Rome'.⁴

⁴ Charles Wordsworth, *On Shakespeare's Knowledge and Use of the Bible* (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1864), p. 222.

Moving on another decade, Edward Dowden – an Anglican critic of Irish descent – published *Shakspeare: A Critical Study of His Mind and Art* (1875). Dowden, inspired by the work of the German scholar Georg Gervinus, split the plays into ‘periods’ throughout the playwright’s life. Dowden provided a critical foundation for the twentieth-century critic A. C. Bradley, in his work *Shakespearean Tragedy* (1904).⁵ In the same year as *Mind and Art*, Frank Marshall, the playwright and theatre critic, published *A Study of Hamlet* (1875) – originally delivered in the form of lectures for the Catholic Young Men’s Association – which has an interesting focus on matters spiritual as well as psychological.⁶

Following the emerging intellectual trend in studies on Shakespeare, Frederick James Furnivall, a scholar of literature and language and active member of the Christian Socialist movement, produced an edited collection entitled *The Leopold Shakespeare* (1877). Furnivall was a founding member of the New Shakespeare Society, wherein he triggered much tension amongst scholars by limiting publications to chronological, factual studies rather than analytical works.⁷ Finally, Frederick Samuel Boas was a literary scholar with a particular interest in drama. Boas published *Shakespeare and His Predecessors* (1896) while he was Professor of English Literature in Belfast. Boas’ work is crucial for its discussion and categorisation of the ‘problem plays’.⁸

With respect to female voices, Anna Jameson, a travel writer, contributed an insightful collection of essays on Shakespeare’s heroines to the chiefly male world of

⁵ E. J. Gwynn and Arthur Sherbo, ‘Dowden, Edward (1843-1913)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* 2004 <<http://oxforddnb.com/view/article/32882>> [accessed February 2011].

⁶ G. C. Boase and Megan A. Stephan, ‘Marshall, Francis Albert (1840-1889)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography Online* 2004 <<http://oxforddnb.com/view/article/18135>> [accessed March 2011].

⁷ William S. Peterson, ‘Furnivall, Frederick James (1825-1910)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* 2007 <<http://oxforddnb.com/view/article/33298>> [accessed May 2011].

⁸ Frederick S. Boas, *Shakespeare and His Predecessors* (1896; repr. London: John Murray, 1922), p. 357.

Shakespearean interpretation in 1832.⁹ Jameson offered close readings of Shakespeare's women in relation to the themes of morality, poetry and history. Similarly, the literary scholar Mary Cowden Clarke, as well as an invaluable concordance to Shakespeare, published a fictional work *The Girlhood of Shakespeare's Heroines* (1850). This is a useful indication of Shakespeare appropriation in the middle of the century, particularly for a female audience. Incidentally, Mary Cowden Clarke's husband, Charles Cowden Clarke, is also referred to in this study.

Just as there are representative critics and scholars, so too are there characteristic performers referred to in the second half of this thesis. The following actor-managers are referred to frequently in the final three chapters. William Charles Macready, manager of Covent Garden and later of Drury Lane, became famous for his Shakespearean productions, two of which – *King John* (1842) and *Henry VIII* (1852) – are pertinent here. Overlapping slightly with Macready, Charles Kean was famed for his lavish Shakespeare productions including *Romeo and Juliet* (1841) and *Henry VIII* (1855), together with his success in securing royal patronage.¹⁰ Finally in this period, Samuel Phelps mounted *Measure for Measure* (1846), amongst other Shakespeare plays, at Sadler's Wells where he became manager in 1844.¹¹

Moving towards the final quarter of the century, Henry Irving famously produced Shakespeare's plays, of which *Hamlet* (1874), *Romeo and Juliet* (1882) and *Henry VIII* (1892) are pertinent to this discussion. Like Irving, his rival, the actor-

⁹ Judith Johnston, 'Jameson, Anna Brownell (1794–1860)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography Online* 2004 <<http://oxforddnb.com/view/article/14631>> [accessed June 2011].

¹⁰ M. Glen Wilson, 'Kean, Charles John (1811–1868)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography Online* 2008 <<http://oxforddnb.com/view/article/15203>> [accessed May 2011].

¹¹ J. P. Wearing, 'Phelps, Samuel (1804–1878)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography Online* 2008 <<http://oxforddnb.com/view/article/22092>> [accessed May 2011].

manager Wilson Barrett, actively sought to promote the educational value of the stage. Barrett used Shakespeare, specifically *Hamlet* (1884), and drama with religious themes such as *The Sign of the Cross* (1895), to instruct his audiences. Also in this period, Johnston Forbes-Robertson produced *Romeo and Juliet* (1895) and *Hamlet* (1897), and was the first actor to include the entrance of Fortinbras at the close of the tragedy. Another *Hamlet* was produced by Herbert Beerbohm Tree in 1892, as well as a lavish three-act version of *King John* (1899). Whereas these actor-managers were associated with, though not restricted to, London, Frank Benson was a travelling manager who was primarily based in Stratford-upon-Avon at the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre. Benson's *Romeo and Juliet* (1898) provides an important indication of religion being foregrounded as a theme on the stage and within the play itself. This list is not intended to be proscriptive; rather, it provides an introduction to the sources discussed over the next six chapters.

Religion in Contemporary Scholarship

Recent scholarship including that of Sue Morgan, Keith Snell and Paul S. Ell, and Timothy Larson has covered ground as broad as religion and gender, religion and geography, and the Bible in the nineteenth century, respectively.¹² While it is difficult to generalize about the nature of religion in the period, J. L. Altholz provides a useful summary:

The orthodoxy of Protestant England [...] was the product of Evangelical revival. It is impossible to overstate the pervasiveness and intensity of the moralism which the Evangelicals had infused into every aspect of Victorian

¹² Sue Morgan, *Women, Religion and Feminism in Britain, 1750-1900* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002); K. D. S. Snell and Paul S. Ell, *Rival Jerusalems: The Geography of Victorian Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Timothy Larson, *A People of One Book: The Bible and the Victorians* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

life [...] what separates us from the Victorians [...] is their readiness to make moral judgments and our readiness to suspend them.¹³

The significance of morality, judgment and self-improvement for salvation underpins current conceptions of Victorian religion. Altholz highlights the common ideological ground between what were, in truth, conflicting Christian sects in a period when the term ‘religion’ encompassed anything from daily domestic life to intellectual, scholarly biblical criticism.

Throughout the nineteenth century, the Church of England and the Bible were being contested from various angles. As well as the rise of natural science and secular rationalism, Evangelism attracted large congregations in nonconformist churches, and intellectual dissent had emerged from within the Anglican Church itself. Furthermore, liberal Christianity, in what came to be known as Christian Socialism, called for an accessible form of religion for those hitherto overlooked by the Church of England. While this was effectively Protestant dissent, the Oxford Movement, in the 1830s and 1840s, expressed discontent with Anglican practices and theology, calling for an ideological reconciliation between these and Roman Catholic traditions. The shift towards Roman Catholic ideology that came with the Oxford Movement or Tractarianism, particularly amid strong English anti-Catholic sentiments, implied that the Church of England was no longer an infallible authority to which all English Christians could aspire. For this reason, morality, a universal system of human ethics, seems to have become the legacy of the Victorian era, rather than religion or even the ‘Church’.

¹³ J. L. Altholz, ‘The Warfare of Conscience with Theology’, in *Religion in Victorian Britain: Interpretations*, ed. by Gerald Parsons, 5 vols. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989), V, 150-69 (pp. 153-4).

Shakespeare

Bearing in mind these concerns about religious variety, it is necessary to move on to the issue of Victorian Shakespeare. Current scholarship on Shakespeare in the Victorian period has revealed a general cultural and scholarly reverence for the playwright.

Michael Dobson has traced the adaptation of Shakespeare into a 'national poet' in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, providing a historical cultural foundation for what Shaw came to define as Victorian 'Bardolatry'.¹⁴ Prior to Dobson, Richard Foulkes argued that 'Victorian buildings, books, statues and paintings inspired by Shakespeare' are indicative of the contemporary cultural significance of the playwright.¹⁵ From Michael Booth's work on spectacular productions of Shakespeare, Richard Schoch's assessment of Shakespeare's histories, Andrew Murphy's study of Shakespeare in print, through to Gail Marshall's recent examination of female responses to Shakespeare's heroines, the seemingly endless appropriation of Shakespeare's drama into Victorian theatrical, political, educational and social paradigms has been foregrounded in twentieth and early twenty-first century Shakespeare reception studies.¹⁶ The recurrence of Shakespeare throughout the Victorian world implies that the playwright was, as Foulkes observes, 'indeed the poet of all the people'.¹⁷

To draw together these ideas about Victorian religion and Shakespeare is to return to the second half of the nineteenth century. In England, there was an attempt to

¹⁴ Michael Dobson, *The Making of the National Poet* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992); Bernard Shaw, 'Preface', in *Three Plays for Puritans* (1901; repr. Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1946), pp. vii-xxxiv (p. xxxiii).

¹⁵ Richard Foulkes, 'Introduction', in *Shakespeare and the Victorian Stage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp. 1-9 (p. 8).

¹⁶ Michael R. Booth, *Victorian Spectacular Theatre 1850-1910* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981); Richard Schoch, *Shakespeare's Victorian Stage: Performing History in the Theatre of Charles Kean*; Andrew Murphy, *Shakespeare in Print: A History and Chronology of Shakespeare Publishing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Gail Marshall, *Shakespeare and Victorian Women* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

¹⁷ Richard Foulkes, *Shakespeare and the Victorian Stage*, p. 8.

narrow the moral gap between the ‘Church’, in its broadest sense, and the theatre. Foulkes has noted that ‘entertainment in general and the theatre in particular occupied as vital a place as religion in the lives of many Victorians’.¹⁸ But to be worthy of this revered ‘place’ in Victorian society, previously conservative religious attitudes towards the theatre had to be adjusted. Foulkes has charted the direct relationship between Shakespeare and the Church, particularly during the tercentenary celebrations in 1864. In sermons preached for the tercentenary, by Archbishop Trench, Bishop Wordsworth and Cardinal Manning, for instance, Foulkes argues that Shakespeare’s talent was invariably attributed to a divine source: ‘his genius was derived from God [...] his morality was sound and consistent with Christianity’.¹⁹

However, that Shakespeare’s work contained what Bishop Wordsworth described as ‘religious principles and sentiments’²⁰ was not always taken as read, particularly at the end of the century. According to the playwright George Bernard Shaw:

Shakespeare’s weakness lies in his complete deficiency in that highest sphere of thought [...] that his characters have no religion, no politics, no conscience, no hope, no convictions of any sort. [...] Shakespeare comes out of his reflective period a vulgar pessimist, oppressed with a logical demonstration that life is not worth living.²¹

Following on from Shaw’s claims of ‘deficiency’, in 1900 the American philosopher George Santayana argued that there is an ‘absence of religion’ in the plays, because while characters are ostensibly pious – they quote passages of the Bible and make oaths, for instance – they fail to derive ‘meaning’ from existence: ‘a world of passion and beauty without a meaning must seem to him [Shakespeare] more worthy [...] than a

¹⁸ Richard Foulkes, *Church and Stage in Victorian England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. xiv.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 103.

²⁰ Charles Wordsworth, p. 45.

²¹ George Bernard Shaw quoted in *Shaw on Shakespeare*, ed. by Edwin Wilson (Kent: Combined Book Services Limited, 1989), p. 3.

world of empty principle and dogma'.²² The 'absence' of religion seems to have been axiomatic for both Shaw and Santayana, which conflicts with Eaton's claim that it is an 'active principle' throughout the drama, and while this study does not focus on the battle between these theories, it is important to be aware that opposition to religious interpretations of Shakespeare's texts existed.

While Shakespeare has been approached in relation to the 'Church' in Victorian England by Richard Foulkes, the playwright and, specifically, his plays, have not been discussed alongside the religious influences surrounding literary interpretation within the period. Because Roman Catholicism was a major source of political and religious concern throughout the Victorian era, commentaries about it often found their way into literature, plays, and, of course, criticism. From a broadly Victorian Protestant perspective, therefore, Shakespeare was perhaps inevitably claimed as anti-Catholic. However, as Michael Davies has argued, amid speculations – literary or otherwise – about Shakespeare's Catholic sympathies is a genuinely fascinating subject: the relationship between Shakespeare and Protestantism;²³ and it is precisely this intersection of the concerns of a largely Protestant England and the work of their revered playwright that this thesis seeks to explore.

Theatre

Links between the Church, morality and Shakespeare were generally restricted to the playwright and his text, rather than to the theatre and performance. Thus, in 1879, Stewart Headlam, the Christian Socialist, founded the Church and Stage Guild. The ethos of this party was 'to resent, and give reasons for our resenting, the imputation of

²² George Santayana, *Interpretations of Poetry and Religion* (1900; repr. Monatana: Kessinger Publishing, 2005), p. 161.

²³ Michael Davies, 'Introduction: Shakespeare and Protestantism', *Shakespeare*, 5.1 (2009), 1-17 (p. 2).

the religious world that going to the theatre, either as spectator or actor, is in any way unchristian'.²⁴

Moving away from Headlam's Guild, it is prudent to note that drama was separated into a two-tier system: legitimate and illegitimate theatre. While musicals and burlesques were associated with – but not restricted to – minor theatres, Shakespeare, legally at least, had always been 'legitimate' drama.²⁵ After the abolition of the Patent Theatres' Monopoly in 1843, Shakespeare could no longer be considered the sole possession of the educated classes or, from the Church's perspective, restricted to a manageable audience. According to the minutes taken of the Select Committee for Inquiry into the Laws affecting Dramatic Literature, both 'legitimate' plays and 'minor theatres' had a propensity to 'improve the morals [...] of those who have gone to them'.²⁶ This was an argument repeated later by Headlam: 'the play's the thing by which it is possible "to catch the conscience" not only of the king, but of the people; not only of the cultured classes, but of those who at present have not much culture'.²⁷

However, the passing of the Theatre Regulations Act did not lead to outright religious sanction of the theatre. In 1845 the Christian periodical *The Visitor* published a paper by the Baptist preacher John Foster, which challenged drama's rising claims to morality. The playhouse, Foster complained, 'is a place of perfect immunity from grave thought and converse with conscience [...] godliness and sober representations of life

²⁴ Stewart Headlam quoted in 'The Church and the Stage', *The Era*, 1 June 1879 <<http://galegroup.com>> [accessed October 2008].

²⁵ See Jane Moody, *Illegitimate Theatre in London, 1770-1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

²⁶ 1831-32 (679) 'Report from the Select Committee on Dramatic Literature with the Minutes of Evidence'. *House of Commons Parliamentary Papers Online*. vol. VIII. p. 162. <<http://parlipapers.chadwyck.co.uk>> [accessed May 2009].

²⁷ Stewart Headlam in 'The Church and the Stage'.

and duty'.²⁸ Similarly, the Church of Scotland's Rev. John Cumming condemned the theatre as contrary to Christianity. He demanded of his auditory whether, after they had visited an 'exhibition' in a playhouse, they 'felt inclined to think about anything rather than about God, or about the soul, or Christ and eternity'.²⁹ Finally, the Evangelist – and possibly the most famous preacher of the century – Charles Haddon Spurgeon, spoke against performances such as '*tableaux vivants*', 'Punch and Judy', and 'musical chairs', proposing that 'it never was the business of the Christian Church to supply the world with amusements'.³⁰ Despite this condemnation of performance, and overlooking of pieces like Mystery plays, Spurgeon kept the works of Shakespeare and books alluding to them in his library, such as J. B. Selkirk's *Bible Truths with Shakespearean Parallels* (1862) and Edwin Goadby's *The England of Shakespeare* (1881).³¹

In fact, despite antipathy towards the theatre, representative Christian responses to Shakespeare, on the stage and page, often appear far more lenient. For example, the philanthropist and co-founder of the Birmingham Shakespeare Library, George Dawson, claimed that Shakespeare was 'one of God's great ministers for enlivening life when church-work was over, to help [...] to see in all creation the marvellous work of an almighty hand'.³² In spite of their theatrical connotations, there was clearly some value to be found within Shakespeare's plays.

²⁸ John Foster, 'The Theatre', *The Visitor*, 1845 (1845), 67-72 (p. 70).

²⁹ Rev. John Cumming, *Apocalyptic Sketches: Lectures on the Book of Revelation* (London: Hall, Virtue & Co., 1850), p. 255.

³⁰ Charles Haddon Spurgeon, 'The Evils of the Present Time and Our Object, Necessities and Encouragements', *The Spurgeon Archive* <<http://spurgeon.org/misc/aarm10.htm>> [accessed December 2008].

³¹ Spurgeon Library Collection at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Kansas City. *Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary Library Catalogue Online* <<http://wilo.mobius.umssystem.edu>> [accessed February 2010].

³² George Dawson quoted in 'The Shakespeare Tercentenary', *Birmingham Daily Post*, 25 April 1864 <<http://galegroup.com>> [accessed October 2009].

Within a theatrical context, actor-managers such as Wilson Barrett, Henry Irving and Herbert Beerbohm Tree hailed Shakespeare as a moral, instructive playwright. In response to an attack in a sermon by one Rev. J. T. Stafford, in 1891, Barrett claimed that drama in general can ‘teach honesty and charity, meekness and manliness – respect for the laws of man and fear of God’.³³ At the end of the nineteenth century, Tree claimed that ‘by deeply impressing an audience, and making their hearts throb to the beat of the poet’s wand, by bringing out [...] the full meaning of his works [...] we are enabled to give Shakespeare a wider appeal and a larger franchise [because] his works are not primarily for the literary student: they are for the world at large’.³⁴ Of course, it was always in the interests of men like Barrett and Tree to claim religious compatibility with the theatre, but it seems that Shakespeare was invariably regarded as genuinely instructive.

Reception History

Hans Georg Gadamer famously argued that ‘all interpretation is speculative’ because the ‘interpretive word’, as Gadamer defines interpretive discourse, is the ‘realisation of the act of understanding’ which, in turn, is ‘the actuality of the historically effected consciousness’; ‘human consciousness is not an infinite intellect for which everything exists, simultaneous and co-present [...] it always remains entangled in the context of historical effect’.³⁵ By this logic, Shakespeare reception is inextricable from a historical religious context because religion is part of the ‘effected consciousness’.

³³ Wilson Barrett quoted in ‘Parson and Player’, *The Era*, 21 November 1891 <<http://galegroup.com>> [accessed August 2011].

³⁴ Herbert Beerbohm Tree, *Thoughts and After-Thoughts* (London: Cassell and Company, 1913), p. 49.

³⁵ Hans Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (1960; repr. London: Continuum, 2004), pp. 469, 228.

In his introduction to a recent study of the Bible, Jonathan Roberts claims that the supposed link between ‘historical consciousness’ and reception, raises questions about what can be defined as representative sources.³⁶ In the case of this thesis which examines the relationship between religion and Shakespeare reception and performance, ‘representative’ interpretations, albeit ‘speculative’ and ‘entangled’, come from members of churches, universities and performers who published their respective discourses on Shakespeare and his drama. As Roberts suggests, reception history’s challenge lies in deciphering and understanding ‘representative’ historical interpretations of specific texts so as to establish a pattern of hermeneutical development.³⁷

When discussing historical receptions of Shakespeare’s works, Kathryn Prince has claimed that non-linear discussions ‘sacrifice narrative appeal [...] and any organizing framework that would foreground the concerns of social historians’.³⁸ However, as Prince also notes in her introduction, it is imperative to recall that Victorian, or indeed any, readings of Shakespeare’s drama cannot properly be said to follow a tidy linear historical pattern. As George L. Geckle observes, ‘readers who expect a continuous process of innovation in literary criticism will often be disappointed, in the mid-nineteenth century as now’.³⁹ Because critics of Shakespeare ‘recycled’ as well as contradicted ‘accepted judgments’⁴⁰ on the plays, reception history has never been an unfolding of teleological interpretations. By assessing the effects of religious debate on Victorian readings of Shakespeare’s drama, the intention is not so

³⁶ Jonathan Roberts, ‘Introduction’, in *The Oxford Handbook of the Reception History of the Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 1-7 (p. 5).

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

³⁸ Kathryn Prince, *Shakespeare in the Victorian Periodical* (London: Routledge, 2008), p. 6.

³⁹ George L. Geckle ‘Introduction’, in *Measure for Measure* (London: Continuum, 2001), pp. 1-30 (p. 8).

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

much to probe linear or progressive interpretations, as to determine whether or not there can be a historicist claim to Victorian Shakespearean discourse. Although trends of interpretation are discussed throughout this thesis, in no context does it claim that there was one overall or 'general' way of reacting to or performing any of Shakespeare's plays. This kind of study means that assumptions are sometimes made about historiography and reception history, but they are not intended to argue that Shakespeare had a single, collective audience in the years of Victoria's reign.

There are, then, three questions to pose at the outset of this thesis. First, what is the relationship between religion and Shakespeare in the Victorian period? Secondly, what can the Victorian 'Church' reveal about contemporary interpretations of Shakespeare? Finally, if Shakespeare's plays were read and performed in ways that foregrounded religious themes, why is this relevant now? Bearing these questions in mind, the following chapters address critical and theatrical engagements with the five plays under discussion. Once themes and productions have been examined, it will be necessary to return to these three questions. With respect to ideological, doctrinal and theological issues in the mid- to late nineteenth century, the following chapters explore the relationships between Shakespearean interpretation, the theatre and the Church, by means of the very 'analysis' and 'investigation' that Gibson claims were absent from Victorian Shakespeare discourse.

Part One: Critical Readings

Introduction

As Adrian Poole argues, ‘Shakespeare is [...] constantly being performed in Victorian [...] prose and verse, in fiction, history, life-writing, memoirs, speeches, sermons, diaries, and private correspondence’.¹ ‘Performing’, by Poole’s logic, seems to be akin to appropriation, whereby Shakespeare’s texts were invited into, quoted and engaged with on a broad cultural scale. The ways in which plays like *King John* and *Romeo and Juliet* were appropriated through Victorian religious discourse – not only theologically, but also on political, social and moral levels – reveal how it was that Shakespeare was ‘performed’, by Poole’s definition, beyond the actual stage.

In order to assess the influences of nineteenth-century religious debates on readings or ‘performances’ of Catholicism within Shakespeare’s drama, it is necessary to address the problem thematically rather than through a critical chronology using what Kathryn Prince has recently termed, ‘the usual teleological method of narrating reception history’.² From criticism of the plays across the period, three common themes come to the fore: religious transgression, disillusionment and redemption.

According to Bishop Wordsworth, Shakespeare was ‘against the errors and corruptions of the Church of Rome’, asserted that faith is ‘the duty of thankfulness towards God’, and believed that ‘redemption is no partial gift’.³ Using Wordsworth’s observations, Part One questions how Shakespeare’s Catholic characters transgress the moral laws to which they themselves claim allegiance, to what extent Shakespeare’s

¹ Adrian Poole, ‘Introduction’, in *Victorian Shakespeare*, ed. by Gail Marshall and Adrian Poole, 2 vols. (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), II, 1-13 (pp. 1-2).

² Kathryn Prince, p. 1.

³ Charles Wordsworth, pp. 222, 147, 113.

characters – religious or otherwise – demonstrate a lack of ‘thankfulness’ towards God, and how redemption could be thought of as universal. These questions were pertinent to a period of religious diversity and crises of faith, and a time when the salvation of the soul was a Christian burden that spanned the empire. In order to answer these questions, this section looks at Shakespeare reception within the contexts of the anti-Catholicism of the early and mid-century and the disillusionment of the central Victorian period, through to the liberal Christian redemptive agenda of the final quarter of the century.

While ‘sin’ was never a concept unique to the Victorian era, in an age where doctrine, theology and even God were under scrutiny, it seems that faith itself could become a kind of earthly transgression. Combined with political and nationalist fears about the Church of Rome, ‘popularly’ disseminated conceptions of Roman Catholicism categorised the faith as deviant and *unEnglish*. The first chapter, therefore, explores how Shakespeare’s Catholic characters were treated in the middle of the nineteenth century, and to what extent their faith was deemed ‘sinful’.

Deviant faith also leads to the issue of faith/*lessness*: a subject that was of particular pertinence to the period. The second chapter questions how this pertinent theme of disillusionment was read into the plays. While secularism is often associated with the ‘Victorians’, disillusionment was not strictly limited to a loss of faith in, or what Wordsworth called a lack of ‘thankfulness towards’,⁴ God. In fact, conversion narratives from the period reveal that disillusionment occurred within religious institutions. John Henry Newman, for instance, is an example of how disillusionment enables an individual to re-appropriate his or her faith into a new, often very different,

⁴ Ibid., p. 147.

Christian paradigm. This Victorian ‘progressive’, but not painless, disillusionment informed the ways in which many readers responded to Shakespeare’s equally disenchanted characters.

Moving away from disillusionment, there was a call, towards the final quarter of the nineteenth century, for a form of faith that allowed for tolerance and accessibility. The rise of liberalism within Protestantism made the issue of redemption paramount in the second half of the century, meaning that preaching, conversion and benevolence were high priorities amongst ascetic philanthropists. Chapter Three asks how Shakespeare’s ostensibly Catholic figures were appropriated into this Protestant redemptive paradigm.

This thematic, ‘non-teleological’ approach to the plays offers an important route of access into Victorian engagements with Shakespeare’s drama without, strictly speaking, removing interpretations from their historical contexts. The following section seeks to determine to what extent critical readings of representative Shakespeare plays were influenced by contemporary debates regarding Roman Catholicism; it questions whether religion truly was ‘a vital and active principle’⁵ in appropriations or ‘performances’ of the texts in the ideologically changing Victorian world.

⁵ Rev. Thomas Ray Eaton, p. 13.

Chapter One

Sin

Introduction

This chapter examines Victorian responses to the political agendas and practices of Shakespeare's Roman Catholic hierarchy and laity. Since much debate about Catholicism occurred in the middle of the nineteenth century, responses to Shakespeare's Roman Catholic characters can be gauged by focusing on the period between the 1830s and 1850s.

In order to trace Victorian anti-Catholicism in interpretations of Shakespeare's work, it is necessary to draw on plays with Catholicism as a central theme. Thus *King John* and *Henry VIII* are pertinent because both plays are about English monarchs who consciously sever themselves from the Church of Rome. Using these plays as a point of focus, the first section of this chapter is a discussion of the papal legates Pandulph and Wolsey, together with their respective intrusions into England and its monarchical authorities. The second part focuses on chaste friars and nuns in *Romeo and Juliet* and *Measure for Measure*, and their deviations from the paradigm of domesticity. The primary objective of this examination will be to determine whether or not Shakespearean interpretation can be said to have been influenced by early Victorian conceptions of 'sinful' or deviant popery.

The Oxford English Dictionary currently defines 'sin' as the 'transgression of divine law' and 'wilful violation of some religious or moral principle'.¹ From the middle of the nineteenth century, it was arguably the diversity of conceptions of 'divine

¹ 'Sin', *Oxford English Dictionary Online* 2010 <<http://oed.com/view/Entry/180030>> [accessed January 2011].

law' that made ideology itself seem to be a 'sin'. As the Unitarian Rev. Frank Walters complained at the end of the century:

I look at the Church of Rome, I examine the thirty-nine articles, I study the Confession of Faith, I read Wesley's notes on the New Testament [...] and how am I to decide which of these is the real infallibility? [...]. If I yield to the venerable authority of the Bishop of Rome [...] I am a disciple of the Scarlet Woman, a servant of antichrist [...] if I accept the Bible alone as the source of truth [...] I find that Protestantism itself is a Babel of conflicting sects.²

The schisms within Christianity, it seems, created the illusion of transgression in the very act of faith. Because of this maze of inter-Christian debate, lamented by Walters, the act of 'sin' was often attributed to deviant or non-Protestant faith: namely Roman Catholicism. Together with objections to the Catholic Emancipation in 1829, and the introduction of papal infallibility in 1870, there were two major events that fuelled antagonism towards Roman Catholicism in the mid-century: specifically the Oxford Movement and the 'papal aggression'.

In the 1830s, the Oxford Movement sparked outrage within the Church of England, as High Anglican Oxford intellectuals published a series of tracts calling for greater unity between the doctrinal and liturgical practices of the Roman Catholic and Anglican Churches. According to Rev. J. E. Gladstone, the tracts were 'an unscriptural and ungodly conspiracy, to confine the intellect and to enslave the souls of free Englishmen'.³ As a result of the Reformation, Anglicanism transcended doctrine, and became an expression of nationality and independence from external ideological and political ties. That High-Anglican, Oxford scholars such as John Henry Newman were

² Rev. Frank Walters, 'Rationalism: What it is and What it is Not', in *Free Thought and Christian Faith: Four Lectures on Unitarian Principles* (Edinburgh: Williams and Norgate, 1890), pp. 1-29 (pp. 7-8).

³ Rev. J. E. Gladstone quoted in 'Anti-Tractarian Lectures', *Daily News*, 5 March 1852
<<http://galegroup.com>> [accessed June 2009].

attacking the *Via Media* and claiming compatibility between the thirty-nine articles and Catholicism, was taken as a betrayal of both England and her Church.

Secondly, in the Papal Bull from September 1850, entitled *Universalis Ecclesiae*, Pope Pius IX proposed that the intention was to allow England ‘to be one single ecclesiastical province’.⁴ Cardinal Wiseman subsequently became Archbishop of Westminster in 1850, which triggered the infamous volley of antagonism towards Roman Catholicism known as the ‘papal aggression’.⁵ During this period, many Protestants began to object vehemently to the so-called infiltration of Romish doctrine and practice into England and, by implication, the Anglican Church. Furthermore, paranoia about a great Catholic conspiracy was disseminated in pamphlets, sermons, newspapers, and a call for riots in Cheltenham and Birkenhead in November 1850.⁶

Betrayal and intrusion, discernable in attitudes towards Tractarians and the papacy respectively, are concepts that fed into responses to Shakespeare’s Roman Catholics during the mid-century. Re-instating the Catholic hierarchy in England was akin to intrusion in much the same way that the desertion of High Anglicans for the Catholic Church was considered an act of betrayal. Using mid-century conceptions of Roman Catholicism, it is possible to judge to what extent Shakespeare’s Catholics confirmed these anxieties about transgression and potentially ‘sinful’ intrusion and betrayal.

⁴ Pope Pius IX quoted in Kathleen O’Meara, *Thomas Grant, First Bishop of Southwark* (1874; repr. Charleston: BiblioBazaar, 2009), p. 91.

⁵ Walter Ralls, ‘The Papal Aggression of 1850: A Study in Victorian Anti-Catholicism’, *Religion in Victorian Britain*, ed. by Gerald Parsons, 5 vols. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989), IV, 115-34.

⁶ See ‘Intended Public Meeting at Birkenhead in the Papal Aggression: Anticipated Riot’, *The Northern Star and National Trades’ Journal*, 14 December 1850 <<http://galegroup.com>> [accessed May 2011].

Part One: The Papal Hierarchy

In 1850, the satirical and nationalist periodical *John Bull* exclaimed: ‘the Popish Archbishop of Westminster [...] will take precedence of the bishops of London, Durham, Winchester and we cannot see any reason why the Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster should not take precedence of the archbishops of Canterbury and York’.⁷ ‘Taking precedence’ over the authorities of the Church of England was clearly considered a genuine threat, and it was this fear of *power* rather than *ideology* held by the papacy that was encapsulated in the history plays *King John* and *Henry VIII*.

Contemporary Events

The factual basis of the plays lent credibility to the characters and their actions. Quite apart from the fact that both John and Henry are associated with anti-Catholicism, it was the figures of Cardinals Pandulph and Wolsey that would have pandered to suspicions about the power-hungry papal hierarchy. In the decade following English paranoia about papal aggression, both plays enjoyed numerous revivals. According to contemporary reviews, Fanny Kemble’s reading of *King John* in November and William Charles Macready’s performance in December of 1850, both elicited cheers during the anti-Catholic extracts. The play was also performed by Samuel Phelps (1851) and Charles Kean (1852, 1858). Similarly, *Henry VIII* was produced by both Kean (1852, 1855) and Phelps on several occasions (1850, 1854, 1858). A table produced by the *Times Literary Supplement* in 1919, indicates that while *Henry VIII* was performed across the period by at least eight Victorian actor-managers, *King John* was produced by only five.⁸ Though not especially ‘popular’ in any other period, that both of these histories were repeatedly played in the 1850s suggests that they were profitable to the

⁷ ‘The Pope’s Supremacy in England’, *John Bull*, 12 October 1850 <<http://galegroup.com>> [accessed June 2009].

⁸ See Appendix A.

actor-managers of the legitimate theatre in this decade. It is no coincidence, therefore, that such anti-Catholic plays coincided with one of the most vehement periods of anti-papal campaigning in nineteenth-century England.

King John

To begin assessing responses to Shakespeare's portrayal of the papacy, it is necessary to refer to the reinstatement of the papal hierarchy in England. According to the Bishop of St. David's in 1850, the Pope's rhetoric in the Bull:

[...] seems as if it were studiously framed to convey the idea of an absolute sovereignty claimed by the Pope over the kingdom of England, and would have suited the time of King John as well as the reign of Queen Victoria.⁹

The bishop's reference to King John and the desire for 'absolute sovereignty' place the English monarchy and the Roman Catholic papacy in direct opposition to one another.

It was this supposed threat to the monarch's sovereignty that triggered an interest in *King John*. John's outburst about the Pope was echoed in meeting halls, sermons and pamphlets¹⁰ aimed at disseminating the call for 'no popery':

Thou canst not, cardinal, devise a name
So slight, unworthy and ridiculous,
To charge me to an answer, as the Pope.
[...] no Italian priest
Shall tithe or toll in our dominions
But as we under heaven are supreme head
So under Him that great supremacy,
Where we do reign, we will alone uphold,
Without the assistance of a mortal hand:
So tell the Pope; all reverence set apart
To him and his usurp'd authority (3.1.149-60).¹¹

⁹ Bishop of St. David's quoted in 'The Papal Aggression', *The Examiner*, 14 December 1850 <<http://galegroup.com>> [accessed October 2009].

¹⁰ See 'Multiple News Items', *The Standard*, 15 November 1850 <<http://galegroup.com>> [accessed January 2011].; 'What is it All About?', *Tait's Edinburgh Magazine*, 18 (1851), 43-52 (p. 47); Rev. John Cumming, *Lectures of Romanism: Being Illustrations and Refutations of the Errors of Romanism and Tractarianism* (Boston: John P. Jewett and Company, 1854), p. 37.

¹¹ William Shakespeare, 'King John', in *Henry Irving Shakespeare*, 8 vols. (London: Blackie and Son, c.1892-1895), III, 161-240.

John Bull published an article in December 1850, quoting this speech. It argued that ‘it is all very well, with clapping of hands, and knocking of sticks and umbrellas, to endorse this sentiment, than which none could more appropriately at this moment fall upon the English ear’.¹² While the paper did not propagate a call for action, that the Pope could ‘appropriately’ be deemed ‘slight, unworthy and ridiculous’ was testament not only to the strength of anti-Catholic sentiment, but also to the relevance of *King John* in early Victorian England. The article termed Cardinal Wiseman ‘the modern Pandulph’, and the Prime Minister Lord John Russell the ‘quasi King John’, placing England’s political leader in opposition to Rome’s minister.¹³ *John Bull* suggested that Cardinal Wiseman ‘by many a sly and cunning move has wriggled himself into the position of a Roman prince’.¹⁴ Both prelates were dismissed as intrusive members of a Romish sect, ‘cunningly [...] wriggling’ themselves and their doctrines into England. If not a transgression of ‘moral’ law, this was certainly a violation of national pride.

Three months into the controversy over the Papal Bull, audience members heckled the Pandulph in Macready’s *King John* at the Haymarket. Mr Rogers played the legate who ‘appeared on stage dressed in the huge scarlet hat and cloak of a cardinal’,¹⁵ which elicited ‘a shout of derisive laughter [that] echoed from one end of the theatre to the other’.¹⁶ The Cardinal’s costume, it seems, rendered him a clown-like figure in the eyes of members of the audience. This suggests that far from fearing Catholicism, members of Macready’s audience perceived it as an inferior religion and a legitimate subject of sport. The conflict between ‘threat’ or ‘intrusion’ and ‘ridiculous’ or

¹² ‘The Modern Pandulph and Quasi King John’, *John Bull*, December 1850 <<http://galegroup.com>> [accessed December 2008].

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ ‘Theatricals Etc.’, *Lloyd’s Weekly Newspaper*, 15 December 1850 <<http://galegroup.com>> [accessed October 2009].

¹⁶ Ibid.

‘inferior’ was one that, consciously or not, appeared in mid-Victorian attitudes towards Roman Catholicism. By laughing at Cardinal Pandulph, his implied threat was reduced along with the credibility of the Church of Rome. According to *Lloyd’s Weekly Newspaper*, Macready delivered his lines ‘thou canst not [...]’ in an ‘emphatic manner’ which ‘was responded to by the loud acclamations of the audience’.¹⁷ After a similar fashion, the phrases ‘no Italian priest’ and ‘usurped authority’ were met with applause, and when Macready accused the Cardinal of being ‘a meddling priest’ offering ‘corrupted pardon’ (3.1.153-60), the audience reacted with ‘a furor [sic]’.¹⁸ The vestments or superficial indications of piety, eliciting laughter and scorn, were heavily charged at this point in history, suggesting that the Catholics were, from the audience’s perspective, the villains in this production.

While John seems to have been praised for his ‘sentiment’ in this speech, it is vital to observe that he was rarely considered a conscionable character. Just under forty years after the papal aggression, Frederick James Furnivall claimed that:

So long as John is the impersonator of England, of defiance to the foreigner, and opposition to the Pope, so long is he a hero. But he is bold outside only, only politically; inside, morally, he is a coward, sneak, and skunk.¹⁹

Although defying the ‘foreign’ Pope renders John a ‘hero’ – recalling attention to the idea of anti-Catholic rhetoric as ‘appropriate’ and justifiable to English audiences – Furnivall is clear about his immorality as a *man*. Later, towards the end of the century, Frank Marshall argued that ‘John’s crimes [made him] a mean and detestable tyrant’.²⁰ These attitudes can be traced back to before 1850. George Fletcher, for instance,

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Frederick James Furnivall, *The Leopold Shakespeare* (London: Cassell Petter & Galpin, 1896), p. 49.

²⁰ Frank A. Marshall, ‘Introduction to *King John*’, in *Henry Irving Shakespeare*, III, 151-9 (p. 157).

accused John of being ‘a usurper and murderer’.²¹ Charles Knight, moreover, argued that John is ‘a creeping, cowardly assassin [whose] low craft and desperate violence we can never forgive’.²² It was this early and late-Victorian focus on John’s immorality, that highlights the praise and fascination for the, otherwise, ‘moral skunk’ during the papal aggression.

However, critics of the play were always conscious of the origins of Shakespeare’s work. *The Troublesome Reign of King John* (1591), was described by A. C. Swinburne as ‘the weakest and most wooden of all wearisome chronicles that ever cumbered the boards [and] had in it for sole principle of life its power of appeal to the [...] vulgar spirit of Protestantism which inspired it’.²³ Indeed, the play is complete with scheming monks and a friar who hides ‘fair Alice the nun’, for everything but pious reasons, in a chest. King Philip, upon discovering the stowaway, remarks:

Why paltry friar and pandar too, ye shameless shaven crown,
Is this the chest that held a hoard, at least a thousand pound?
And is the hoard a holy whore? (1.1.1.63-7).²⁴

The very fact that such overt anti-Catholicism does not feature in Shakespeare’s play was sufficient evidence for early Victorian critics like Charles Knight to dismiss the notion that the action centres on the corruption of the clergy. Knight noted that ‘one of the most remarkable characteristics of Shakespeare’s *King John* is the utter absence of all invective or sarcasm against the Romish Church’.²⁵ It is also worth remarking that Colley Cibber’s version of Shakespeare’s play *Papal Tyranny in the Reign of King John* was a self-evident piece of anti-Catholicism which opened in the frenzy of the Jacobite

²¹ George Fletcher, *Studies of Shakespeare* (London: Longman, Brown, Green and Longmans, 1847), p. 13.

²² Charles Knight, *Studies of Shakespeare: Forming a Companion Volume to Every Edition of the Text* (1849; repr. Montana: Kessinger Publishing, 2004), p. 204.

²³ Algernon Charles Swinburne, *A Study of Shakespeare* (1880; repr. London: Heinemann), p. 99.

²⁴ *The Troublesome Reign of King John: Being the Original of Shakespeare’s Life and Death of King John*, ed. by F. J. Furnivall and John Munro (London: Chatto & Windus, 1913), p. 63.

²⁵ Charles Knight, *Studies of Shakespeare*, p. 197.

Rebellion of 1745. Although Cibber's play was never deemed an accomplished piece of drama, the fact that Victorian performers chose Shakespeare's version over this explicitly anti-Catholic adaptation would suggest that, as well as the general desire to return to Shakespeare, the piece was never truly considered to be a story about 'papal tyranny'. A critical departure from the explicit anti-Catholicism in the early and late-Victorian periods lends significance to the strength with which the play was adopted in the mid-century by 'no popery' campaigners.

Referring back to the article in *John Bull*, it is worth noting that the piece was a direct response to audience reactions during Macready's revival of *King John* in December 1850. It was during John's anti-papal rant, that 'the clapping' and 'knocking' took place, emphasising the audience's collective endorsement of Pandulph's humiliation. A month before this event, Fanny Kemble undertook a public reading of *King John* in Cheltenham. Once again the lines 'no Italian priest [...]' (3.1.152) were met with an audience outburst of approval. According to the *Cheltenham Journal*, this response 'proved two things – that the language of Shakespeare is fitted for all ages, and that resistance to the tyranny of Rome exists, as an innate principle, in the minds of Englishmen'.²⁶ While it is possible that audiences may have been anticipating the anti-papal extract in the play, the focus on English liberty within John's speech, as well as verging on the xenophobic, implies that the 'innate' ethos of Reformed England encourages all attack on the Church of Rome.

However, that the 'language of Shakespeare' was thought 'fit' for the 'no popery' campaign, suggests that John's speech was displaced from its context and

²⁶ 'The Protestant Feeling of the Country', *Cheltenham Journal*, 13 November 1850. <<http://galegroup.com>> [accessed January 2010].

relocated within the political paradigm of 1850. The audiences of Macready and Kemble, together with the appropriators of *King John* into Victorian anti-Catholic discourses, were arguably detaching themselves from the drama by applying the logic of the *speech*, and not the *play*, to real life. Endorsement of the anti-papal segment of the play, by this logic, should not necessarily be taken as an indication of *interpretation*, but rather one of *appropriation*. *King John* is an example of how Shakespeare was understood to signify something beyond the play itself. Ian Small, in his twentieth-century work on textual editing, suggests that ‘what is important is obviously not the origin of the quotations, but the fact that they come to the reader dislocated from their original contexts’.²⁷ But it was precisely the ‘origin’ of the ‘fit’ quotation that lent it credibility. Even without a consciousness of the ‘context’ of John’s papal accusations, his speech offered ‘no popery’ agitators a rhetorically crafted attack, sanctioned by Shakespeare, with which to contest the Roman Catholic right to intrude upon and govern over England.

Henry VIII

While *King John* was temporarily dislocated from its context, *Henry VIII* furnished more opportunity for readers to draw parallels between the play and reality. This was, of course, perceptible in the 1850s. More particularly, after the Oxford Movement culminated in conversions such as Newman’s to Roman Catholicism, any reminder of English intellectuals defecting to the Church of Rome – Cardinal Wolsey for instance – could not have gone without notice. Thus connections were made between Wolsey and the Victorian, English papal hierarchy.

²⁷ Ian Small, ‘The Editor as Annotator as Ideal Reader’, in *The Theory and Practice of Text Editing*, ed. by Ian Small and Marcus Walsh (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 186-209 (p. 205).

‘No popery’ campaigns and *King John* quotations did not prevent the succession of Nicolas Patrick Wiseman to the status of Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster in 1850. One spectator of the ceremony claimed that ‘the first glance of him [Wiseman] reminds one of those lofty prelates of yore’, and added, ‘there goes Cardinal Wolsey’.²⁸ After Wiseman’s death, moreover, it was said that ‘one can imagine him robing himself with every circumstance of solemnity, point by point and garment by garment in order to give an actor a living ideal of how to dress the character of Cardinal Wolsey’.²⁹ Just as the Papal Bull was reminiscent of ‘the times of King John’, so too, it seems, did its implementation recall attention to Wolsey.

Nevertheless, Wolsey’s intelligence and status as an Englishman struck a chord after the Oxford Movement. In the play, Henry makes the following observation about the Cardinal:

[...] If we did think
 His contemplations were above the earth,
 And fix’d on spiritual object, he should still
 Dwell in his musings: but I am afraid
 His thinkings are below the moon (3.2.130-4).³⁰

It was arguably Shakespeare’s depiction of Wolsey as unspiritual that has important connections with concerns about the Oxford Movement. ‘Thinkings below the moon’, judging by Victorian criticism of the character, pertain to two areas: specifically intellect and worldliness.

First, in the play Griffith notes that Wolsey was ‘a scholar’ of ‘Ipswich and Oxford’ (4.2.59). Indeed, Knight observed that the character has a ‘commanding

²⁸ ‘Literary Notices’, *The Newcastle Courant*, 31 May 1850 <<http://galegroup.com>> [accessed August 2009].

²⁹ ‘Cardinal Wiseman’s Life and Times’, *The Pall Mall Gazette*, 7 December 1897. <<http://galegroup.com>> [accessed January 2010].

³⁰ William Shakespeare, ‘Henry VIII’, in *Henry Irving Shakespeare*, VIII, 155-207.

intellect',³¹ and W. J. Birch suggested that Wolsey 'trusts to his genius for extrication from his difficulties'.³² Secondly, Wolsey was specifically described as 'selfish and ambitious',³³ and 'an example of a churchman living licentiously [through his] clinging to worldly grandeur'.³⁴ According to William Watkiss Lloyd, Wolsey was tempted into transgression by his 'worldly' acquisitiveness. Lloyd suggested that Wolsey is distracted with 'pillars, and crosses, and pomander [and develops a] pride of aristocracy'.³⁵ Such affinity to pomp formed part of the accusations of 'worldliness' levelled at Roman Catholicism. For instance, according to the Broad Churchman Edward Copleston in 1842, Catholicism's 'ceremonies', such as the Eucharist and sacraments, appeal only to the 'worldly minded' who, he argued, included the Tractarians.³⁶ This attitude seems to have been present in a scholarly edition of *Henry VIII*, from 1860. Here, a brief history of Wolsey, by one Rev. Hunter, formed part of the introduction. Hunter's introductory remarks included descriptions of the prelate's 'worldliness': 'he expended lavishly, delighted in ostentatious displays of his opulence [...] his houses were palaces: his household like that of royalty'.³⁷

Material display evokes images of temptation and indulgence which prioritise the earthly over the spiritual self. The seemingly anthropocentric nature of Catholicism was a major source of concern for Anglicans. In the early nineteenth century, Rev. G. S. Faber argued that while:

³¹ Charles Knight, *Studies of Shakespeare*, p. 403.

³² William John Birch, *An Inquiry into the Religion and Philosophy of Shakespeare* (London: C. Mitchell, 1848), p. 350.

³³ Anna Jameson, *Shakespeare's Heroines: Characteristics of Women Moral, Poetical, and Historical* (1832; repr. London: G. Bell and Sons Ltd., 1924), p. 315.

³⁴ William John Birch, pp. 41, 345.

³⁵ William Watkiss Lloyd, *Critical Essays on the Plays of Shakespeare* (1875; repr. Boston: Adamant Media Corporation, 2005), p. 309.

³⁶ Edward Copleston quoted in 'Bishop of Llandaff 1842', in *The Judgement of the Bishops upon Tractarian Theology*, ed. by Rev. W. Simcox Bricknell (Oxford: J. Vincent, 1845), pp. 635-7 (p. 635).

³⁷ Rev. John Hunter, 'Introduction', in *Oxford Examination Scheme: Shakespeare's Henry VIII* (London: Longman, Green, Longman and Roberts, 1860), pp. v-xxxix (p. xix).

Reformed doctrine [...] makes Christ alone [...] the saviour of sinful man [...] Romish doctrine [...] makes the Church, and priest, and sacraments, and saints, and purgatory, and extreme unction, and pilgrimage, and penance, and ordinances and notions without end and without measure; in a word, miserable man's own self essentially embodied in his own inherent and merited righteousness, a college of saviours [...] supercessive of Christ.³⁸

The distinction made here between the single divine saviour and the long list of earthly activities, suggests that Catholicism values physical above spiritual existence. It was precisely this specific kind of prioritising that fed into conceptions of Wolsey as a tempted, 'fallen' man.

The image of the 'scholarly man led astray' was, in the second half of the century, associated with the Tractarians and most notably Cardinal Newman. According to Charles Kingsley, 'the atmosphere of Romish priesthood has degraded his [Newman's] notions of what is due to himself'.³⁹ Reports of conversions also shared the images of betrayal and temptation: 'we deplore the heresies into which many good and pious men have been led [away from] the pale of our reformed religion'.⁴⁰ The *Freeman's Journal* lamented that 'Mr Newman and some of his immediate adherents have abandoned the Church of England for that of Rome'.⁴¹ Furthermore, Kingsley argued that 'if there is any distrust of certain Catholics, it is restricted to the proselytising priests among them; and especially to those who, like Dr Newman, have turned round upon their mother church (I had almost said their mother country)'.⁴² The conflation of 'mother church' and 'mother country' here, presupposes a synonymy

³⁸ George Stanley Faber, *The Primitive Doctrine of Justification Investigated: Relatively to the Several Definitions of the Church of Rome and the Church of England* (London: R. B. Seeley and W. Burnside, 1839), p. 320.

³⁹ Charles Kingsley, *What Then Does Mr Newman Mean? A Reply to a Pamphlet Lately Published by Dr Newman*, 3rd edn (London: Macmillan and Co., 1864), p. 7.

⁴⁰ 'The Era', *The Era*, 16 November 1845 <<http://galegroup.com>> [accessed July 2009].

⁴¹ 'Conversions', *Freeman's Journal and Daily Commercial Advertiser*, 22 October 1845 <<http://galegroup.com>> [accessed January 2010].

⁴² Charles Kingsley, *What Then Does Mr Newman Mean?*, p. 18.

between nationality and ideology, both of which were supposedly *betrayed* by the Tractarians.

Wolsey's abandonment of an otherwise blameless party ties up with ways of interpreting the mid-Victorian fascination with Queen Katharine. Katharine was considered by Anna Jameson to be 'the triumph of Shakespeare's genius' with her 'beautiful [...] religious enthusiasm'.⁴³ Although the character was praised earlier in the century by Johnson and Coleridge, Victorian readings of Katharine arguably transcended praise for her wifely virtues, and became a simultaneous means of condemning her tormentor Cardinal Wolsey. Like the weakened Anglican Church after the 'betrayal' of the Tractarians, Katharine was a wronged woman suffering from the treachery of a once respected scholar:

[...] holy men I thought ye,
Upon my soul, two reverend cardinal virtues;
But cardinal sins and hollow hearts I fear ye (3.1.102-4).

This extract was quoted in 1843 to demonstrate Shakespeare's supposed lack of faith in the papal hierarchy: 'no papist would have been inclined, or would have dared to put into the mouths of his *dramatis personae* such expressions, counter to papacy'.⁴⁴ Shakespeare's own affinities aside, that Katharine was disillusioned with Catholicism by the conduct of Wolsey was, certainly from the mid-century onwards, considered integral to her demise. It is here that the analogy with the Oxford Movement converts comes to the fore.

The connection between Katharine and Wolsey was the focus of Charles Kean's 1855 production. Not only did Kean restore the closet scene in which the characters

⁴³ Anna Jameson, pp. 302, 317.

⁴⁴ Frederick B. Watson, *Religious and Moral Sentences Culled from the Works of Shakespeare Compared with Sacred Passages Drawn from Holy Writ* (London: Calkin and Budd, 1843), p. 13.

verbally confront one another – an episode that was omitted in performance throughout the eighteenth century – but much emphasis was placed on Wolsey’s contribution to Katharine’s death. As Kean’s biographer John William Cole observed, the very act of including the closet episode with Katharine’s expostulation, ‘take heed, lest at once the burthen of my sorrows fall upon ye’ (3.1.110-11), made Wolsey’s fall flow as a direct consequence of the Queen’s warning: ‘the helpless woman he has assisted to destroy’.⁴⁵ More importantly, Kean’s depiction of Katharine’s death was evocative of imminent spiritual transcendence. The *Morning Post* noted that there were ‘seven angels [...] descending on a golden sunbeam [and] the effect is exceedingly solemn and impressive’.⁴⁶ On the other hand, Wolsey’s death, as depicted in the text, occurs off stage after the loss of his wealth and position. There was, therefore, a clear visual distinction between the spiritual elevation of Katharine, and the worldly descent of Wolsey.

That the innocent woman died as a result of the Cardinal’s ‘intrusion’, and the latter in consequence of his ‘worldliness’ echoed simultaneous concerns about the abandoned ‘mother church’ during the Tractarian conversions in the 1840s. Just as Newman ‘turned his back’ on the Church of England, leaving her exposed to ‘contumely and slander’,⁴⁷ so too did Katharine symbolise ‘real piety’ that is ‘abandoned’ by her subjects.⁴⁸ Shakespeare’s Wolsey was, consciously or otherwise, a recipient of similar rhetoric levelled at the deserters of the Church of England. It seems, therefore, that Cardinals Pandulph and Wolsey appealed to conceptions of Roman

⁴⁵ John William Cole, *The Life and Theatrical Times of Charles Kean*, 2 vols. (London: Richard Bentley, 1859), II, p. 148.

⁴⁶ ‘The Princess’s Theatre’, *The Morning Post*, 18 May 1855 <<http://galegroup.com>> [accessed June 2011].

⁴⁷ Charles Kingsley, *What Then Does Mr Newman Mean?*, p. 18.

⁴⁸ Anna Jameson, p. 349.

Catholic priests as weak, power-hungry individuals tempted into submission to Rome through the acts of ‘intruding’ onto and ‘betraying’ England.

Celibacy and Casuistry

However, evoking the intrusion and betrayal of the papal aggression and the Oxford Movement, respectively, was not sufficient to accuse Pandulph and Wolsey of being ‘sinful’. Since ‘sin’ was a transgression of the laws of religion, the cardinals had to be read as theologically, as well as politically, unsound. It is crucial, then, to turn to the issues of casuistry and celibacy, both of which had distinctly Catholic connotations.

First, casuistry, where reason is used to defend courses of action that have ambiguous moral possibilities, can be seen as a rational and unbiased means of making decisions in ethical predicaments. As Richard Brian Miller has recently observed, ‘we engage in casuistry in order to clarify the practical applicability of an otherwise vague piece of legislation’.⁴⁹ However, casuistry, as the classical scholar and biblical critic Benjamin Jowett observed, ‘has become a byword among mankind for hypocrisy and dishonesty’,⁵⁰ because it was commonly associated with Roman Catholicism.

In real terms, Newman provides an example of this supposed ‘dishonesty’. While still within the Anglican Church, Newman offered an interpretation of the passage ‘be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves’ from Matthew 10:16: ‘by innocence, or harmlessness, is meant [...] to be innocent as the dove; yet [...] this

⁴⁹ Richard Brian Miller, *Casuistry and Modern Ethics: A Poetics of Practical Reasoning* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), p. 18.

⁵⁰ Benjamin Jowett, *The Epistles of St. Paul to the Thessalonians, Galatians, and Romans*, 2 vols. (London: John Murray, 1859), II, p. 405; See Peter Hinchliff and John Prest, ‘Jowett, Benjamin 1817-1893’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography Online* 2006 <<http://oxforddnb.com/view/article/15143>> [accessed March 2011].

conduct accordingly has pre-eminently the appearance of craft'.⁵¹ 'It is', Newman continued, 'as if He set before us craft, treachery, and perfidy [...] and bade us extract a lesson even from so great an evil'.⁵² Whether conscious or not, Newman's juxtaposing of 'craft' and 'innocence' was interpreted, particularly by Kingsley, as a Romish conception of conquering evil. By way of response, Kingsley concluded that 'truth is not honoured amongst these men [papal hierarchy] for its own sake [...] but only for the sake of the spread of Catholic opinions [where] cunning was the weapon which heaven had allowed to them'.⁵³ The notions of 'cunning', 'weaponry' and 'craft' are all transformed by Newman into morally and divinely permissible necessities. It was this Catholic ability to justify 'cunning', both morally and theologically, that flouted the Protestant sensibilities of Shakespeare's readers within the context of his plays. Both Cardinals Pandulph and Wolsey impose themselves and their religious rhetoric onto their respective monarchs, in turn, eliciting the scorn of casuist-fearing Victorian critics.

Cardinal Pandulph

George Fletcher, in 1847, claimed that Cardinal Pandulph is a 'cold-blooded papal diplomatist'.⁵⁴ Similarly, Edward Dowden noted that Pandulph 'possesses the astuteness and skill to direct the various conflicting forces of the time to his own advantage, Pandulph is the *de facto* master of England, and as he pleases makes peace or announces war'.⁵⁵ Vocabulary such as 'cold', 'diplomat', 'master', and 'skill'⁵⁶ should be misnomers when applied to pious individuals who have dedicated themselves to the Church.

⁵¹ John Henry Newman, *Sermons Bearing on Subjects of the Day* (1844; repr. London: Rivingtons, 1869), p. 229.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 297.

⁵³ Charles Kingsley, *What Then Does Mr Newman Mean?*, pp. 47, 16.

⁵⁴ George Fletcher, p. 20.

⁵⁵ Edward Dowden, *Shakspeare: A Critical Study of His Mind and Art* (London: Henry S. King & Co., 1875), p. 171.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 171.

Fletcher's and Dowden's interpretations of Pandulph, however, were not restricted to Protestant readers. The liberal-Catholic convert, Richard Simpson, argued that the Cardinal acts out of self- rather than moral interest:

John may imprison and murder Arthur, and the Pope is quiescent. But when John refuses to institute Stephen Langton, the Pope comes on the scene with a rival claimant, not more legitimate [...] but likely to be more obedient, a more faithful vassal of the Church.⁵⁷

The Pope, for Simpson, is 'indifferent to every cause but his own'.⁵⁸ Here, Simpson considered Pandulph's actions as a betrayal of Catholicism which, by its own theology, revolves around the Church. In fact, Newman preached:

If Christ has constituted one holy society [...] if his apostles have set it in order [...] and have expressly bidden us not to undo what they have begun [...] it were a traitor's act in us to abandon it [...] a cruel disregard of those who are to come after us, nay of those now alive who are external to it and might otherwise be brought into it.⁵⁹

'Separation' from the Church, from Newman's Roman Catholic perspective, was an unequivocal 'sin'. It was arguably this logic that Simpson extended to Pandulph who separated every soul in England from the Church in his expostulation, 'Thou shalt stand cursed and excommunicate' (3.1.173). Like Newman's reference to 'abandonment', 'disregard' and 'a traitor's act', Simpson's notion of the 'indifferent' hierarchy, creates the impression of a spiritually careless Church, deliberately condemning those who 'might otherwise be brought in' to sin and, ultimately, hellfire.

The seeming carelessness of Pandulph's actions contributes to the 'cunning' nature of his methods. Pandulph claims that France would be 'canonised and worshipped as a saint' for opposing England (3.1.176-7). He also claims, 'All form is

⁵⁷ Richard Simpson, 'The Politics of Shakespeare's Historical Plays', in *The New Shakespeare Society's Transactions*, 2 vols. (1874), I, 396-441 (p. 405).

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 405.

⁵⁹ John Henry Newman, *Parochial and Plain Sermons* (1868; repr. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1997), p. 611.

formless, order orderless/ Save what is opposite to England's love' (3.1.253-4).

Pandulph utilises linguistic absolutes to reduce John into a state of repentance and submission. Simpson's reference to 'obedience' in the Church's 'vassals' categorises Pandulph's oratory here as a form of 'cunning' that excuses or moralises the spiritual unsoundness of his actions.⁶⁰

Crucially, Pandulph's wielding of religious rhetoric to sanction war operates in contrast with his inability to speak on matters emotional. When Arthur is captured, his mother Constance drifts into despair. Pandulph makes two brief attempts to aid her, both of which are dismissive and judgemental: 'Lady, you utter madness and not sorrow' and 'You hold too heinous a respect of grief' (3.4.43, 90). To Pandulph's unhelpful replies, Constance retorts, 'he talks to me that never had a son' (3.4.91). Bishop Wordsworth hinted that Shakespeare asserts the bond between parent and child here to draw attention to Pandulph's lack of domestic experience.⁶¹ Since Constance is unable to further her son's claim to the throne of England, as well as being powerless to prevent his capture by John, she has less ignorance of human affliction than the celibate, apostolically empowered cardinal. Thus her expostulation, 'Had you such a loss as I/ I could give better comfort than you do' (3.4.99-100) was, for Knight, 'matchless as an exhibition of maternal sorrow'.⁶² This reference to 'maternal' is integral to interpreting these responses to Pandulph, because it was precisely his lack of any parental sympathy that made him less human in the eyes of his mid-nineteenth century readers.

Pandulph's supposed want of humanity arguably pertains to the laws of celibacy. According to Newman, mistrust of celibate religious adherents is a product of

⁶⁰ Richard Simpson, p. 405.

⁶¹ Charles Wordsworth, p. 161.

⁶² Charles Knight, *Studies of Shakespeare*, p. 203.

the ‘unbelieving world [that] cannot believe that men will deliberately sacrifice this world to the next [...] it thinks that of necessity there must be something behind [...] there is some secret to be found out’.⁶³ Chastity in the name of God, particularly within the context of Roman Catholicism, transcended piety and theology; instead it became a sign of worldly naivety and even, as will be explored later, pathology. Because Catholic priests rejected the accepted domestic paradigm of marriage and family, the ‘deliberate sacrifice’ of the body, which Newman alluded to, was perceived as a conscious ignorance of worldly affairs.

From a doctrinal perspective, in the thirty-nine articles, ‘single life’ amongst the clergy is presented as a personal choice. Unlike Catholicism, Anglicanism makes no demand on the marital status of its ecclesiasts. In fact, Kingsley argued that ‘the duties of a husband and a father are sacred things [...] God has created them [...]. He commands marriage and it is He who has told us “be fruitful and multiply” [...] it is mockery for a man to pretend to be a converted Christian man who knows not even so much’.⁶⁴ Lacking understanding of the ‘sacred’ nature of marriage and fatherhood, rendered those who rejected domesticity in the name of religion self-consciously ignorant and, by extension, impious.

Cardinal Wolsey

Just as Pandolph’s domestic ignorance allows him to justify the use of ‘cunning’, so too does Wolsey ‘work on the conscience’⁶⁵ of a married couple in order to achieve his own ends. Buckingham describes Wolsey as ‘venom mouthed’ (1.1.120), and although Shakespeare never shows him convincing Henry of the immorality of his marriage to

⁶³ John Henry Newman, *Sermons Bearing on Subjects of the Day*, p. 300.

⁶⁴ Charles Kingsley, *Village Sermons and Town and Country Sermons* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1891), p. 83.

⁶⁵ William John Birch, p. 345.

Katharine, he is described as ‘diving into the King’s soul’, reducing him to ‘sad thoughts’ (2.2.45). Here the rhetoric of religion is weaponised and manipulated in a casuistic fashion, to render even holy matrimony unchristian. This suggests that Wolsey’s deliberate meddling or intrusion, as well as having political motivation, derived from his ignorance of domestic affairs.

Arthur Symons noted that ‘Holingshed is followed with a fidelity which is simply slavish’,⁶⁶ Shakespeare’s Wolsey, in the closet episode, uses Latin as a form of linguistic subtlety to lure Katharine into a politically, rather than morally, appropriate position. The American clergyman and Shakespeare critic Rev. Henry Norman Hudson, noted that Wolsey’s ‘confidence in the potency of his speech makes him reckless of truth and contemptuous of simplicity and purity’.⁶⁷ This combination of ‘potency’ and ‘recklessness’ dwells on the potential dangers of religious ‘speech’. Wolsey’s cunning, was, therefore, conflated with his celibacy and domestic ignorance. This means that Katharine was perceived as a disposable pawn in his immoral pursuit of power. Holingshed aside, Shakespeare’s Wolsey is characterised as a cunning casuist with little understanding of marital sanctity. But despite seeking to remove Katharine from the throne, the cardinals seem to genuinely believe in the virtue of their advice. Being celibate, ‘unworldly’ priests dedicated to God, it is reasonable that they should not comprehend Katharine’s anger at being stripped of a husband. Nor would they understand, what Jameson termed, the ‘ruination’ of a discarded wife.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Arthur Symons, ‘Introduction to *Henry VIII*’, in *Henry Irving Shakespeare*, VIII, 155-70 (p. 162).

⁶⁷ Henry Norman Hudson quoted in ‘Character of Wolsey’, in *Shakespeare’s Scenes and Characters*, ed. by Edward Dowden (London: Macmillan and Co., 1876), pp. 250-1 (p. 250).

⁶⁸ Anna Jameson, p. 352.

How, then, could Wolsey have been considered ‘sinful’? As the American writer Denton J. Snider observed in 1875, ‘the Reformation struck at celibacy and attempted to sanctify the family so that it became [...] a positive religious institution’.⁶⁹ Returning to Kingsley’s complaint that ‘it is mockery for a man to pretend to be a converted Christian’⁷⁰ without acknowledgement of the duty to ‘multiply’, it seems that Wolsey’s dismissal of Katharine’s marriage vows fell into this Protestant attitude towards Catholic celibacy. Even before the outrage sparked by the Oxford Movement, Jameson appeared to be concerned about the ‘sin’ inherent in Wolsey’s ecclesiological rejection of matrimony. Katharine expostulates that the prelates have not ‘cardinal virtues’ but ‘cardinal sins’ (3.1.103-4) which, according to Jameson, is an ‘appropriate [...] natural [and] inevitable’ accusation.⁷¹ Like the ‘appropriate’ cheering at Macready’s denunciation of Pandulph in 1850, Jameson’s reading of a wronged woman ‘appropriately’ renouncing her spiritual leaders implies that the papal hierarchy, between the 1830s and 1850s, within a Protestant context, carried connotations of sinfulness.

But the image of ‘cardinal sins’, far from referring to their political motives, has carnal connotations. If Wolsey was ‘carnal’ he could not have been ignorant of domestic affairs, in which case he was far from the celibate priest of Kingsley’s conception. In fact, this hint of sexual impropriety, rather than categorical ignorance, was something explored in Kean’s production (1855). Despite the Cardinal’s celibacy, entering the chamber of a woman played by Kean’s wife must have infused the scene with a sexual undertone both for the actors and the spectators drawn there by the

⁶⁹ Denton J. Snider, ‘Shakespeare’s *Measure for Measure*’, *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, 9 (1875), 412-25 (p. 425).

⁷⁰ Charles Kingsley, *Village Sermons and Town and Country Sermons*, p. 83.

⁷¹ Anna Jameson, p. 354.

celebrity couple. The German critic Theodore Fontane, lamented that Kean ‘takes it for granted that he and his wife should take the principal roles, without his ever seeming to ask himself whether or not he is suited to them’.⁷² This ‘suitability’ transcended acting abilities, because Kean’s Wolsey was given a genuine motive to interfere in the marriage of Mrs Kean’s Katharine. Though this is mere speculation, it was something that did not escape the attention of audiences, as demonstrated by Fontane’s response. Wolsey, therefore, as Jameson had claimed decades earlier, was a man approaching ‘cardinal sin’.

Nevertheless, if ‘worldly’ thoughts of policy, power and what Henry calls ‘thinkings below the moon’ (3.2.134), constitute the occupation of Shakespeare’s papal hierarchy, it seems contradictory that their ‘unworldliness’ should have been considered the source of their ignorance and even ‘sinfulness’. Like the prominence of the images of intrusion and betrayal with respect to the Oxford Movement and papal aggression, the seemingly paradoxical concepts of abstinence and indulgence fed into preconceptions about *corporeally*, but not necessarily *carnally*, greedy men.

Conclusion

The purpose of this section has been to show that both Cardinals Pandulph and Wolsey, with their casuistry, meddling, ambition and hypocrisy all masquerading as religious authority, were evocative of awakened mid-century concerns about Romish priests and their anthropocentric preference for all things ‘below the moon’ rather than ‘above the earth’ (3.2.131-4). For their irreligious intrusions and assumptions to power, betrayals of innocent parties, and manipulations of morality, Shakespeare’s Roman Catholic

⁷² Theodore Fontane, *Shakespeare in the London Theatre 1855-58*, trans. by Russell Jackson (London: Society for Theatre Research, 1999), p. 54.

prelates confirmed the early Victorian, post-Reformation paranoia about a grand papal conspiracy to overthrow England.

It is no coincidence that, after the tide of anti-Catholicism had reached its peak in the mid-Victorian era, Bishop Charles Wordsworth claimed that Shakespeare was ‘a Protestant against the errors and corruptions of the Church of Rome’.⁷³ Shakespeare, the ‘Protestant’, clearly offered a feasible channel through which mid-century ‘no-popery’ and anti-Tractarian agitators could ‘appropriately’ vent their paranoia about intrusive, treacherous and, by extension, ‘sinful’ Catholics.

Part Two: Nunneries and the Confessional

Following on from Anglican anxieties about pious celibacy, it is necessary to examine Victorian conceptions of Shakespeare’s nuns and monks through contemporary preconceptions of the Roman Catholic laity. This section refers primarily to *Measure for Measure* and *Romeo and Juliet*, assessing responses to the Roman Catholic woman, and priests with confessional authority. These plays centre on Church practice and the morality and implications of religious seclusion. They provide a significant focal point around which to negotiate Victorian responses to Shakespeare’s depiction of nuns and monks.

While the histories furnished opportunities to scorn the Roman Catholic hierarchy, the characterisation of the laity in Shakespeare’s tragedies and comedies seemed to confuse advocates of the playwright’s Protestantism. As Catholic apologists like Simpson were keen to observe, ‘amiable’ friars and nuns exist in plays such as

⁷³ Charles Wordsworth, p. 222.

Pericles and *Much Ado About Nothing*.⁷⁴ Interestingly, the contradictions arising from objections to religiously inspired celibacy plagued the Victorian era in ways that could not escape seeping into its literature and criticism. Kingsley's play *The Saint's Tragedy* (1848), for instance, explored the boundary between the purity of worldly renunciation and the deviant, potentially sexualised, nature of men and women abandoning themselves entirely to God. The conflict between genuine religious fervour and abnormal, deviant passion, communicated through Kingsley's play, seems to have been present in responses to Shakespeare's Catholic laity.

Antagonism towards Catholicism gave rise to accusations such as that of Bishop Wordsworth, who claimed that 'the excess and exorbitancy [sic] [of] Roman Catholicism's 'demands upon [...] its adherents, has a tendency to produce [...] secret infidelity'.⁷⁵ The combination of Catholicism's allure and 'demands' on followers relegated adherents to the position of slavish subjects. Along with the scholarly High Anglicans in the mid-century, two such 'subjects' succumbing to this so-called 'infidelity' were inhabitants of nunneries and penitents visiting the Catholic confessional.

First, the Roman Catholic convent was far from a simple sanctuary for pious women. Although High-Anglican nunneries became increasingly common in England,⁷⁶ the convent had irrevocable associations with Catholicism and became, as Lydia Maria

⁷⁴ Richard Simpson, 'Was Shakespeare a Catholic?', *The Rambler: A Catholic Journal and Review*, 2 (1854), 19-36 (p. 30).

⁷⁵ Charles Wordsworth, p. 224.

⁷⁶ According to Susan Mumm, by the turn of the century there were around ninety Anglican sisterhood communities in England. Though this figure is minimal compared to the estimated six hundred Roman Catholic convents in England by the end of the nineteenth century, it offers an indication of the frequency of all-female religious communities within the Church of England. Susan Mumm, *Stolen Daughters, Virgin Mothers: Anglican Sisterhoods in Victorian Britain* (London: Leicester University Press, 1999), p. 3; F. Knight, "'Male and Female He Created Them': Men, Women, and the Question of Gender", in *Religion in Victorian England*, V, 23-58 (p. 53).

Child argued in 1835, ‘powerful instruments of oppression’.⁷⁷ According to the Protestant magazine *The Churchman*, ‘there is no greater cruelty [...] than to ask a young, innocent, confiding girl to sign away [...] her future life [...] to the law of the Church of Rome’.⁷⁸ Laying aside the obvious prejudices of the Protestant periodical, it seems that any female attraction to the nunnery was – on account of its deviation from domestic life – perceived as ‘a pathological state’.⁷⁹ This was, in turn, likened to ‘Catholic fanaticism’ and presented as ‘female hysteria’, rendering the nunnery an ‘asylum’ designed to ‘oppress’ the socially deviant woman.⁸⁰

Secondly, as S. D. Bernstein observed at the end of the twentieth century, ‘the excitement over papal aggression envisioned confession as a menace to English domestic authority where Church fathers usurp the privilege of domination over women usually awarded to familial patriarchs’.⁸¹ Exposing immoral Catholic priests to vulnerable, usually female, penitents fuelled the already strong distrust of Catholic worship and its representatives; it also contributed to concerns about ‘intrusive’ Catholicism. Using these Victorian concepts of convents and confession, the figures of the nun and friar will be explored so as to determine to what extent Shakespeare’s laity, like his hierarchy, were perceived as transgressors and potential sinners.

⁷⁷ Lydia Maria Child, *The History of the Condition of Women in Various Ages and Nations* (Boston: John Allen & Co., 1835), p. 125.

⁷⁸ ‘Nunneries and their Abominations’, *The Churchman’s Monthly Penny Magazine and Guide to Christian Truth* (1869), 170-1 (p. 170).

⁷⁹ Maureen Moran, *Catholic Sensationalism and Victorian Literature* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2007), p. 81.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 81.

⁸¹ Susan David Bernstein, *Confessional Subjects: Revelations of Gender and Power in Victorian Literature and Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), p. 46.

Nunneries

With newspapers disseminating information in the mid-nineteenth century, stories and suspicions about Roman Catholic convents were readily available. Such stories were, perhaps inevitably, monopolised by editors such as George Reynolds, whose own sensationalist fiction was popularised in penny dreadfuls.⁸² Reports with headlines such as ‘A Flight from a Nunnery’,⁸³ ‘Extraordinary Proceedings in a Nunnery’,⁸⁴ and ‘Strange Doings at an English Nunnery’,⁸⁵ sensationalised the convent, providing readers with scandalous accounts of women trapped in an establishment masquerading as a place of devotion.

Fused with these ‘popular’ and probably fictional accounts of nunneries were genuine concerns about the mental health of women prioritising spiritual celibacy over the normalised routes of matrimony and domesticity. Despite the Anglican Sisterhood Movement of the mid-century, which led to the establishment of the first Anglican nunnery in London in 1845, the image of the convent was, as Susan Mumm has observed, ‘irretrievably Romish, and thereby taboo’.⁸⁶

Vestments, prayer, and celibacy aside, it was arguably the very idea of excessive female godliness that elicited suspicion throughout the nineteenth century. In Charles Kingsley’s play *The Saint’s Tragedy* (1848), and P. H. Calderon’s subsequent portrait *St. Elizabeth of Hungary’s Great Act of Renunciation* (1891), Saint Elizabeth was

⁸² Louis James, ‘Reynolds, George William MacArthur (1814-1879)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography Online* 2008 <<http://oxforddnb.com/view/article/23414>> [accessed May 2011].

⁸³ ‘A Flight from a Nunnery’, *Reynolds’s Newspaper*, 11 April 1852 <<http://galegroup.com>> [accessed November 2008].

⁸⁴ ‘Extraordinary Proceedings in a Nunnery’, *Daily News*, 22 October 1864 <<http://galegroup.com>> [accessed February 2009].

⁸⁵ ‘Strange Doings at an English Nunnery’, *Liverpool Mercury*, 8 April 1865 <<http://galegroup.com>> [accessed November 2008].

⁸⁶ Susan Mumm, pp. 3, 192.

depicted as dangerously subservient to God. Calderon's painting, for instance, offers a contrast between the extreme piety of Elizabeth, and the superficial virtue of the fully clothed priest overlooking her naked body.⁸⁷ Both the play and image depict a 'pathologically' pious and unconsciously sexualised Roman Catholic woman.

Isabella

Elizabeth is an apt parallel for the nun Isabella in *Measure for Measure*. W. J. Birch argued that Isabella's preference for chastity over the life of her brother is an 'exhibition of prudery and ferocity of virtue'.⁸⁸ Isabella invited vocabulary such as 'savage',⁸⁹ 'antipathy',⁹⁰ and 'inadequate',⁹¹ throughout the period; but it is important to be aware that her excessive piety was perceived as subordinate to her sexualisation.

In the play, both Angelo and Vincentio succumb to a sexualised worshipping of the nun. While Angelo proposes a sexual liaison, the Duke offers her marriage, suggesting that she has corporeal as well as spiritual allure. As Birch noted, when pleading with Angelo, Isabella's 'religion, morality and reason all fall inefficacious'.⁹² Although Birch claimed that 'it is Isabella's virtue' that subdues Angelo, that her piety was thought to hold no power over him raises questions about the kind of 'virtue' she actually possesses. Interestingly, Jameson explained that Isabella's 'purity [has] no sophistry [...] and no allurements',⁹³ which anticipated accusations, such as those of Birch, against the character's innocence. By this logic, Isabella, like the naked Elizabeth of Hungary, is *unconsciously* sexualised through her zealous Romish affinities.

⁸⁷ See Appendix B.

⁸⁸ William John Birch, p. 357.

⁸⁹ Richard Grant White, *Shakespeare's Scholar: Being Historical and Critical Studies of His Text, Characters and Commentators* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1854), p. 144.

⁹⁰ Arthur Bingham Walkley, *Drama and Life* (London: Methuen and Co., 1907), p. 157.

⁹¹ Denton J. Snider, p. 425.

⁹² William John Birch, p. 360.

⁹³ Anna Jameson, p. 59.

Religious critics were keen to praise the virtue of Isabella without necessarily focusing on her Catholicism. In 1832, for instance, Jameson proposed that Isabella has a ‘saintly self-possession’ and ‘moral grandeur’.⁹⁴ Later, in 1875, Dowden described her as ‘the embodiment of conscience’ and ‘saintly’.⁹⁵ Moreover, Dowden offered to justify her choice of convent life by arguing that it is ‘a place where her energy can spend itself in stern efforts towards ideal objects’.⁹⁶ Far from condemning the convent and Isabella’s attachment to it, the character’s faith was turned into something admirable rather than deviant.

Yet such praise for a Roman Catholic woman was, in itself, verging on a form of religious deviancy. Despite scorn for ritualised reverence, early and mid-Victorian celebrations of Isabella’s piety to some extent mirrored Roman Catholicism’s Marian worship. For instance, to celebrate female beauty, Francis William Topham painted Isabella, in 1888, as a Marian-like figure kneeling in an attitude of prayer.⁹⁷ Because the portrait focuses on pious chastity, it conflicted with the notion of ideal, marriageable beauty. To distract from such ‘misplaced’ reverence for Isabella’s virginity, her role as a *nun* had to become subservient to the fact that she is also a *woman*. Therefore, as will be explored shortly, attention was generally focused on her potential marriage to Duke Vincentio.

By re-assessing Isabella as a marriageable woman, the character was released from her alliance with the convent and, therefore, the Catholic Church. Despite hailing the nunnery as ‘an ideal’ for Isabella, Dowden asserted that her marriage is ‘entirely

⁹⁴ Ibid., pp. 54, 61.

⁹⁵ Edward Dowden, pp. 61-2, 82.

⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 62.

⁹⁷ See Appendix C.

meet and right [since] her place as Duchess of Vienna [in] faithful wifehood [...] is still a consecrated life'.⁹⁸ That marriage may be just as 'consecrated' as convent seclusion, as well as rendering the nunnery obsolete, romanticises the spirituality of matrimony. According to David Englander, 'family duties [...] were an atonement for Eve's errors [and] the godly wife and mother was central to the suppression of sin'.⁹⁹ The Victorian obsession with familial stability and Anglican, English respectability, presented marriage as a form of piety and placed emphasis on the *function* of the Christian woman. Conversely, according to Jameson, the convent represents a 'narrow and obscure situation'.¹⁰⁰ This 'narrowness' strips Isabella of any propensity to manifest her virtue and fulfil, by implication, her Christian function as a woman. As Dowden observed, 'Isabella does not return to the sisterhood [...] she has learned that in the world may be found a discipline more strict [...] than the convent; she has learned that the world has need of her'.¹⁰¹ Entering a convent was a betrayal of the Victorian image of womanhood, in turn, intruding upon and inhibiting a woman's potential to carry out her duty.

On the surface, this duality between the religious and domestic life appears to be one-sided. But as Maria LaMonica has argued, the paradigm of 'hearth and home' became a form of secular religion in its ideological status as an 'ideal'. LaMonica questions: 'was there time for reflection, solitude and prayer? Would the overwhelming devotion to husband and children [...] diminish or eclipse her [the wife's] love for

⁹⁸ Edward Dowden, p. 63.

⁹⁹ David Englander, 'The Word and the World: Evangelicalism in the Victorian City', *Religion in Victorian Britain*, II, 14-38 (p. 20).

¹⁰⁰ Anna Jameson, p. 65.

¹⁰¹ Edward Dowden, p. 84.

God?¹⁰² Despite raising children and maintaining an ostensibly Christian household, there was no real propensity to experience genuine spirituality in the marital state. Renunciation, then, could apply to the abandonment of a religious life just as it was commonly attributed to the rejection of domesticity.

However, Monica Cohen has observed that Victorian fiction often places characters within the domestic sphere to demonstrate that ‘it is not that the vocational path is abandoned, it is simply relocated’.¹⁰³ Indeed, in the novels of George Eliot, such as *Adam Bede* (1859) and *Felix Holt* (1866), and much later Hall Caine’s novel *The Christian* (1897), characters renounce their vocations as a female preacher, a political reformer and a monk, respectively, in order to pursue a domestic life. Just as religion relies on ideological paradigms so too, Cohen argues, does domesticity centre itself in ideology: ‘the work involved in devoting a life to building and maintaining a home [...] is continuous, non-teleological and self-sacrificial and [...] therefore constitutes a higher calling in the Protestant tradition’.¹⁰⁴ This places domestic ideology within the realm of religion rather than in LaMonica’s sphere of secularism. While this is not a uniquely Victorian concern, marriage can be seen as both a renunciation and adoption of a religious cause, and it was this paradox that seemed to trouble critics of Isabella.

Putting gender aside, the polarised fields of domesticity and cloistral piety – though equally bound by the rhetoric of renunciation – within the parameters of Roman Catholicism suggested a discrepancy between fulfilling a purpose and shying away from real-life duty. In segregating its nuns and friars, with the obvious exception of working

¹⁰² Maria LaMonica, *Masked Atheism: Catholicism and the Secular Victorian Home* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2008), p. 5.

¹⁰³ Monica F. Cohen, *Professional Domesticity in the Victorian Novel: Women, Work and Home* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 138.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 139.

orders (nurses and teachers), the Roman Catholic establishment allegedly failed to offer any tangible aid to the world. By this logic, it seems that many Victorian non-Catholics would have concluded that to reject the pious life would be far more worthy a renunciation than abandoning the opportunity to build and work within the ideological parameters of the Protestant 'hearth and home'.

For the purposes of advocating this message, and instructing young women about the importance of Protestant domestic stability, Mary Cowden Clarke appropriated Shakespeare's heroines into didactic short stories about adolescence. The conflict of renunciation was introduced into Cowden Clarke's short story *Isabella: The Votaress*, in which the child is placed within the literal barriers of the convent. The nunnery, in the story, has 'a large iron gate' and is 'surrounded by a high wall'.¹⁰⁵ The nuns are always depicted in their garden which, as C. P. Havely observes, presents 'the duties of the Poor Clares as no more than a little dainty horticulture'.¹⁰⁶ In fact, Isabella's mentor, Sister Aloysia, demonstrates a greater care for her garden than for the tribulations of humanity. She 'sedulously applied herself to trim the edges' by 'pruning', 'adorning' and 'training'.¹⁰⁷ Such functional dedication to nature is never matched in her attitude towards society, because sister Aloysia makes no attempt to involve herself in the world beyond her convent.

Thus Cowden Clarke's interpretation of nuns implies a distance between reality and Catholicism itself. That Isabella alone cares for the sinners of Vienna draws attention to the irreligion and lack of charity in the walled, gated convent. As well as

¹⁰⁵ Mary Cowden Clarke, *The Girlhood of Shakespeare's Heroines* (1850; repr. London: Bickers and Son, 1879), pp. 150-1.

¹⁰⁶ Cecily Palser Havely, 'Saying the Unspeakable: Mary Cowden Clarke and *Measure for Measure*', *The Durham University Journal*, 87 (1995), 233-42 (p. 239).

¹⁰⁷ Mary Cowden Clarke, p. 151.

being 'pathological' and sexualised, therefore, confinement to a nunnery verged on the unchristian and self-indulgent. It is no wonder that non-Catholic Victorian readers preferred to focus on Isabella's marriage. This returned her to a normalised standard of female piety with an implicit 'whiteness of soul',¹⁰⁸ without the physical intrusion of the convent onto her liberty, or betrayal of ideal womanhood.

Juliet

Just as Isabella's choice represented the dichotomy of the convent and matrimony, so too did Juliet's election of death over a 'sisterhood' at the close of *Romeo and Juliet*, hint at the ideological and physical 'otherness' of religious seclusion. At the death of the lovers, when Juliet wakes from her sleep, Laurence expostulates, 'I'll dispose of thee/ Among a sisterhood of holy nuns' (5.3.157-8).¹⁰⁹ Of this episode the mid-century actress Helen Faucit noted that Juliet 'has wakened for this! She has no questions, no words' and when Laurence 'leaves the tomb [...] nothing could be more welcome [to her than] Romeo's dagger'.¹¹⁰ If death was 'welcomed' over a convent, and received by Faucit as a demonstration of 'true love constant and triumphant throughout persistent evil fortune',¹¹¹ it follows that the 'sisterhood' represented *inconsistency*, *non-triumph*, and 'evil' fate: something, in other words, to be avoided.

However, if Juliet were to enter the nunnery it would be to escape the notice of her parents, not for any spiritual purpose. As a sexually active, husbandless girl, the convent would be for Juliet what Moran terms an 'asylum' for the deviant, rather than

¹⁰⁸ Frederick S. Boas, p. 369.

¹⁰⁹ William Shakespeare, 'Romeo and Juliet', in *Henry Irving Shakespeare*, I, 177-255.

¹¹⁰ Helena Faucit Martin, *On Some of Shakespeare's Female Characters* (London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1885), p. 190.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 191.

godly, woman.¹¹² Further to this ‘convent as asylum’ image, it is useful to note interpretations of Ophelia in *Hamlet*. F. A. Marshall argued that when Hamlet advises Ophelia to reside in a nunnery, ‘where else, but in such a sanctuary, should so pure a being be sheltered?’¹¹³ That Ophelia will be safe *within* counteracts the praise for both Isabella and Juliet’s escape *from* the nunnery. Again, there is no religious requirement to enter a convent but, as with Juliet, a need to be hidden and forgotten about by society.

Despite the image of the convent as an indication of ineptitude and weakness, however, that the intrusive institution can operate as a sanctorum for women, would suggest some spirituality to the seclusion process. Like the paradoxically ‘worldly’ yet ignorant papal hierarchy, attitudes towards female piety seemed to overlook the fact that women like Isabella and Calderon’s St. Elizabeth are spiritually autonomous; they require faith alone in order to exist. Perhaps the idea that women could be experiencing spiritual transcendence without the aid of men rendered the convent a symbol of defiance, holy or otherwise, in the eyes of its Protestant, celibacy-doubting antagonists.

With respect to Shakespeare, for many of his non-Catholic readers – Birch, Jameson, Dowden, Faucit and Clarke – both Isabella and Juliet were better off married and suicidal, respectively, than inside a Roman Catholic convent. Betrayal, it seems, was implicit in the very idea of conventual seclusion, and to admit any profit in it would have been a violation of the Protestant ethos. More importantly, it may have challenged claims about Shakespeare’s Protestantism.

¹¹² Maureen Moran, p. 111.

¹¹³ Frank A. Marshall, ‘Introduction to *Hamlet*’, in *Henry Irving Shakespeare*, VIII, 3-25 (p. 24).

The Confessional

While conceptions of the convent infiltrated responses to Shakespeare's aspirant nuns, the same Catholic-fearing readers were less keen to align his priests with the Catholic scandals of the period. In the mid-nineteenth century, there were emerging questions about the safety of vulnerable women entering the confined space of the confessional with masculine company posing as pious, spiritual guides.

A letter printed in *The Times* in 1850, quoted a companion for Catholics which advised on points to consider before entering the confessional. These included questions such as, 'have you touched others, or permitted yourself to be touched by others?' and 'have you looked at immodest objects with pleasure or danger? How often?'¹¹⁴ Demands like 'how often' and 'how many' amplify the sense of intrusion into individual privacy. Although such questions would have been commonplace in a Roman Catholic context, as well as potentially an Evangelical one, that corporeal transgressions should be spoken of aloud was inappropriate within the scope of Anglicanism. Forcing confessions of sexual activity out of adherents was perceived as a perverse indulgence on the part of the intrusive confessor. As the *Era* complained in 1858, 'the priest is empowered to ask any and every female communicant any questions which his real piety or his prurient imagination may suggest'.¹¹⁵ The intentions of celibate confessors were perhaps rightly questioned, but the sensationalising of priestly 'imagination' generated a widespread fear of Roman Catholic confessional spaces.

¹¹⁴ 'To the Editor of *The Times*', *The Times*, 26 November 1850 <<http://galegroup.com>> [accessed January 2009].

¹¹⁵ 'The Confessional', *The Era*, 12 September 1858 <<http://galegroup.com>> [accessed December 2008]. This kind of complaint was common in reports and letters printed in newspapers. That the *Era*, predominantly interested in theatricals and entertainments, concerned itself with the confessional is indicative of the intolerance felt towards Catholicism.

However, reading Shakespeare's Catholic priests through these notions of confessional impropriety arguably threatened the palatability of the plays. While Shakespeare released his women from the bondage of convents, thereby appealing to Victorian preferences for domesticity, there are no such means of escape from religion for his priests. Thus, if plays like *Romeo and Juliet* and *Measure for Measure* were to retain their moral validity, their Catholic priests would have had to be read as beneficent, not dangerous or even sinful, religious agents.

Friar Laurence

Returning to the image of the potentially 'carnal' priest, it is necessary to turn to Laurence who is confessor to both Romeo and Juliet, and is privy to their emotions and sexual habits. It is no surprise, therefore, that Birch argued that Laurence 'abuses the confessional [by] amusing intrigues and clandestine stratagems'.¹¹⁶

Like the intrusive, casuistic prelates, Laurence assumes a position of rhetorical authority with the lovers. As well as extracting details of their love lives, he is able to manipulate the couple for his amusement. This concept of 'manipulation' was alluded to in Helen Faucit's recollections of her performance of Juliet's encounter with Laurence: 'I always felt a kind of icy coldness and stillness come over me after leaving the Friar's cell'.¹¹⁷ It is possible to attribute this 'coldness' to an exposure to the Catholic priest who advises her to 'be merry' and to 'give consent to marry Paris' (4.1.89-90), thereby urging her to disobey her parents and break, by Roman Catholic doctrine, the fourth commandment. George Fletcher observed that Juliet is 'instructed by her confessor [to undertake] the scene of simulation with her parents'.¹¹⁸ Although Fletcher, like Faucit,

¹¹⁶ William John Birch, p. 217.

¹¹⁷ Helena Faucit Martin, p. 178.

¹¹⁸ George Fletcher, p. 349.

did not scorn the Friar's counsel, he did make a connection between Laurence's 'preaching' and Juliet's subsequent misconduct. This was later explored in Edward Matthew Ward's 1867 portrait entitled *Juliet in the Cell of Friar Laurence*. Ward depicts a confined space with Laurence standing over a frightened Juliet. His foot is close enough to be treading on the bottom of her skirt, contributing to the sense of physical, verbal and ideological intrusion within the parameters of the confessional.¹¹⁹ Whatever Laurence is doing and saying to Juliet, both in the portrait and play itself, it seems that his influence over her did not escape the notice of either Fletcher or Ward.

Despite the secretive marriage and 'teaching' within Laurence's cell, it is impossible to ignore the lack of condemnation for the Friar. In 1847, Knight argued that Shakespeare sought to 'disencumber men of their hatreds and prejudices' by depicting Laurence as 'a kind old man [who is] well-meaning'.¹²⁰ Interestingly, however, in Knight's posthumous *Imperial Shakespeare*, Ward's image of Laurence and Juliet was included, drawing on the ambiguous attitudes towards Catholicism and celibacy that had emerged later in the century. While it is possible that Knight himself wished to avoid overt anti-Catholic discourse in his reading of the Friar, it is clear that the character merited a degree of genuine respect for his supposedly 'good' intentions.

Although Knight's attitude implies that anxieties about Catholicism had little effect on interpretations of the Friar, it is fascinating that, in performance, Laurence tended to be played as a peripheral character. Macready noted in his diary in April 1838, 'I find the playing a part of this sort, with no direct character to sustain, no effort to make, no power of perceiving an impression made, to be a very disagreeable and

¹¹⁹ See Appendix D.

¹²⁰ Charles Knight, *William Shakespeare: A Biography* (London: Charles Knight and Co., 1851), p. 108.

unprofitable task'.¹²¹ If Laurence posed no challenge to the actor, this may be attributed to an unwillingness to delve into the psychology of the character. Macready's claim that Laurence makes no 'impression' suggests that audiences did not desire a realistic representation of the potentially dangerous confessor. On stage or otherwise, that *Romeo and Juliet* was riddled with the improprieties of a meddling Roman Catholic friar who, like the sensationalised priests of the press, was manipulating the lovers for his own perverse enjoyment, may have been too disturbingly *real* for respectable Victorian audiences.

Such realism was portrayed in what was perceived as 'popular' theatre. In M. M. G. Dowling's *Romeo and Juliet* burlesque (1837), Laurence was depicted as a blacksmith.¹²² The secularisation of the character – a popular trait of burlesque – rather than departing from Shakespeare, arguably paralleled the character's actions within a context outside of the 'moral' sanction offered by his cowl. The blacksmith claims to 'splice young gents and ladies [making] them virtuous with my vice'.¹²³ This allusion to 'my vice' re-assesses the Friar's interferences with the lovers as *sinful* rather than *helpful*. Dowling's Laurence, moreover, offers Juliet 'a large black bottle' instead of poison and expostulates, 'You must get tipsey [sic] – nay, quite gone with gin/ I've got a bottle – never mind the sin'.¹²⁴ Again, the character's indifference to 'sin' and 'vice' reflects the immorality of Laurence's deceptions and meddling, however kindly meant, in the actual play. Similarly, in Horace Amelius Lloyd's Scottish travesty entitled *Rummio and Judy: A Serio-Comic-Parody-Tragedy-Farcical Burlesque* (1841), when

¹²¹ William Charles Macready, *Macready's Reminiscences and Selections from His Diaries and Letters*, ed. by Sir Frederick Pollock, 2 vols. (London: Macmillan and Co., 1875), II, p. 110.

¹²² Maurice M. G. Dowling, 'Romeo and Juliet: "As the Law Directs"' (1837), in *Nineteenth Century Shakespeare Burlesques*, ed. by Stanley Wells, 5 vols. (London: Diploma Press Limited, 1977), II, 45-81 (p. 49).

¹²³ *Ibid.*, p. 69.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 75.

Judy awakens to find Rummio's corpse, she berates Laurence with, 'you old block-head! You are the cause'.¹²⁵ She goes on to 'beat out her desperate brains' once Laurence 'runs off',¹²⁶ exaggerating the horror and death that can be attributed to the character's meddling. Comedy aside, by removing his religious credentials, Shakespeare's Friar could *legitimately* be interpreted as a corrupt, worldly man with no real piety but rather, as Birch claimed, one that misused and 'abused' his confessional rights.

This, however, suggests that 'alternative' ways of reading Shakespeare's drama were driven to marginal forms of theatre. Burlesques of plays such as *Romeo and Juliet* were dismissed by Michael Booth as 'reductions of Shakespeare's plot [...] to a low level of grotesque domestic comedy'.¹²⁷ Legitimate theatre, on the other hand, was hailed as didactic and, for Charles Kemble, a place where 'the rabble of London [...] can be instructed and improved'.¹²⁸ That unchallenging interpretations of characters like Laurence were more 'instructive' than those 'low level' entertainments of Dowling and Lloyd, subscribes to a belief that good drama was somehow above the reality of everyday existence.

Duke Vincentio

This was asserted in the eagerness to praise Duke Vincentio in *Measure for Measure*.

Whereas Laurence's advice has religious credibility, the Duke only *claims* to be a priest.

Not only does he propose to shrive penitents in prison before their execution, but he

¹²⁵ Horace Amelius Lloyd, 'Rummio and Judy: A Serio-Comic-Parody-Tragedy-Farcical Burlesque' (1841), in *Nineteenth Century Shakespeare Burlesques*, II, 157-208 (p. 206).

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 206.

¹²⁷ Michael Booth, *Theatre in the Victorian Age* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 196.

¹²⁸ Charles Kemble quoted in 1831-32 (679) 'Report from the Select Committee on Dramatic Literature with the Minutes of Evidence'. *House of Commons Parliamentary Papers Online*. vol. VIII. p. 162. May 2009. <<http://parlipapers.chadwyck.co.uk>>.

endeavours to befriend and absolve vulnerable women. Distancing Vincentio from real-life was, by extension, morally necessary.

Bishop Wordsworth praised the Duke's ability to elicit contrition from the impregnated Juliet by encouraging her to confess, and, by repenting, find grace.¹²⁹ Richard Simpson noted that 'had the poet been imbued with the Protestant ideas of penance, he could not have given this fine and proper representation of it [...] doing justice to it as a sacrament for the sincerely penitent'.¹³⁰ Notwithstanding the presence of faith in this episode, what Wordsworth and Simpson did not allude to was the Duke's lack of any right to demand confessions, give moral advice and, more importantly, his improper fascination with the sexual habits of others. It was William Watkiss Lloyd who observed the sexual affinities not only of the 'Duke Friar', but of the priest that lends him a disguise. In the monastery scene, Vincentio opens with:

No, holy friar, throw away that thought,
Believe not that the dribbling dart of love
Can pierce a complete bosom (1.3.1-3).¹³¹

Lloyd suggested that, in the 'oppressive retirement of the monastery [...] friars are curious as to the motives of ducal seclusion, and are ready to intimate a guess that a petticoat is concerned in the secret'.¹³² The utter immorality of 'petticoat' presumptions in a 'holy friar' challenges the sanctity of the monastery and the influence it has over its penitents.

But if the Duke's own priorities were the subject of speculation, it follows that his encounters with 'petticoats' ought to have been equal foci of moral discourse. Lloyd

¹²⁹ Charles Wordsworth, pp. 158-9.

¹³⁰ Richard Simpson, 'Was Shakespeare a Catholic?', pp. 32-3.

¹³¹ William Shakespeare, 'Measure for Measure', in *Henry Irving Shakespeare*, V, 134-241.

¹³² William Watkiss Lloyd, p. 40.

argued that ‘Isabella, cold and un-impressible [...] is submissiveness itself under the guidance of a supposed ghostly father’.¹³³ It is precisely this ‘guidance’ that is infused with a lewd undertone given that, in his dealings with Isabella, Marianna, and Claudio’s fiancée Juliet, the Duke enters into discussions of sexual activity. In what Wordsworth praised as the ‘confessional’ scene, Vincentio argues that Juliet’s ‘sin [was] of heavier kind’ than Claudio’s and suggests that her ‘most offenceful act was mutually committed’ (2.4.26, 29). Asking about ‘mutuality’ and who was responsible for luring the other into bed, demonstrates a perverse interest in the intricacies of Juliet’s role in her physical relationship with Claudio. In fact, Vincentio initially addresses her as ‘fair one’, dwelling on her beauty, and alludes to ‘the sin that hath brought you to this shame’ (2.4.19, 31). Here, like the infamous questions in the handbook for penitents, the confessor draws conversation towards a recapitulation of the sexual act, extracting details and, presumably, satisfying a lewd curiosity.

Again, the Duke refers to his ‘habit’ as proof that ‘no loss shall touch [Isabella] by my company’ (3.1.179-82). The very fact that his ‘habit’ is borrowed rather than earned, taints his ‘confessional’ discussions with the women and, as Lloyd hinted, poses questions about his motivation for assisting them. When greeting Isabella his language is more like that of a lover than a holy father:

The hand that hath made you fair hath made you good: the goodness that is cheap in beauty makes beauty brief in goodness; but grace, being the soul of your complexion, shall keep the body of it ever fair’ (3.1.184-8).

Just as he refers to Juliet’s beauty, so too does Vincentio flatter Isabella, ultimately luring her into his bed with his offer of marriage at the close of the play. For Lloyd, therefore, the Duke found a perfect vent for his sexual curiosity, ‘dark management and

¹³³ Ibid., p. 40.

behind-scene intermeddling',¹³⁴ in the robes of a 'petticoat' seeking, Roman Catholic friar.

Yet, as with Laurence, responses such as that of Lloyd to Duke Vincentio were rare and often overlooked. Walter Pater proposed that Isabella and 'the Duke disguised as a friar [...] come with the quiet of the cloister [...] like some grey monastic picture hung on the wall of a gaudy room'.¹³⁵ Aligning what Pater termed Vincentio's 'moralising' with Isabella's virginal piety, celebrates the character's 'monastic', religious qualities.¹³⁶ This reading of the Duke as genuinely pious was epitomised in Schlegel's proposition that, in the case of Shakespeare's character, 'the cowl seems really to make the monk'.¹³⁷ However, such praising of Vincentio's implicit religion does not counteract the lewd tendencies with which Lloyd was suggesting the character is imbued; rather, it focuses on the Duke's virtue and usefulness, rendering him a feasible, moral and worthy alternative for Isabella, to the convent.

Conclusion

Coupled with assumptions about confessionals and convents, that characters such as Duke Vincentio and Friar Laurence could be the very depictions of Catholic immorality so despised by the English, would have threatened the morality of the characters and, more importantly, the didactic quality of Shakespearean drama. In fact, according to Gibson, the supposed lack of Shakespeare investigation and analysis in the period pertained to a celebratory rather than critical engagement with his texts.¹³⁸ Although, on

¹³⁴ Ibid., p. 39

¹³⁵ Walter Horatio Pater, *Appreciations with an Essay on Style* (1889; repr. London: Macmillan & Co. Ltd., 1924), p. 175.

¹³⁶ Ibid., p. 175.

¹³⁷ August Wilhelm von Schlegel quoted in *The Works of Shakespeare*, ed. by Howard Staunton (London: Routledge, Warne and Routledge, 1863), p. 640.

¹³⁸ Andrew Gibson, p. 74.

the surface, this may seem to be true, analyses of the laity imply a complex relationship with Shakespeare in the Victorian era that was not only dependant on ‘bardolatry’, but also on contemporary attitudes towards the convent and confessional. Exploring these responses reveals that readings of the plays were riddled with echoes of contemporary scandal, inducing readers and performers – in a laboured manner – to gloss over the unpalatable piety and activities of characters like Isabella and Laurence. It was, however, the labour and critical detail required to do this that makes Victorian responses to these characters analytical and investigatory.

Chapter Conclusion

By exploring the theme of Roman Catholicism within the context of ‘sin’, this chapter demonstrates that Shakespeare’s plays were appropriated into the mid-century awareness of Roman Catholic scandal and so-called aggression. In turn, this implies that the plays were often interpreted so as to draw out segments like John’s anti-papal rant, and concepts such as Isabella’s virtue, upon which to fix attention. As suggested earlier, perhaps mid-century responses to these plays can be perceived as adoptions of the texts into the world of papal aggression and conventual distrust rather than, strictly speaking, *interpretations* of the plots and characters.

This reveals something important about Catholicism in Protestant England and, of course, Shakespeare. Despite the overwhelming want of theological justification for condemnation of Shakespeare’s hierarchy and laity, it is imperative to observe that these responses to characters were prominent in a period of equally un-theological antagonism towards Roman Catholicism. Conceptions of the intrusion of cardinals and friars into England and domestic privacy, respectively, were part of the political and

social accusations made against Roman Catholics amid mid-century fears of papal converts and aggression. To transgress or commit 'sin', it seems, was not invariably limited to acts of unconscionable behaviour but – both within and outside of the plays – dependent upon ideological affinities.

By professing rights to penetrate and enforce laws over England's monarchy; manipulate moral reasoning; seek sanctuary in a convent, or probe penitents for lurid details of their private lives, Shakespeare's Roman Catholics were not necessarily being consciously wicked but rather, practising within the parameters of their religion. Though Isabella and Laurence were forgiven their conduct, to a degree, and Pandolph and Wolsey were redeemed by England's folly and repentance, each character occupied sinful territory in the eyes of mid-century Protestant readers and audiences smarting from the memories of Romish intrusion and treachery. In other words, the concepts of Catholicism and Shakespeare were approached by a mass non-Catholic audience in similar ways: they were both used to justify existing preconceptions about Protestantism, England and inappropriate Catholic conduct.

Chapter Two **Disillusionment**

Introduction

In this chapter, Victorian attitudes towards Catholicism within Shakespeare's drama are traced through the theme of disillusionment. Victorian concerns about disillusionment often pertained to the concept of a lost ideal. A pattern emerges here: loss leads to disillusionment which brings about despair.

Turning to Shakespeare, having created false idols who, in turn, deviate from their positions as ideal, Hamlet, Romeo and Constance each lose faith in society and themselves, and choose to pursue a self-destructive tragic course of despair that leads to death. This reading of the characters which characterised the works of Edward Dowden, George Fletcher, Frank Walters and Frank Marshall, can be located within the Victorian context of disillusionment.

It is vital to understand the pertinence of 'disillusionment' to the period. Christopher Herbert has recently defined disillusionment, broadly speaking and not relating directly to Shakespeare, as a 'psychological and spiritual wound' or 'traumatic break'.¹ By assessing this 'break' and subsequent despair within the context of reactions to Shakespeare's characters, it will be possible to determine how Victorian concerns about disillusionment entered into interpretations of the plays, and to what extent these readings can be traced back to contemporary ideas about Catholic imagination, idol worship and tragedy.

¹ Christopher Herbert, *War of No Pity: The Indian Mutiny and Victorian Trauma* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), p. 18.

Herbert's notion of 'trauma' can be applied to religious disillusionment. This was a threat to established religion because a 'traumatic break' from the Anglican Church resulted in a loss of confidence in, what was hitherto, a national religious icon. Given the challenges that took place to the Church of England between the Oxford Movement and so-called papal aggression, any questioning of orthodox belief was perceived as part of a larger attack on Anglicanism. To add insult to injury, in 1860 respected Anglicans revived concerns about the possible errors of the Church of England in a publication entitled *Essays and Reviews*. Here, the theologians Benjamin Jowett, Henry Bristow Wilson, and Baden Powell, amongst others, questioned concepts like biblical hermeneutics, the thirty-nine articles and Genesis, respectively, triggering outrage from the Church of England. Bishop Samuel Wilberforce famously associated the rationalism inherent in the study of theology – a trait that was quintessential to *Essays* – with 'irreligion [...] scepticism [and] delusion': 'the spiritual child of the rationalist', he claimed 'develops into the atheist'.² From Wilberforce's orthodox perspective, any questioning of religious authority leads to disillusionment or 'scepticism' which brings about godlessness.

Circling back to Shakespeare, Richard Chenevix Trench, in his sermon given for the tercentenary celebration of Shakespeare's birth, claimed that the plays are 'accepting of God's world [because characters are] not fiercely dashing and shattering themselves [...] against the bars of their prison-house, or moodily nourishing in their own hearts and in the hearts of others, thoughts of discontent, revolt and despair'.³ Though Trench denied that any of Shakespeare's characters fall into 'despair', the figures of Hamlet,

² Samuel Wilberforce, 'Essays and Reviews', *The Quarterly Review*, 109 (1861), 248-304 (pp. 289, 287).

³ Richard Chenevix Trench, *Every Good Gift from Above* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1864), p. 8.

Romeo and Constance, from *Hamlet*, *Romeo and Juliet*, and *King John*, respectively, each experience disillusionment and allow themselves to fall into existential despair.

In fact, decades later Shaw argued that Shakespeare often appears to be a ‘vulgar pessimist, oppressed with a logical demonstration that life is not worth living’.⁴ Rather than breaking with an organised ‘Church’, the characters Hamlet, Romeo and Constance each lose faith in their own iconic people and experience the subsequent trauma of this loss by plunging into existential crises: in short, they believe that ‘life is not worth living’.

This chapter traces conceptions of Constance, Romeo and Hamlet as disillusioned individuals after a traumatic break from their ‘false’ idols. The second part explores the treatment of these figures as despairing characters whose religion fails to address the trauma of disillusionment. Experiences of disillusionment within the plays, because they failed to subscribe to Victorian progressive ideology, were often aligned with Catholicism. The loss of physical, institutional and individual icons – within Shakespeare – was attributed to Catholic idol worship and the so-called ‘Catholic imagination’, and despair or what Wordsworth suggested was a lack of ‘thankfulness towards God’, to Catholicism itself.

Part One: The Traumatic Break

In *King John*, *Hamlet*, and *Romeo and Juliet*, the son, mother and lover, respectively, make up a faux trinity of apotheosised figures. Critical attention often focused on the trauma that proceeds to afflict the characters after the loss of, or break from, each idol.

⁴ George Bernard Shaw, *Shaw on Shakespeare*, p. 3.

How and why Constance, Hamlet and Romeo were read as disillusioned figures are questions that are addressed in this section.

Idols and the Imagination

The concept of fallen idols, particularly in the second half of the century, was attributed to the Catholic practice of icon worship. According to Jowett in 1855, ‘idolatry detains men in the world of sight: it offers an outward form to the eye and imagery to the fancy, it draws the many-coloured veil of art over the corruption of human nature’.⁵ Similarly, the Evangelical preacher Charles Haddon Spurgeon argued that ‘every mass that is ever offered upon the Romish altar is an insult to heaven’.⁶ ‘Holy places and crosses, copes, and dalmatics, crosiers, and chasubles’ all distract from or seek to replace God: ‘it is because man has fallen, that as his body wants clothing, so he is always dressing up his religion’.⁷ Idols, here, become forms of disguise, creating the illusion of proximity to an easily accessible deity.

Because of the spiritual value placed on idols and ornaments for instance, Catholicism was thought to appeal to the ‘imagination’. The ‘Catholic imagination’, which adopted theory and rhetoric of its own in the twentieth century, was implicit in nineteenth-century ideas about Catholic theology and worship. The imagination was troublesome territory throughout the Victorian era because it existed on the border between rational and irrational. Though Charles Kingsley argued that ‘imagination [is] valuable [because] God has made it’, he also noted that it leads to ‘carelessness of truth

⁵ Benjamin Jowett, ‘On the Connection of Immorality and Idolatry’, *A Collection of Theological Essays from Various Authors*, ed. by George R. Noyes (Boston: American Unitarian Association, 1868), pp. 321-4 (p. 323).

⁶ Charles Haddon Spurgeon, ‘The Axe at the Root: A Testimony against Puseyite Idolatry’ sermon delivered 17 June 1866, *The Spurgeon Archive* <<http://spurgeon.org/sermons/0695.htm>> [accessed June 2010].

⁷ Ibid.

[...] blasphemy [and] want of common morality'.⁸ When 'thrown inward', Kingsley argued that the imagination becomes 'mental fever [and] disease'.⁹ Victorian religious discourse on the imagination, therefore, hovered between the realms of spirituality and pathology.

According to the psychologist Henry Maudsley, 'the excitements of religious feelings [...] are sometimes a direct cause of insanity'.¹⁰ When individuals are 'addicted to playing at Roman Catholicism, the most baneful effect is sometimes produced on women [...] who mistake for deep religious feeling what is really [...] a morbid self-feeling [...] many times accompanied by hysterical excitement'.¹¹ Hysteria, insanity and excitement – terms usually associated with feminised psychosis – were tied to Roman Catholicism by Maudsley. Also, as discussed in the previous chapter, the notion of excessive piety was also bound up with ideas about papacy. Kingsley speculated that Catholicism's appeal, particularly in the mid-century, lay in its emphasis on the arts: while medieval architecture was a 'consecration of the beautiful', Protestantism, he claimed, 'had nothing to do with the imagination'.¹² The desire to deify people or objects was against Protestant sensibilities and invited vocabulary such as 'guilt', 'blasphemy' and 'sin'. It also cultivated an aspect of the mind that was widely believed to be the source of 'disease' and 'insanity'. With these conceptions of idolatry and imagination, then, it is necessary to turn to the plays.

⁸ Charles Kingsley, *Scientific Lectures and Essays* (1880; repr. Montana: Kessinger Publishing, 2004), p. 85.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 85.

¹⁰ Henry Maudsley, *The Physiology and Pathology of the Mind* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1867), p. 211.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 211.

¹² Charles Kingsley, *Literary and General Lectures and Essays* (1880; repr. Montana: Kessinger Publishing, 2004), p. 121.

King John

Constance's love for her son Arthur fell within this category of idolatry cultivated by a Catholic imagination. Alison Thorne has recently aligned Constance with 'complaint'.¹³ Thorne claims that Shakespeare's 'royal women', such as Constance, represent challenges to masculine injustice by their nature as complainers.¹⁴ This idea of Constance as a figure of 'complaint' builds on Victorian concerns about the character's discontentment which, in turn, derives from her idolatry. Jameson, Birch and Fletcher, amongst others, linked the character's sorrows to an 'imagined' apotheosis of Arthur, rather than, as Thorne currently maintains, with the ineptitudes of masculine law and politics.

Returning to Victorian interpretations of the character, it is important to note the characterisation of Constance as a mother. According to Charles Knight, there is 'the passion of the mother in every act and word', and the play is riddled with 'maternal terror and anguish'.¹⁵ Knight claimed that it is not the retribution of heaven, but the curse of Constance that triggers John's demise: 'when the poison has done its work upon the guilty king, we can scarcely help believing that the spirit of Constance hovers over him'.¹⁶ Bringing the character to the forefront of the play and infusing 'every word' with Constance's 'anguish', attributes all the events within the plot (war, excommunication, repentance and death) to the sacred relationship between mother and son.

¹³ Alison Thorne, "'O lawful let it be/ That I have room to curse awhile": Voicing the Nation's Conscience in Female Complaint in *Richard III*, *King John* and *Henry VIII*", in *This England, That Shakespeare: New Angles on Englishness and the Bard*, ed. by Willy Maley and Margaret Tudeau-Clayton (Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2010), pp. 105-24 (p. 113).

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 107.

¹⁵ Charles Knight, *Studies of Shakespeare*, p. 202.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 204.

While Knight focused his reading of the play around Constance's maternal 'passion', Fletcher, writing in the same decade, openly criticised Constance's affection for her son as 'idolatrous love'.¹⁷ Jowett's notion of the idolatrous 'outward form' which hides 'the corruption of human nature' seems to have been anticipated by Fletcher in his readings of Constance's 'excessive' fondness for Arthur:

She longs to see this one sole and beautiful, and gracious object of her maternal idolatry, placed on the pedestal of grandeur which is his birthright, that she may idolise it more fondly still.¹⁸

Although Fletcher insisted that Constance acts out of love and not ambition,¹⁹ her fight for Arthur's inheritance seems to blur together the issues of affection and desire. By inviting France to fight for her son's right to the throne of England, and protesting against the negotiations between John and Philip, Constance demonstrates a selfish preference for Arthur's worldly advancement over international peace. Jowett's notion of the internal 'corruption' of humanity, therefore, can be seen in Constance's obsessive pursuit for power 'veiled' by her maternal love.

If idolatry is to be accepted as a cause of Constance's disillusionment, it is prudent to question from whence this worship springs. Constance has, Jameson argued, 'a predominance of imagination [and an] excess of the ideal power [which] exalts all her sentiments and thoughts'.²⁰ According to Jameson, 'she not only loves her son with the fond instinct of a mother's affection, but she loves him with her poetical imagination'.²¹ Constance 'exults in Arthur's beauty and his royal birth, hangs over him with idolatry and sees his infant brow already encircled with the diadem'.²² That

¹⁷ George Fletcher, p. 14.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

²⁰ Anna Jameson, p. 317.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 317.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 317.

Jameson links Constance's 'excess' with 'imagination', though not specifically referring to Catholicism, seems to fit with contemporary conceptions of Romish practice. Vocabulary such as 'idolatrous', 'excessive', and 'fondness', clearly designates Constance's love for her son to a deviant category of affection.

Constance's mental deviance through the imagination was discerned by literary and scientific critics of the play. The idolisation of Arthur was, according to the psychiatrist John Charles Bucknill, an indication of Constance's psychological demise: 'in actual insanity [imagination] runs riot, and the world of reality is supplanted by that of fancy'.²³ From a more literary perspective, at the end of the century, F. S. Boas claimed that Constance's 'maternal affection is [...] inflamed by an imagination of hectic brilliance into an abnormal passion that swallows up every thought and energy'.²⁴ The imagination that enables the character to idolise her son was, in scientific as well as literary discourse, considered culpable for Constance's lapse into despair and madness.

Mental abnormality is clearly aligned with Constance's maternity, meaning that the character was not Thorne's figure of political 'complaint' so much as one whose discontentment proceeds from internal, rather than external, matters. While it is tempting to attribute this reading to conceptions of feminine psychology and maternal abnormality, it is necessary to turn to the male characters Romeo and Hamlet who, like Constance, invited Victorian discussions on idolatry, imagination and discontent.

²³ John Charles Bucknill, *The Mad Folk of Shakespeare: Psychological Essays* (London: Macmillan, 1867), p. 287.

²⁴ Frederick S. Boas, p. 244.

Romeo and Juliet

As with the maternal Constance, Romeo's infatuation with Juliet was often discussed in terms of idolatry. This is prominent in the accepted reading of Romeo's development throughout the play from a love-sick boy to a strong-willed man. Jameson observed that Romeo moves from 'airy fancies' to 'a soul-absorbing reality'.²⁵ Dowden later echoed this by arguing that Romeo's linear journey through the play is the 'deliverance of a man from dream into reality'.²⁶ Romeo shifts from an intangible 'golden haze of luxurious feeling' to a physical desire for Juliet who is 'a veritable fact of the world'.²⁷ Referring back to Jowett's notion of 'idolisation' as a tangible concept satisfying the worldly senses, it is possible that Romeo's 'soul-absorbing' attraction to the 'factual', 'actual' Juliet signified a form of earthly worship.

Like Constance, Romeo's affection for Juliet was thought to reside in the 'imagination'. According to Dowden, Romeo has 'passion, imagination and will [and] emotion which enriches and exults itself with the imagination, emotion apart from thought, and apart from action, is an end in itself'.²⁸ The self-sufficient emotion, because it encourages Romeo to believe in 'heaven' on earth, suggests that there is a direct link between the imagination and idol worship. In fact, Romeo's idolisation of Juliet is infused with religious, specifically Catholic, rhetoric. In the initial meeting of the lovers, for instance, the connection between 'pilgrim' and 'saint', and the association of physical contact, is reminiscent of 'miracles' (I.5.95-111). Sainthood remains being touched by 'pilgrims', within the scope of Catholic theology, is a literal, not symbolic, act of redemption. By employing the rhetoric of devotion, both Romeo and Juliet conflate notions of piety and desire, making them inseparable. This metaphor

²⁵ Anna Jameson, p. 109.

²⁶ Edward Dowden, p. 107.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 108.

²⁸ Ibid., pp. 79-80.

functions because of the spiritual connection between the sinner and redeemer. Romeo's reference to Juliet's body as 'a holy shrine' (1.5.96), therefore, fuses corporeal reality with the miraculous. The literal spiritual renewal that takes place in baptismal regeneration and the sacrament of penance, though sources of theological debate throughout the second half of the century, are taken as fact by Romeo. As well as being a conceit for a kiss, the metaphor of absolution becomes a literal passage of sin from one body to another.

In spite of the Catholic rhetoric here, the only point of critical contention was the Folio and Quarto difference between 'sin', 'fin', and 'finne'. In Dowden's edition, the footnotes expound on the various possible meanings of these alternatives. He notes, 'I take the whole speech to be a request for permission to kiss; to touch Juliet at all is a sin; to touch with his lips is "the gentle sin"'.²⁹ If sin is substituted with 'fine', however, Dowden observes that the payment due for the profanation 'would refer to the kiss'.³⁰ Either the touch or kiss, by this logic, is the 'sin'. But, that Dowden attributed any kind of contact with Juliet to profanation, subscribes to the belief that she is, ultimately, a holy idol.

To acknowledge Juliet's 'holiness' recalls Thomas Carlyle's mid-century theory of 'hero worship' which, he argued, is 'the germ of Christianity itself'.³¹ Carlyle's offer to exalt man seems to encapsulate the fears of 'false' worship that troubled Jowett. Interestingly, this 'hero worship', as well as being directed at Shakespeare was offered up to his heroines. Like the saintly Isabella, Juliet became the quintessential figure of

²⁹ *Romeo and Juliet*, ed. by Edward Dowden (1875; repr. London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1917), p. 45.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

³¹ Thomas Carlyle, *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History* (London: Chapman and Hall Ltd., 1840), p. 15.

youthful love. She was painted, for instance, by Frank Dicksee (1884) as a submissive figure in the arms of her husband. A few years later, Calderon – who painted the St. Elizabeth of Hungary alluded to in the previous chapter – depicted Juliet as a beautiful, innocent but pensive young woman.³² In both Dicksee's and Calderon's paintings, youthful love and even passion are legitimised by the purity of Juliet. These images of girlhood evoked by the paintings reveal an idealistic Victorian conception of Juliet that can be traced to a general contemporary fascination with Shakespeare's women. For instance, during the 1860s, John Ruskin argued that heroines, rather than heroes, were at the centre of Shakespeare's plots, and while Romeo is an 'impatient boy', Juliet is 'wise and brave'.³³ Just as Isabella was a virginal 'saint', in both art and criticism, so too was Juliet perceived as Ruskin's 'heroine' with greater strength and purpose than her male counterpart.

Why, then, was Romeo considered a 'boy' with a self-indulgent imagination when the object of his idolatry was a 'worshipped' Shakespearean heroine? Because this question constitutes a thesis in its own right, it is necessary to answer it in relation to religion and, specifically, the Catholic nature of Romeo's discourse. Romeo's adoration and 'reverence' for a woman without whom existence is 'purgatory' was, according to Henry Sebastian Bowden, part of the 'language [...] of the old religion'.³⁴ 'If Shakespeare had felt that it had been proper to make true love speak as a Protestant, he would not have chosen the story of Romeo and Juliet [...] or if he had, he would boldly have made Romeo speak with the tongue of the Reformers'.³⁵ Faith, it seems,

³² See Appendix E.

³³ John Ruskin, *Sesame and Lilies: Two Lectures Delivered at Manchester in 1864* (New York: John Wiley & Son, 1865), p. 79.

³⁴ Henry Sebastian Bowden, *The Religion of Shakespeare: Chiefly From the Writings of the Late Mr Richard Simpson* (London: Burns & Oates Limited, 1899), p. 248.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 248.

was the very essence of Romeo's troubles. As well as informing his language, it allowed him to idolise, through the imagination, a false idol. So, admiring Juliet as a *character* was not necessarily on a par with Romeo's catholicised worship of her as a *woman*.

Whether Jameson and Dowden were conscious of this Catholicism inherent in Romeo's character is unclear, but there is a case to be made for accusations of 'imagination' and idolatry in the character pertaining to religious allegiance. This was, to some degree, articulated by Boas at the end of the century in his claims that the lovers 'live only in and for each other',³⁶ and that Romeo is 'an example of the ruin wrought in a life which makes the blunder of taking love as the sum total of existence'.³⁷ In other words, Romeo was interpreted as an idolatrous man. By making 'existence' centre on a false idol cultivated by his imagination and ideology, he was often subject to a similar kind of attack as the psychologically deviant Constance.

Hamlet

Whereas both Constance and Romeo, within the plays, are given time to cultivate their 'imaginings' and centre them on their respective idols, Hamlet begins his dramatic journey having lost the existential stays created by his idolatry. After 1870, Dowden, MacDonald and Walters – all of whom were religious critics – argued that the cause of Hamlet's melancholy and pessimism was a loss of faith in his mother.

The Unitarian Frank Walters, who was quoted in Chapter One, questioned, 'what earthly lot could be happier than Hamlet's [with] a fond mother, a most dear

³⁶ Frederick S. Boas, p. 204.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 210.

father, a loyal country, and the hope of a kingship?’³⁸ Because Hamlet, like Constance and Romeo, contemplates ‘self-slaughter’ (1.2.132) after the loss of his idol, his existential energy is bound up with the domestic stability of his parents, specifically his mother. MacDonald was careful to link all of Hamlet’s misdeeds with his loss of faith in Gertrude throughout the footnotes and act commentaries in his edition of 1885. He argued that Hamlet’s ‘distrust of Ophelia comes from a far deeper source – suspicion of all women, grown doubtful to him through his mother’.³⁹ MacDonald proposed that ‘it is not Hamlet but his mother who is to blame: her conduct has hurled him from the peak of optimism into the bottomless pool of pessimistic doubt, above the foul waters of which he keeps struggling to lift his head’.⁴⁰ Although conceptions of the fallen woman as a maternal figure form a topic with a potential of its own, it is important to be aware of MacDonald’s link between disillusionment and ‘pessimistic doubt’. Walters too argued that ‘when those who are bound to us in closest relationship fall into sin, we can scarcely help feeling a sense of guilt ourselves; if we cannot trust *them*, how can we keep faith in our own stability?’⁴¹ The fall of one thing, in other words, precipitates the descent of another, and it is precisely through inter-human idolisation, that individuals become vulnerable to disillusionment.

While conceptions about motherhood and maternal ideals were not intrinsically Catholic, when associated with the ideas of an infallible mother Church and Mariology, the authoritative maternal figure became inextricable from High-Anglican and Roman Catholic dogmatic associations. Echoing the criticism of Walters and MacDonald, Frank Marshall argued:

³⁸ Rev. Frank Walters, *Studies of Shakespeare’s Plays* (London: Sunday School Association, 1889), p. 123.

³⁹ *The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*, ed. by George MacDonald (1885; repr. Montana: Kessinger Publishing, 2004), p. 130.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 86.

⁴¹ Rev. Frank Walters, *Studies of Shakespeare’s Plays*, pp. 126-7.

[...] a mother who is scarcely a widow before she was again a bride; a mother from whose loving sympathy he had looked to find his greatest consolation in his sorrow, on whose sobbing breast he had thought to pour forth all the anguish of his soul. But – horrible disillusion – he had found that breast disturbed by nothing but the throbs of an incestuous passion.⁴²

The blame levelled at Gertrude, and her transgression from ideal motherhood, are testament to the value placed on what twenty-first century critic Sally Shuttleworth terms the ‘identikit picture’ of the mother.⁴³ The ‘sacred mission to rear children’⁴⁴ placed the biological connotations of reproduction and maternal nurture into a spiritual context. This fuses the image of procreation with a muscular Christian need to shape, educate and moralise the religiously ignorant. The conflation of spiritual and moral instruction, here, reflects the role of the mother Church which, like the biological parent, ensures the growth and protection of her children. Spurgeon claimed that the Church ‘should be amiable and she is [...] the true Church is an organised whole [...] sure to create order and arrangement’.⁴⁵ The creation of ‘order’ within an ‘organised whole’, referred to in the feminine third person, is reminiscent of Jameson’s claim, made in the mid-century, that ‘maternity’ transcended ‘motherhood’ and should be perceived as ‘the maternal organisation’.⁴⁶ Both the mother and the Church seemed to have been on a conceptual par with physical and ideological stability.

It is no wonder that Hamlet’s loss of Gertrude plunges him into despair, just as it is fair to argue that the loss of the ‘mother Church’ ideal elicited disillusionment. In fact, Marshall argued that ‘the maternal idea [...] remains to many a man in

⁴² Frank A. Marshall, ‘Introduction to *Hamlet*’, in *Henry Irving Shakespeare*, VIII, p. 18.

⁴³ Sally Shuttleworth, ‘Demonic Mothers: Ideologies of Bourgeois Motherhood in the Mid-Victorian Era’, in *Rewriting the Victorians: Theory, History and the Politics of Gender*, ed. by Linda M. Shires (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 31-51 (p. 31).

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

⁴⁵ Charles Haddon Spurgeon, ‘The Church as She Should Be’, sermon delivered 1871, *The Spurgeon Archive* <<http://spurgeon.org/sermons/0984.htm>> [accessed January 2011].

⁴⁶ Anna Jameson, *Letters of Anna Jameson to Ottilie von Goethe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1939), p. 234.

unblemished purity and even sweetness'.⁴⁷ This yearning for an 'unblemished' authority figure is important in conversion narratives. Newman's recollections of his loss of faith in the Church of England seem to be riddled with echoes of *Hamlet*: 'he who has seen a ghost, cannot be as if he had never seen it'.⁴⁸ Newman described his doubts about the apostolic sanctity of Anglicanism, and his realisation of the anti-Catholic nature of the thirty-nine articles as 'dismay and disgust', and considered 'whether the suggestion did not come from below'.⁴⁹ Like Hamlet's encounter with his father, Newman alluded to his disillusionment as the appearance of a 'ghost' which was sent from hell to confound his 'maternal ideal' of the Church of England. The important issue here is not whether Newman deliberately identified with Hamlet, but rather the similarity of situation. Both figures suffer from disillusionment and, metaphorically or otherwise, are visited by a power that confirms their anxieties. It was the propensity for this loss to lead, as it did with Newman, to Roman Catholicism that troubled theologians like Kingsley.

Although the 'maternal idea' is, or ought to be, 'unblemished', it is ultimately imaginary and Hamlet's attachment to it brings about his disillusionment. Hamlet creates an imaginary ideal out of something earthly, as Newman did with the Church of England and subsequently the Church of Rome. But the intense scorn for Gertrude by Walters, Marshall and MacDonald allowed these religious critics to channel any resentment for the Church of England through attacks on the weaknesses of Hamlet's mother. After all, if 'mother' and 'Church' are on a conceptual par, then the 'horrible disillusion' caused by Gertrude was not so very different to the 'dismay and disgust' elicited by the Church of England that triggered the Oxford Movement.

⁴⁷ Frank A. Marshall, 'Introduction to *Hamlet*', p. 23.

⁴⁸ John Henry Newman, *Apologia Pro Vita Sua: Being a Reply to the Pamphlet "What Then Does Mr Newman Mean?"* (London: Longman, Green, Longman, Roberts and Green, 1864), p. 213.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 159-60.

A conscious apotheosis of another, within these plays, seemed to have been attributed to an internalised need for an idol upon whom to fix all hope and aspiration. Because each character attaches an imaginary significance to another being, the loss of that being plunges all three into the very same disillusionment and instability feared by ‘orthodox’ adherents like Wilberforce. Since the human, earthly affinity to ‘outward forms’ or idols was a trait attributed to the High-Anglican and Catholic adherents who created and submitted themselves to a mother Church, the despair of each character was associated with Roman Catholicism and its appeal to the ‘imagination’, particularly in the mid-century. Whereas the disillusionment in *Hamlet* stems from the perceived deficiencies of the idol Gertrude, this does not seem to apply to Arthur or Juliet. The issue is not so much the fall or position of the idol in these cases. Rather, Victorian criticism focused on the subjective, imaginative experiences of the traumatised idoliser.

Submission

Before returning to Shakespeare’s plays, it is important to be aware of the Catholic model of submission. During the Protestant debates about the Oxford Movement, objections to the liturgical and theological sympathies of High Anglicans with Roman Catholicism often boiled down to a key argument: authority. The Roman Catholic conception of the ‘holy mother Church’, coupled with the infallible papal hierarchy, privileged, according to many Protestants, the idea of an all-dominating, rather than nurturing, religious institution. Being subordinate to a Church that dictates prayer, worship and faith itself, was diametrically opposite to the Protestant, and particularly nonconformist, ethos of spiritual autonomy hinging around *sola scriptura*.

Returning to Shakespeare, this model of submission was appropriated by the Catholic Henry Sebastian Bowden into his reading of tragedy:

All tragedy is necessarily sacrificial, in a sense suicidal [...] a tragic purpose is one which straitens the whole man till it be accomplished, welds him together, hardens him, points him to one great act, in doing which he dies. Tragedy is devotion, sacrifice.⁵⁰

An obsessive pursuit of ‘tragic purpose’ in sacrificial self-destruction conflicted with Protestant conceptions of faith as redemptive, as well as scientific theories of progress and survival. In fact, Bowden’s admiration for the self-inflicted mental torture of Shakespeare’s tragic characters relates to the idea that suffering and sacrifice are integral to Catholic faith. According to Bowden, earthly renunciation is a way of demonstrating reverence for ‘the central mystery of the atoning sacrifice of the redemption’.⁵¹ It was precisely this attitude towards redemption that induced Spurgeon to lament, ‘what a God must theirs be, that is pleased with poor souls when they torture themselves’.⁵²

Tension between submission and independence in the act of faith can be found in criticism of Shakespeare’s three idolising characters. While Constance, Romeo and Hamlet all employ imagination to construct faith around a false idol, each character submits his or herself to an external order or authority to arrive at what Bowden called sacrificial tragedy.

Constance

Since Arthur is Constance’s idol she submits herself to a flawed form of worship. Her understanding of divine judgement is bound up with Arthur, just as her definition of

⁵⁰ Henry Sebastian Bowden, p. 311.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 29.

⁵² Charles Haddon Spurgeon, ‘The Way to God’, sermon preached 27 March 1859, *The Spurgeon Archive* <<http://spurgeon.org/sermons/0245.htm>> [accessed March 2010].

faith itself pertains to her son. To repeat Boas' claim, Constance's 'abnormal passion' 'swallows up every thought and energy'.⁵³

Constance claims that any challenger to Arthur's legitimacy is a 'monstrous injurer to heaven' (2.1.174), and that his tears are 'heaven-moving pearls' that 'bribe' divinity to act on his behalf (2.1.169, 171). Thus redemption, for Constance, is possible only through the worship and coronation of Arthur. Because Cardinal Pandulph emerges immediately after Constance's plea to heaven to 'Arm [...] against these perjured kings' (3.1.107), she is encouraged to believe both herself and her son to be divinely protected beings. She is, albeit unintentionally, cajoled into idolising Arthur by the very authority that should direct her attention and reverence to God. Submission, here, is distinctly sacrificial because Constance allows herself to be directed by faith, offering herself up to divine will.

Crucially, Constance misunderstands the purpose of faith: 'tread down my need and faith mounts up/ Keep my need up and faith is trodden down' (3.1.215-6). It was Birch who noted that Constance's polarisation of 'faith' and 'need' belies the religious notion that belief is healing. Since Arthur's sorrow creates Constance's 'need', she claims that faith in God and the Church are lost. But, by this logic, Constance cannot claim to have heaven on her side, or legitimately call for divine retribution: she has, effectively, renounced her faith. Birch argued that the purpose of Constance's seemingly paradoxical statement is to demonstrate that 'religion is [not] represented to be the consolation of the afflicted [because] it is not thought of in adversity except as a means of vengeance'.⁵⁴ Not only does Constance affect a disproportionate reverence for

⁵³ Frederick S. Boas, p. 244.

⁵⁴ William John Birch, p. 256.

her son, but her understanding of 'faith' itself is flawed. That Pandulph makes no attempt to correct Constance suggests that either he cares little for her soul, or that her logic is compatible with his theology. As Birch suggested, Constance's idea of religion is dependant on 'vengeance' or punishment and reward; therefore she subscribes to a form of faith that entails complete ideological submission to an earthly idol and, only in times of need, to God.

Because Arthur 'swallows up every thought and energy', Constance was categorised as a disillusioned woman who creates and loses a 'false' idol. Her 'passion' leads her towards Bowden's concept of Catholic tragedy, wherein the individual is 'devoted', and through this devotion becomes 'suicidal'.

Romeo

While Constance was failed by her spiritual leader and submission to her fanciful construction of 'faith', Romeo elicited pity from Victorian critics for his self-abandonment to fate. The early nineteenth-century critic William Maginn, proposed that Romeo is 'not designed merely as an exhibition of a man unfortunate in love [but] as the character of an unlucky man [...] perpetually so unfortunate as to fail in every aspiration'.⁵⁵ However, it is precisely this 'aspiration' in Romeo that lends itself to debates about providence, particularly in the mid-century.

Like Constance's trust in an inevitable heavenly retribution, Romeo has a firm conception of providence as linear and equally inevitable. His complete submission to fate in his exclamation, 'he who hath the steerage of my course/ Direct my sail' (1.4.112-13), presupposes that earthly events are orchestrated by a higher power. His

⁵⁵ William Maginn, *The Shakspeare Papers of the Late William Maginn* (New York: Redfield, 1856), p. 70.

meeting with Juliet, marriage and demise are all, as far as Romeo is concerned, aspects of a greater providential journey that lead him to ‘untimely death’ (1.4.111). Upon hearing of Juliet’s demise, Romeo expostulates, ‘I defy you stars’ (4.1.24). The ‘unfortunate’ aspirations of Romeo, by Maginn’s logic, are not arbitrary; they are decisions fuelled by a belief in ‘stars’. Of course, this recalls Bowden’s idea of abandoning the self, sacrificially, to an external authority.

This notion of submission to fate was echoed by Knight, who attributed the events in the lives of the lovers to their ‘abandonment to an overmastering will’.⁵⁶ Although passion and despair drive each character to ‘untimely death’, the ‘will’ to which they submit seems to be, as Knight suggests, a conscious ‘abandonment’ to an external order. However, far from ‘submitting’, Dowden claimed that Romeo ‘assumes manhood [in his] defiance [of the] stars [acting] with his own will’.⁵⁷ But rather than negating Knight’s earlier claim that Romeo’s aptitude is towards submission rather than autonomy, Dowden seems to suggest that the character’s independent action is a conscious offering up of the self to providence. That Romeo’s path of self-destruction after the loss of Juliet signifies his ‘manly determination’⁵⁸ comes back to Bowden’s argument that self-sacrifice is a spiritual ideal.

Romeo, therefore, in his combination of ‘misfortune’, ‘abandonment’ and ‘will’, fails to act entirely autonomously precisely because of his false reverence for an earthly idol. Just as Constance abandons herself to her misconceived ‘faith’ in heaven through her obsession with Arthur, so too does Romeo become reckless of his existence in his infatuation with Juliet. The extent of the lovers’ ‘passion’ was such that it threatened to

⁵⁶ Charles Knight, *Studies of Shakespeare*, p. 226.

⁵⁷ Edward Dowden, pp. 117-18.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 118.

become anthropocentric and earthly, rather than transcendent and, potentially, heavenly. Anna Jameson observed that ‘Romeo and Juliet speak of themselves only; they see only themselves in the universe, all things else are as an idle matter’.⁵⁹ The ‘abandonment’ of the self to the tides of an external ‘steerage’, however ambiguous for most scholars, was certainly a form of proof for Dowden that Romeo pursues a catholicised course of self-sacrifice in order to experience spiritual fulfilment.

Hamlet

This belief in and submission to an authority, found in Constance’s ‘faith’ and Romeo’s self-sacrificial death, is prominent in Hamlet’s complete abandonment to external powers. Knight observed that Hamlet ‘casts himself like a feather upon the great wave of faith’ but added that ‘dangerous as this may be, it is better than doubt’.⁶⁰

Though not religious scepticism, Dowden acknowledged that Hamlet’s faith is ‘dangerous’.⁶¹ If there is a ‘divinity that shapes our ends’ (5.2.10),⁶² then Hamlet cannot be said to believe in free will, nor do his decisions and actions have any individual or personal consequences. According to Dowden, after his meeting with Gertrude, Hamlet ‘abandons himself [...] to his chances [...] trying to believe that he and his concerns are in the hands of God’.⁶³ But this, he surmised, was a ‘disposition to reduce to a minimum the share which man’s conscious will and foresight has in the disposing of events, and to enlarge the sphere of the action of powers outside the will’.⁶⁴ Bowing to powers extraneous to independent ‘will’ is, for Dowden, a means of detaching the self from responsibility by attributing earthly actions to divine authority.

⁵⁹ Anna Jameson, p. 103.

⁶⁰ Charles Knight, *Studies of Shakespeare*, p. 327.

⁶¹ Edward Dowden, p. 157.

⁶² William Shakespeare, ‘Hamlet’, in *Henry Irving Shakespeare*, VIII, 1-154.

⁶³ Edward Dowden, p. 157.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 158.

As Dowden, MacDonald and Walters observed, Hamlet's woes began at his mother's re-marriage. It follows that it was Gertrude's fall that was the alleged cause of his tragic 'sacrifice'. It is only after Hamlet confronts his mother that he begins to excuse his actions by invoking providence, claiming to be a 'scourge and minister' (3.4.173-5). Crucially, Marshall argued that Hamlet's belief in a 'providence that shapes our ends' (5.2.10), is 'not a pagan fatalism, but neither is it the resignation of a Christian [...]'. It is at best the negative courage of a conscientious doubter'.⁶⁵ Hamlet, by Marshall's reasoning, uses providence as a counterpoint to his own disillusioned or traumatic experience. He employs 'fatalism' as a source of comfort. Again, disillusionment leads to flawed theology or reasoning, echoing Wilberforce's fears about rationalism, scepticism and faithlessness.

Dowden's claim that Hamlet is 'trying to believe', infuses the character with the very same tension between will and submission that appeared in discourse in the war between Catholicism and Protestantism. Like Romeo who deliberately submits himself to his fated 'untimely death', Hamlet plunges himself into what Bowden called, not the 'mechanical slavery of destiny' but rather the 'one end' that calls for the ultimate sacrifice: life itself.⁶⁶

Conclusion

The disillusionment of Hamlet, Romeo and Constance, after the loss of their respective idols, was excused by the Protestant conception of Catholic 'imagination' and its dependence on material, literal worship. However, that vocabulary such as 'idolatry', 'failure' and 'imaginary' surrounded mid-century discourses on the characters, suggests that they fell short of the Victorian pursuit for progress. These characters were

⁶⁵ Frank A. Marshall, *A Study of Hamlet* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1875), p. 104.

⁶⁶ Henry Sebastian Bowden, p. 2.

perceived as figures who abandon themselves to a form of religion that was dismissed throughout the Victorian, non-Catholic intellectual world as ‘morbid’.⁶⁷

Not only does Roman Catholicism encourage each character to construct imaginary idols, but it cajoles them into submitting to an equally imaginary authority. Far from advocating the Protestant ideal of spiritual autonomy, this authority allows them to believe that their faith will save them from the despair of a traumatised existence. Such submission, coupled with the psychological instability afforded by the loss of idols, plunges each character into Bowden’s Catholic paradigm of sacrifice. To determine how sacrifice ties in with the theme of disillusionment, it is necessary to turn to the concept of despair.

Part Two: Despair

Having established that common themes in Victorian responses to the three characters were idolatry and submission, this section looks at the ways in which Hamlet, Constance and Romeo were categorised as despairing. Using critical responses to the plays, the themes of introspection and suicide are examined so as to determine why ‘despair’ was so pertinent a topic to Victorian interpreters of the play.

Because of its propensity to lead to disillusionment, any excessive internalised mental activity was often aligned with atheism. George MacDonald suggested that ‘the way to madness of the brain and despair of the heart [is in] soul-sickening self-examination’.⁶⁸ More commonly, ‘self-examination’ was linked with psychosis because,

⁶⁷ See William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature* (1902; repr. New York: Barnes & Noble, 2004), p. 124.

⁶⁸ George MacDonald, *Unspoken Sermons* (1889; repr. New York: Cosimo Inc., 2007), p. 267.

according to Maudsley, such individuals ‘make for themselves an ideal of despair’.⁶⁹

‘The highest achievements of thought sever the unity of man and nature, and bring doubt and disillusion’.⁷⁰ The reference to ‘nature’ can be likened to Trench’s image of ‘God’s world’ which should be appreciated. An inability to accept nature, godly or otherwise, was indicative of a mental despair that leads individuals to psychological, physiological, and spiritual self-destruction.

This links with the concept of self-sacrifice or suicide. Although Bishop Wordsworth, for instance, contested the credibility of claims that suicide was a sin, that ‘self-slaughter’ was degenerate and irreligious was widely acknowledged both within and outside of religious ideologies. In fact, while the English law *felo de se* had been altered in 1823 so that suicides were entitled to proper burial, as R. A. Houston has recently noted, ‘a perception of moral failing of some kind continued to underlie understandings of self-murder’.⁷¹ In other words, suicide was indicative of what Maudsley called ‘the premature loss of evolutionary energy’.⁷²

Returning to Shakespeare, Hamlet, Romeo and Constance all have suicidal thoughts and desires, and two of them succeed in ending their own lives. Losing an earthly ideal plunges all three into despair and, ultimately, an irreligious lack of ‘thankfulness’ for life. Since Catholicism seemed to be culpable for the creation of earthly idols, it was arguably Catholic theology that, simultaneously, failed to rouse the characters out of crisis. Beginning, then, with readings of internal, rationalised despair,

⁶⁹ Henry Maudsley, *Body and Will: Being an Essay Concerning the Will in its Metaphysical, Physiological and Pathological Aspects* (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1884), p. 325.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 327.

⁷¹ R. A. Houston, *Punishing the Dead? Suicide, Lordship and Community in Britain, 1500-1830* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 361.

⁷² Henry Maudsley, p. 331.

and moving on to the characters' contemplations of suicide, this section questions to what extent despair and death, within the plays, were attributed to Roman Catholicism throughout the period.

Introspection

As Edward Royle argued in the twentieth century, rationalism was 'the scientific quest for the knowable', and a means of establishing a system of ethics extraneous to 'spiritual providence and prayer'.⁷³ Royle traced the development of rationalism, claiming that secular morality was born out of the nineteenth century. Notwithstanding this positive perspective in hindsight, in real terms, the rise of rationalism caused concern within established religion. If individuals could apply logic – rather than doctrine or piety – to a situation, then the foundation of religious morality was no longer secure.

All three of Shakespeare's characters privilege introspection and a form of rationalism over action and practicality. Interestingly, Dowden aligned Romeo and Hamlet together, and proposed that both heroes are unable 'to maintain the will in a fruitful relation with facts, and with the real world. [...]. The will in each is sapped [...] by a disease of soul'.⁷⁴ Lacking 'will' and harbouring 'disease', seems to anticipate the scientific discourses of Maudsley on energy and progress. 'Introspective self-analysis', Maudsley argued, distracts from the business of intellectual and physiological survival, because in order to 'idealise the real' there must be a pre-existing 'belief in the ideal' and, consequently, 'the aspiration to realise the ideal'.⁷⁵ Once that ideal is gone,

⁷³ Edward Royle, *Victorian Infidels: The Origins of the British Secularist Movement 1791-1866* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1974), pp. 126-8.

⁷⁴ Edward Dowden, p. 101.

⁷⁵ Henry Maudsley, pp. 22, 28.

however, aspiration and, by implication, existential energy are also lost. Thus rationalism with no useful object leads to despair.

As well as echoing concerns about science and rationalism within religion, the emphasis on introverted intellect fused with an overactive imagination, pertained in some degree to non-Catholic conceptions of religious seclusion. According to Benjamin Jowett, excessive rationalism is ‘sapless, lifeless, spiritless [because] the mind of the philosopher seems to yearn for something more than he knows, and would fain receive the kingdom of heaven as a little child’.⁷⁶ This combination of ‘lifelessness’ and infantile dependence on a divine order, Jowett attributed to ‘the Church which has accommodated the character of its belief to the wants of another age’.⁷⁷ This nostalgic, out-dated institution arguably refers to the Roman Catholic Church. Just as Roman Catholic adherents were accused of submitting to the authority of a single Church and its dictates, so too were ‘rationalists’ perceived as childlike subjects of the intellect who ‘never lift a hand for the improvement of mankind’.⁷⁸

Separation from the world recalls attention to religious recluses discussed in the previous chapter. Although critics of Catholicism – Cumming and Kingsley for instance – often objected to institutions such as monasteries and nunneries, it was the use of these religious houses in Victorian literature that offers insight into contemporary attitudes towards pious seclusion. In Hall Caine’s novel *The Christian* (1897) and Henry Arthur Jones’ play *Michael and his Lost Angel* (1896) for instance, Roman Catholic priesthood is depicted as an escape. The characters John Storm and Michael, from Caine and Jones respectively, lose their ideal women and, having become disillusioned by

⁷⁶ Benjamin Jowett, *Sermons Biographical and Miscellaneous* (London: John Murray, 1899), p. 296.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 296.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 296.

societal existence, choose a life of contemplation and obedience as a form of escape. Far from being a positive admission into a life of piety, each author depicts the monastic path as an expression of existential weariness. Caine's John Storm, for example, claims that 'in this condition of shame and *disillusionment* I am now resolved to escape at the same time from the world and from myself, for I am tired of both alike'.⁷⁹ But this escapism from the world leaves individuals, and certainly Shakespeare's three tragic characters, free to speculate on existence in solitude, without any means of manifesting their thoughts in a practical outlet.

Introversion and excessive 'self-examination' lead, as MacDonald argued, to 'despair' and a 'sickness [of the] soul'.⁸⁰ Whether inside or out of a monastic context, it seems that any form of contemplation without a propensity for practical application, within a Victorian, Protestant ideological context, fell into a regressive category. The combination of self-examination and impracticality can be traced in the disillusioned despair of the three characters, because like Caine's John and Jones' Michael, Shakespeare's Hamlet, Romeo and Constance choose speculation and inaction over encounters with the real world.

Hamlet

A clear, and even the most famous, example of 'self-analysis' can be found in the character of Hamlet. The disillusioned protagonist was accused of introspection and aligned with Victorian scientists who, like Hamlet, sought to rationalise otherwise godly, mystical aspects of the world.⁸¹

⁷⁹ Hall Caine, *The Christian* (London: William Heinemann, 1899), p. 101. My italics.

⁸⁰ George MacDonald, *Unspoken Sermons*, p. 267.

⁸¹ This duality of rationalism and mystery was noted by George Eliot after her initial encounter with Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* (1859). Eliot wrote that 'explanations of processes [...] produce a

According to Marshall, Hamlet's 'great fault is that he is too introspective'.⁸² Throughout Marshall's appraisal of Hamlet, it is possible to discern a parallel between the character and the pursuits of Victorian scientists such as Huxley, Maudsley and Darwin. Marshall utilised the word 'experiment' to describe the 'mouse-trap' incident and claimed that Hamlet 'is always trying to take himself to pieces [...] and to examine the moral machinery of his nature, to dissect his own soul, to trace every nerve and fibre of its inner and spiritual nature'.⁸³ Language such as 'evidence', 'dissect', 'examine' and 'trace', reflects contemporary scientific investigation. For instance, 'to trace every nerve and fibre' was resonant of the scientist Thomas Henry Huxley's earlier biological search for 'one kind of matter which is common to all living beings [in order to prove that] their endless diversities are bound together by a physical, as well as an ideal, unity'.⁸⁴ Huxley argued that in order to 'make the little corner [man] can influence, somewhat less miserable and somewhat less ignorant [...] the progress of science' will enable all things 'to be verified experimentally [to facilitate] men who have work to do in the world'.⁸⁵

That this quality in Hamlet was considered a 'fault' may have derived from the idea that scientific experimentation distracted from spirituality, and more importantly, real life. Spurgeon, for instance, claimed that science is 'the method by which man tries to conceal his ignorance'.⁸⁶ Despite the physical, objective nature of scientific ventures, this image of 'hiding' behind experimentation and evidence implies a fear or

feeble impression compared with the mystery that lies under the processes'. George Eliot, *George Eliot Letters*, ed. by Gordon S. Haight, 6 vols. (London: Oxford University Press, 1954), III, p. 227.

⁸² Frank A. Marshall, 'Introduction to *Hamlet*', p. 21.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, pp. 21-2.

⁸⁴ Thomas Henry Huxley, 'On the Physical Basis of Life', *Fortnightly Review*, 5 (1869), 129-45 (p. 129).

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 144.

⁸⁶ Charles Haddon Spurgeon, 'How to Meet the Evils of the Age', address delivered at the Annual Conferences of the Pastors' College between 1872-1890, *The Spurgeon Archive* <<http://spurgeon.org/misc/aarm.htm#toc>> [accessed September 2010].

incomprehension of the world itself. According to Spurgeon, science is akin to ‘discussion’: ‘it is time we had done planning [so as to be] men of action [...] get to work, and quit yourselves like men’.⁸⁷ Contrary to Huxley’s argument, scientific experimentation was not always perceived as genuine *male* ‘progress’ or, in fact, a means of promoting what Huxley called ‘work in the world’.

Marshall’s scientific rhetoric seems to draw on this idea that ‘experimentation’ and ‘examination’ are unmanly. Hamlet is able to make observations such as, ‘rightly to be great/ Is not to stir without great argument’ (4.5.53-4), and ‘there is nothing either good or bad but thinking makes it so’ (2.2.256-7), thereby demonstrating his intellectual engagement with reality. However, he never *acts* to improve the supposed shortfalls of the social paradigms about which he complains. Thus Hamlet’s preference for thought over action was a source of tension to Walters who claimed that the character’s ‘ideal meditation, mental analysis, speculative thought, begin to overpower him; his will becomes paralysed; his executive power sinks into feebleness’.⁸⁸ ‘Sink’, ‘feeble’ and ‘overpower’ all dwell on Hamlet’s weakness and subordination to his mental faculties. In other words, the thinker, or rather over-thinker, is feeble and unmanly, therefore feminised, and potentially psychotic.⁸⁹

Moreover, Hamlet’s references to ‘self-slaughter’ (1.2.132) and wish that ‘my mother had not borne me’ (3.1.125-6) all evoke the character’s sense of existential futility. Hamlet’s questions such as ‘what is a man?’ (4.4.33) and ‘what is this quintessence of dust?’ (2.2.322), although attempting to ‘dissect’ humanity, are

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Rev. Frank Walters, *Studies of Shakespere’s Plays*, p. 126.

⁸⁹ See Tony Howard, *Women as Hamlet: Performance and Interpretation in Theatre, Film and Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

inherently pessimistic, confirming Shaw's and Santayana's late-century complaints about Shakespeare's drama. Hamlet claims that man is 'noble in reason', 'infinite in faculty', and 'like a god', but fails to take any interest in his subject by concluding that 'man delights not me' (2.2.320-8). To extend Marshall's scientist analogy, Hamlet experiments with life and draws conclusions, but derives no practical solutions or even pleasure for his troubles.

Hamlet's internalised speculations lead, therefore, to despair and life weariness; all this Walters attributed to the conduct of his once ideal mother. Hamlet, Walters proposed, 'has looked down into a hell of crime and guilt, in which are involved those who share his blood, and it seems to his shuddering moral nature as though he shared their sins'.⁹⁰ This idea that Hamlet's despair pertains to self-doubt and mistrust, rather than his disillusionment with the external world, offers to attribute his sorrows to an internalised guilt and self-loathing. Despite voicing fears about an afterlife in which judgement is awaited, Hamlet seems to create a purgatorial experience for himself on earth with what Walters termed his 'inner world of thought'.⁹¹

Constance

While Hamlet was read by Marshall and Walters through paradigms of the scientist and introvert, respectively, Constance's discontentment was attributed to a feminised madness or disease of mind. This, in turn, leads to the character's loss of existential will.

Although maternal love of Arthur was, to some extent, permissible, that her despair pertained to 'ambition' was of another matter entirely. Bucknill suggested that

⁹⁰ Rev. Frank Walters, *Studies of Shakspeare's Plays*, p. 127.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 126.

Constance is ‘alloyed with pride, and ambition, and selfishness’.⁹² When Arthur, by implication her means to power, is lost, she suffers from a ‘frenzy of imagination [and] she is conducted from a tempest of emotional disturbance into the very midst of maniacal excitement’.⁹³ According to Bucknill’s diagnosis of Constance’s insanity, her ‘faculty of forming sensational ideas without the intervention of the external senses, is one which, if not kept in subjection to a sober judgement, is perilous to mental health’.⁹⁴ Again, the concept of internal ‘ideas’ or imagination recurs, implying that the character’s grief and despair are psychological.

Leaving behind the scientific approach, as both Eaton and Bishop Wordsworth observed, before Arthur’s demise Constance lapses into a despair evocative of Job.⁹⁵ Shakespeare ‘has put into her [Constance’s] mouth a speech which I cannot doubt was founded upon the poet’s recollection of the passage in the Old Testament’.⁹⁶ Wordsworth referred here to Job’s cursing of his birth, claiming that the passage is evoked by Constance:

Turn this day out of the week,
This day of shame, oppression, perjury.
Or, if it must stand still, let wives with child
Pray that their burthens may not fall this day,
[...] But on this day let seamen fear no wreck;
No bargains break that are not this day made:
This day, all things begun come to ill end,
Yea, faith itself to hollow falsehood change! (3.1.95-102).

‘This state of feeling’, Wordsworth suggested, is one ‘to which no faithful Christian should allow himself to be reduced’.⁹⁷ Constance’s rejection of the day and her plea for

⁹² John Charles Bucknill, *The Psychology of Shakespeare* (London: Longman, Brown, Green, Longmans and Roberts, 1859), p. 218.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 227.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 228.

⁹⁵ See Rev. Thomas Ray Eaton, p. 18.

⁹⁶ Charles Wordsworth, p. 270.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 269.

faithlessness, reveal her inability to joy in existence and, more significantly, to find comfort in religion. Like Hamlet's despair of humanity, Constance's imagined, psychologically cultivated conception of Arthur leads her to a loathing of herself and others.

Just as Hamlet's 'reason' was considered at fault for inducing his discontentment, so too was this rational aspect of Constance to blame for her unchristian interpretation of redemption. As discussed in Chapter One, Cardinal Pandulph makes no effort to comfort Constance with talk of spirituality or even theology.⁹⁸ Nevertheless, Constance recalls:

I have heard you say [...]
That we shall see and know our friends in heaven
If that be true, I shall see my boy again.
[...] But now will canker-sorrow eat my bud
And chase the native beauty from his cheek
And he will look as hollow as a ghost,
As dim and meagre as an ague's fit,
And so he'll die; and, rising so again,
When I shall meet him in the court of heaven
I shall not know him: therefore never, never
Must I behold my pretty Arthur more! (3.4.76-89).

Constance suggests that earthly sorrow physically deforms the body. So sorrow, like sin, *visibly* tarnishes the soul. But that Constance's loss of Arthur should be infused with the rhetoric of Christianity, suggests that religion contributes to, rather than heals, her grief.

George Fletcher, when quoting this passage, italicised 'if that be true', and argued that Constance is 'stimulated by her intellect [to] reason herself to the climax of despair'.⁹⁹ Fletcher seemed to be questioning Constance's faith in resurrection and

⁹⁸ See p. 38.

⁹⁹ George Fletcher, p. 13.

salvation here. Not only does this episode draw attention to the failure of the Cardinal who, as a minister and priest, ought to help her avoid the conclusion at which she arrives, but Fletcher's allusions to 'intellect' and 'reason' infuse Constance's irreligion with her internalised rationalism. Speculation and 'reason', it seems, lead to Constance's 'imaginary' idea of Arthur and, ultimately, her despair at his loss.

Romeo

It is precisely this rationalism or logic in both Constance and Hamlet that can be identified in Romeo's sorrow at his loss of Juliet. In fact, 'reason' was often a common concern in criticism of the character.

Like Hamlet and Constance, Romeo was accused of excessive introspection and 'false' logic:

There is no world without Verona walls,
But purgatory, torture, hell itself.
Hence banished is banished from the world,
And world's exile is death: then banished
Is death mis-termed.
[...] Banished?
O friar, the damned use that word in hell (3.3.17-21, 46-7).

His reasoning is, like that of Constance, unsound. That the world can be purgatory and potentially hell distinctly undermines Trench's claim that Shakespeare's characters 'are accepting of God's world'.¹⁰⁰ Romeo mistakes earth for heaven, hell and purgatory combined, and, aside from his later expostulation 'put not another sin upon my head' (5.3.62), he seems to be unaware of any judgement or existence after death.

But if earth is purgatory, it follows that death offers a release from the torture of existence. Far from being comforting, the Catholic doctrine of purgatory fails to offer

¹⁰⁰ Richard Chenevix Trench, p. 8.

Romeo hope, inspiring only discontent and fear. Romeo's combination of misplaced logic, idolisation and lack of 'will' all contributed towards Dowden's conception of him as a man who 'abandons himself to helpless and hopeless despair'.¹⁰¹ Like Constance, Romeo infuses his loss of existential energy with religious discourse and, most significantly, he fails to be consoled by his spiritual adviser. Just as Constance complains, 'thou art not holy to belie me' (3.4.44), Romeo laments that his 'confessor' and 'sin absolver' contributes to his 'hopeless' despair, concluding that 'poison mixed' and a 'sharp-ground knife' would be preferable to his lot (3.3.49-50, 44). According to Birch, 'Romeo reasons as though misery cancelled the obligations of religion'.¹⁰² Through logic, Romeo overlooks theology, morality and sanity, and it was this combination of flawed rationalism and claims to piety, under the guidance of Laurence, that invited criticism of Romeo's internalised rationalism and despair.

That 'intellect' fused with religious doctrine creates despair left Wordsworth, Dowden, Walters and Marshall in no doubt about the dangers of misplaced rationalism. But, despite being driven into a hatred of self and life by the supposed failings of Roman Catholicism, the existential forms of discontentment experienced by Constance, Romeo and Hamlet seemed to have elicited forgiving responses. Although all three create and worship false idols and experience existential discontentment, not one was fully condemned by religious critics. In order to understand why this may be, it is necessary to turn to the characters' attitudes towards death.

¹⁰¹ Edward Dowden, p. 112.

¹⁰² William John Birch, p. 218.

Death and Suicide

A loss of existential will, within the wider scope of Shakespeare's work, falls into two categories: namely despair and fear. While characters like Ophelia, Romeo and Constance all commit suicide out of desolation, a *fear* of death leads to dissatisfaction with life in individuals such as Claudio and Hamlet. How characters dealt with despair and fear, therefore, was integral to Victorian responses to their deaths.

The best example of Catholic-induced fear was found in, and often quoted from, *Measure for Measure*. The Duke disguised as a priest claims to offer the condemned Claudio 'advice' in order to prepare him, spiritually, for death. Far from expounding on the virtues of repentance and heavenly forgiveness, the Duke focuses exclusively on the horrors of earthly existence. Claims such as 'thou art not noble', 'thou'rt by no means valiant', 'happy art thou not' and 'friend hast thou none' (3.1.13-32), urge rather than dissipate discontentment. What should be a holy scene between a penitent and a priest offering absolution is, in truth, a subverted encounter between a sham friar and an unrepentant youth. But this scene evokes existential despair and a fear of death: both pertaining, in this case, to Catholicism. It is important to extract from this incident not the Duke's practical advice, but Claudio's conception of theology. Rather than irreligiously hating existence, as the Duke bids him, he chooses to fear the Catholic concept of purgatory and the possibility of having to 'bathe in fiery floods' (3.1.122).

There is a conflict between Catholic theology and practice here, with the former conjuring fears of punishment, while the latter evokes guilt and a fear of life. Because of its location between these two spheres of theory and practice, Victorian Protestant concerns about Catholicism, like those of Wordsworth, categorised the faith, in general,

as a form of psychological torment. It is, therefore, necessary to question to what extent this ‘torment’ was cited as a cause of suicidal tendency in these characters, and whether their faith excused them from outright condemnation for submitting to a catholicised sacrificial end.

Hamlet

Like Claudio in his prison cell, Hamlet seems to be trapped between an existential crisis and a dread of punishment after death. George MacDonald argued that the protagonist:

[...] had been thinking of death only as the passing away of the present with its troubles; here comes the recollection that death has its own troubles [...] if it be a sleep, it has its dreams. “What dreams may come” means, “the sort of dreams that may come”; the emphasis is on the “what”, not on the “may”.¹⁰³

The consciousness of an afterlife combines with Hamlet’s belief in purgatory, self-hatred and ‘self-examination’, to make the pre- and post-death experiences equally despairing. Interestingly, Dowden argued that it is the fault of Denmark’s religion that Hamlet is driven towards sin and instability: ‘there is no Friar Laurence in this play. To him the Catholic children of Verona carried their troubles [...] better consort in Denmark with players than with priests!’.¹⁰⁴ Thus Hamlet’s potentially suicidal thoughts were, for Dowden, a consequence of the religion ‘which helps to make Claudius a palterer with his conscience, and Hamlet an aimless wanderer after truth’.¹⁰⁵ Either way, both Dowden and MacDonald hinted at the negative connotations of existential dissatisfaction and sought, however contrarily, to distance Hamlet from accusations of ingratitude or thanklessness towards heaven.

¹⁰³ *The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*, ed. by George MacDonald (1885; repr. Montana: Kessinger Publishing, 2004), p. 129.

¹⁰⁴ Edward Dowden, p. 154.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 154.

That Hamlet could contemplate suicide was a source of tension for MacDonald. In fact, MacDonald made frequent references to Hamlet's 'self-slaughter' in his edition of the play, by making repeated protestations against the character's suicidal tendencies: 'if there be here any allusion to suicide, it is on the general question, and with no special application to himself'.¹⁰⁶ Despite being so 'wretched [...] both in mind and circumstance that he could well wish to vanish from the world', MacDonald argued that 'the suggestion of suicide [...] he [Hamlet] dismisses at once [...] as against the will of God'.¹⁰⁷ MacDonald seemed to be aware that, were it not for fear of punishment, Hamlet's despair would have driven him to suicide. While Constance's rationalism verged on the insane, Hamlet's seemed to be redeemed by the palatability of his ideology, particularly with respect to death.

Hamlet's discourses on bodily demise are infused with a presupposition about a spiritual hereafter. He observes that in the 'sleep of death', given the continuation of consciousness, there is the propensity to 'dream'. MacDonald echoed Hamlet's thoughts about sleep in his attempt to find a comforting perspective on death: 'am I going to sleep – to lose consciousness – to be helpless for a time – thoughtless – dead? Or, more awful consideration, in the dreams that may come may I not be weak of will and scant of conscience?'¹⁰⁸ This concern about the possibility of a conscious, though unearthly, existence was tempered for MacDonald in the echo of Christ: 'father into thy hands I commend my spirit, for it is thy business not mine'.¹⁰⁹ MacDonald, therefore, took comfort in the idea that death was planned and overseen by God. By this logic,

¹⁰⁶ George MacDonald, *The Tragedy of Hamlet*, p. 126.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

¹⁰⁸ George MacDonald, *Unspoken Sermons*, p. 51.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 51.

MacDonald's interpretation of Hamlet hinges around comfort, rather than disillusionment and despair.

The unknown nature of the 'undiscovered country' and experiences within it, render the dream analogy far more palatable and comforting than the possibilities of a tortuous purgation by fire, or worse, nothing. It is, therefore, possible to interpret Hamlet's fascination with 'what is to come' as a result of his Roman Catholic consciousness of purgatory. Although orthodox Roman Catholics argued that purgatory involved purgation by fire and torture, in an edition of *Tracts for the Times*, Newman claimed that 'purgatory is not spoken of at all as a place of pain; it need only mean [...] a place of purification [and] the souls would be happier out of it than in it, and [...] they cannot of their own will leave it'.¹¹⁰ Along the same lines, Gerard Manley Hopkins claimed that:

We are our own tormentors, for every sin we then shall have remorse and with remorse torment [...] for God punishing him through his own guilty thoughts made him seem to suffer in the part that had offended [...] so sinners are themselves the flames of hell.¹¹¹

That self-torture can be a purgatorial experience emphasizes the intrinsic, psychological nature of guilt and punishment. By this logic, Hamlet's introspection and scientific 'dissection' constitute a spiritual purgation, meaning that his despair is self-inflicted or, as Bowden would have suggested, 'sacrificial'.

While Hamlet, like Claudio, is faced with the disappointments of life but chooses to avoid death on account of its physical rather than mental purgatorial horrors, Romeo and Constance consciously abandon existence, effectively daring damnation.

¹¹⁰ John Henry Newman, 'Tract 79: On Purgatory', *Tracts for the Times. Project Canterbury: Tracts for the Times* <<http://anglicanhistory.org/tracts/tract79.html>> [accessed May 2010].

¹¹¹ Gerard Manley Hopkins, *The Sermons and Devotional Writings of Gerard Manley Hopkins* (London: Oxford University Press, 1959), pp. 241-2.

MacDonald's defence of Hamlet against suicidal accusations would suggest that any self-destruction was considered if not sinful then, certainly, immoral.

Romeo

However, in the case of Romeo, the unchristian nature of his death was often glossed over in favour of a positive interpretation of the play's moral. According to Anna Jameson, the suicide makes the 'tomb a shrine of martyred and sainted affection consecrated for the worship of all hearts'.¹¹² Furthermore, she claimed that there is a lack of 'pain, rage and desperation' to the characters' suicides. But, without 'pain' and 'desperation' there would have been no need to commit suicide, neither would Romeo have been 'tempted' to murder Paris. Not only does Jameson's theory adopt a romanticised view of the conclusion, but it is inherently, and paradoxically, irreligious: it assumes that the lovers are not subject to heavenly retribution. Further, the 'shrine' and 'sainted' interpretation offers to revere the couple and their mutual sacrifice, especially given Jameson's use of biblical rhetoric, rather than condemning them as sinners.

In fact, Dowden noted that the lovers choose 'love at all costs',¹¹³ which offers to admire their election of death over life. Although he never alluded to eternal damnation or punishment for suicide, it is possible that Dowden's recognition of 'cost' encompassed chastisement in the after-life. Thus their sacrifice is conscious and demonstrates their loyalty to one another over individual salvation. Interestingly, Dowden critiqued the popular theory that the lovers are overhasty: 'at what precise point ought a discreet regard for another human soul to check itself and say, "thus far

¹¹² Anna Jameson, p. 106.

¹¹³ Edward Dowden, p. xxxiv.

towards complete union will I advance, but here it is prudent to stop?”¹¹⁴ Far from being naïve and rash, for Dowden Romeo matures into ‘full manhood’ by taking responsibility for his actions and, allegedly, choosing death over life. In this way, suicide functions as a positive and fulfilling conclusion to Romeo’s life, healing the rifts between those left behind.

Nevertheless, more critical responses to the deaths of the lovers were present earlier in the nineteenth century. For Birch, the play was anti-religious propaganda, criticising the supposedly consolatory Christian doctrine of resurrection after death. It is important, here, to refer to Romeo’s death speech:

[...] shall I believe
That unsubstantial death is amorous,
And that the lean abhorred monster keeps
Thee here in dark to be his paramour?
For fear of that, I still will stay with thee;
And never from this palace of dim night
Depart again: here, here will I remain
With worms that are thy chamber-maids; O, here
Will I set up my everlasting rest,
And shake the yoke of inauspicious stars
From this world-wearied flesh (5.3.102-12).

Birch rightly argued that ‘nothing can be more material than all the terms here employed in speaking of death’.¹¹⁵ Romeo’s repetition of ‘here’ and the rhetoric of stagnancy such as ‘stay’, ‘remain’ and ‘set up’, concentrate on the explicitly physical nature of death and, as Birch argued, bear little resemblance to Christian eschatology. In fact, Romeo lapses into a detestation of himself and life:

In what vile part of this anatomy
Doth my name lodge? tell me, that I may sack
The hateful mansion (3.3.106-9).

¹¹⁴ Ibid., p. 122.

¹¹⁵ William John Birch, p. 219.

This episode will be explored again in Chapter Four, but it is important here to observe the self-loathing that precedes Romeo's discourse on Juliet's earthly demise. Referring to his body as a 'hateful mansion' offers to attribute Romeo's disillusionment to a lack of trust in himself. Romeo's anthropocentric conception of worship, idolatry and death, all culminate in the ultimate expression of self-hatred: suicide.

The moral transgression inherent in the act of 'self-slaughter' did not, it seems, escape the notice of all Victorian readers. As Charles Wordsworth observed:

The pleasure and admiration excited by that play, and the interest felt in the hero and heroine, are all marred in some degree by the suicide which they both commit, being Christians, and shortly after they had been united in holy matrimony.¹¹⁶

Here, Wordsworth implied that had the lovers not committed suicide, they might have been considered better if not 'good' Christians. So far from tying up the loose ends of the plot and healing the rifts between the characters, the nature of Romeo's self-destruction did concern the more religiously conscious critics like Wordsworth. In truth, the idolatrous, imaginative youth commits the play's greatest sin by despairing of and ending his own life.

Constance

Just as Romeo's combination of flawed logic and self-detestation lead to his death, so too do Constance's morbid speculations become tied into her suicide. She beseeches:

Amiable lovely death!
Thou odoriferous stench! sound rottenness!
[...] I will kiss thy detestable bones
[...] And be a carrion monster like thyself:
[...] And buss thee as thy wife (3.4.25-35).

¹¹⁶ Charles Wordsworth, p. 130.

Despair leads Constance to reason through death as something tangible and distinctly unchristian.

Constance's rejection of Pandulph's preaching on heavenly reunion, Arthur's spiritual transcendence, and her quasi-pagan personification of death, all convinced Bucknill that she suffers from a 'disease' of mind.

My reasonable part produces reason
How I may be delivered of these woes,
And teaches me to kill or hang myself (3.4.54-6).

Suicide becomes a release from life, and it is this lack of desire to exist and overcome 'grief' that places Constance into the degenerate, regressive category of 'mentally diseased'.

Crucially, Fletcher objected to what he perceived as Jameson's 'radical error' in accusing Constance of having '*poetical* imagination'.¹¹⁷ Fletcher proposed that 'only her bright strong intellect' could fuse with 'a widowed mother's boundless and idolatrous love [to produce a] rich and lively fancy'.¹¹⁸ This combination of 'fancy', 'intellect' and idolatry, all of which lead Constance to rationalise on faith itself, echoes mid-century ideas of Oxford Movement converts being seduced by their intellectually justified imaginations. Not poetry, but rationalism forms the basis of this kind of 'imagination'. The connotations of reason, here, can be found in Kingsley's complaints about Newman: he 'has persuaded himself, by what seems to him logic, of anything whatsoever which he wishes to believe'.¹¹⁹ Kingsley argued that employing 'logic' or rationalism to claim a falsehood is akin to 'carrying self-deception to such perfection

¹¹⁷ George Fletcher, pp. 21-2. My italics.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., p. 22.

¹¹⁹ Charles Kingsley, *Mr Kingsley and Dr Newman: A Correspondence on the Question Whether Dr Newman Teaches that Truth is no Virtue?* (London: Longman, Green, Longman, Roberts, and Green, 1864), p. 26.

that it becomes a sort of frantic honesty'.¹²⁰ This propensity to turn falsehood into 'honesty' through pious 'imagination' seems to come to the fore in Bucknill's and Fletcher's responses to Constance. In other words, Constance reasons herself towards her own suicide.

If Constance was perceived as mad, and MacDonald laboured so intently to direct attention away from Hamlet's suicidal tendencies, why were Romeo and Juliet spared moral scorn for their collective demise? Although responses to the characters explored here seem eclectic, attitudes towards Shakespeare's characters all echo, or endeavour to echo, Trench's quixotic claim that all are 'accepting of God's world'. Ultimately, these characters live with their despair and invite their own deaths, but though misled by religion and reason itself, not one loses faith in God.

Conclusion

By applying scientific discourse about psychology and experimentation to Shakespeare's characters, as well as ideas about rationalism and imagination, Fletcher, Dowden, Bucknill and Marshall all incorporated contemporary concerns about 'despair' into their interpretations of the fictional figures. Of course, this made Hamlet, Constance and Romeo relevant subjects of discussion for the period; but it also suggests that Shakespeare's characters were isolated and 'performed', as Poole terms it,¹²¹ in ways that reveal complex contemporary attitudes towards issues like introspection and suicide. Whether what MacDonald called 'excessive self-examination' was spiritual or scientific, it seems that any kind of rationalism that triggered dissatisfaction was categorically negative. Even in the most famous instance of Victorian despair: Matthew Arnold's poem 'Dover Beach' (1867), despite the 'sadness', the 'human misery' and

¹²⁰ Ibid., p. 26.

¹²¹ Adrian Poole, 'Introduction', in *Victorian Shakespeare*, pp. 1-2.

futility of cyclical existence, Arnold's final verse acknowledges the importance of love and truth, meaning that life is ultimately worth living.¹²² The rejection of this 'truth' by the three characters examined here, meant that they were subject to criticism and, of course, the rhetoric of disillusionment.

Chapter Conclusion

Although conceptions of idols, the mother Church, providence and purgatory crept into readings of Hamlet, Constance and Romeo, the wider significance of falling prey to disillusionment did not escape Anglican readers like Wordsworth, Dowden, Fletcher and Marshall. Though each character despairs of life and drives his or herself to existential apathy, the plays enabled the disillusionment-fearing readers to derive an important moral about disillusionment and failure from each work.

Just as Bowden contended that tragedy was implicitly Catholic in the self-destructive tendency of its characters, Dowden infused his interpretation with a more Protestant reading: 'the theme of tragedy' he argued, 'is not material prosperity or failure; it is spiritual; fulfilment or failure of a destiny higher than that which is related to the art of getting on in life'.¹²³ This success or 'failure' of a 'destiny' implies that characters, including Hamlet and Romeo, struggle through their lives, not necessarily sacrificially, but for a greater spiritual fulfilment.

Dowden's conceptualisation of sacrifice renders Shakespeare's introspective, suicidal protagonists heroic failures. In fact, Walters observed that 'the most glorious poems chant the stories of heroes who have failed. [...] It is this seeming failure,

¹²² Matthew Arnold, 'Dover Beach', in *Dover Beach and Other Poems* (London: Constable and Company, 1994), pp. 86-7.

¹²³ Edward Dowden, p. 123.

combined with heroic endurance and moral triumph, which transfigure these stories with perennial significance'.¹²⁴ Failure, though psychologically, morally and spiritually undesirable, offered readers a cautionary tale about survival after suffering trauma or disillusionment. It is perhaps no wonder, then, that Bishop Wordsworth came to this conclusion about Shakespeare's works: 'however gloomy the view which our poet might sometimes take of human life, he does not allow us to hesitate respecting the duty imposed upon every man [...] to preserve the precious gift which God has given him'.¹²⁵ Shakespeare, by this logic, promoted faith by illustrating the dangers of disillusionment, despair, suicide and failure. It was this 'allowing', as Wordsworth termed it, of audiences to learn through characters that informed the more redemptive nonconformist conception of Shakespeare that will be discussed in the next chapter.

¹²⁴ Rev. Frank Walters, *Studies of Shakspeare's Plays*, p. 116.

¹²⁵ Charles Wordsworth, p. 129.

Chapter Three **Redemption**

Moving away from the negative connotations of introspection and suicide, this chapter focuses on redemption and, ultimately, salvation. Two schools of Victorian ‘redemption’ are discussed in relation to Shakespeare’s characters: first, that of the mid-century Evangelist or muscular preacher; secondly, the Christian Socialist ideology. The section on Evangelism examines the characters of Isabella and Hamlet through the lens of muscular Christianity, tracing patterns of criticism pertaining to the muscular preacher. While these characters seem willing to condemn their peers to hell for their transgressions, Friar Laurence is comparatively merciful despite bearing the credentials which would allow him to chastise sinners. Together with the Roman Catholic friar, Queen Katharine of *Henry VIII* and the Bastard Falconbridge in *King John* both share the qualities of fidelity and mercy. These three characters form the basis of the discussion in the second part of this chapter on liberal Christianity.

In terms of Victorian spirituality, ‘redemption’ ranged from conformity to Church practice, to intellectual salvation. Soteriology, the doctrine of salvation through Christ, encompassed ritual and obedience, as well as a more autonomous form of redemption through work and faith. According to the Evangelical Charles Haddon Spurgeon, ‘emancipation from bad habits, unclean desires, and carnal passions is the main point in salvation, and if it be not ours, salvation in its other branches is not and cannot be enjoyed by us’.¹ Liberating the self from earthliness was, by Spurgeon’s logic, the first step towards redemption.

¹ Charles Haddon Spurgeon, ‘Your Own Salvation’, sermon preached 30 July 1871, *The Spurgeon Archive* <<http://spurgeon.org/sermons>> [accessed July 2010].

Circling back to Altholz's claim, 'it is impossible to overstate the pervasiveness and intensity of the moralism which the Evangelicals had infused into every aspect of Victorian life'.² But what, exactly, is this Victorian brand of Evangelicalism? According to Jeffrey Richards, 'the characteristics of the Evangelicals were intense seriousness of purpose, addiction to hard work, hostility to worldliness, censoriousness, an intense missionary impulse and a puritanical abstention from worldly pleasure'.³ Abstinence, toil and missionary zeal were, therefore, foremost in broad Victorian 'moralism'.

Contrary to this ethos, however, Protestant American influences revived belief in 'holiness', triggering the Higher Life or Kewswick Movement in the 1870s. As the preacher Evan Henry Hopkins argued:

It is only in the cross of Christ that a power can be found capable of separating the soul from all moral defilement. And because such defilement throws the soul out of communion with God, all Christian duties performed in that condition [...] are but "dead works".⁴

Despite conflicting with liberal, Anglican and rational sects of Christianity, the Higher Life doctrine of 'holiness' through 'sanctification' offered believers like Hopkins the unconditional promise of eternal salvation. Spurgeon's notion of 'emancipation', though anticipating the Higher Life Movement's claim to spiritual 'liberty' from sin, holds within it implications of struggle and endurance. These ideas seem to be missing from the Keswick Movement ideology. Adherents must, by Spurgeon's logic, ceaselessly *earn* the right, through Richards' criteria, to claim immunity from Hopkins' later concept of 'moral defilement'.

² J. L. Altholz, 'The Warfare of Conscience with Theology', in *Religion in Victorian Britain*, IV, pp. 153-4.

³ Jeffrey Richards, *Sir Henry Irving: A Victorian Actor and His World* (London: Hambledon and London, 2005), p. 392.

⁴ Evan Henry Hopkins, *The Law of Liberty in the Spiritual Life* (London: Marshall Brothers, 1884), p. 15.

Assuming that theologians settled on a way of negotiating the arguments of struggle versus elect salvation, the eschatological journey was still far from a simple spiritual transcendence to heaven. While eternal punishment had not disappeared from Victorian England, Medieval Christian images of corporeal suffering in hellfire seemed to have become out-dated, particularly in liberal theology. The liberal Anglican theologian and Christian Socialist, Frederick Denison Maurice, argued that rather than sending non-Christian souls to hell, there will be ‘a judgement of the heart and reigns, a judgement of the man, a judgement of the principles from which acts flow’.⁵ According to Maurice, when St. Paul ‘speaks of God justifying the Jew and heathen equally, he has prepared both to understand that they can have no *real* righteousness but that which they derive from God’.⁶ Doctrine and adherence to an establishment, in other words, were no longer necessary or indispensable when it came to spiritual salvation. Maurice’s ability to reconcile the image of God with Anglican scripture and theology triggered a shift in religious attitudes towards salvation that led, ultimately, to the rise of liberal Christianity.

This chapter, therefore, examines muscular and liberal Christian interpretations of Shakespeare’s characters in order to explore how contemporary attitudes towards redemption affected Shakespeare reception. Additionally, this chapter questions how Protestant nonconformist paradigms of redemption were imposed upon Shakespeare’s ostensibly Catholic characters.

⁵ Frederick Denison Maurice, *The Doctrine of Sacrifice Deduced from the Scriptures: A Series of Sermons* (Cambridge: Macmillan & Co., 1854), p. xi.
 Bernard M. G. Reardon, ‘Maurice, (John) Frederick Denison (1805-1872)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography Online* 2006 <<http://oxforddnb.com/view/article/18384>> [accessed March 2011].

⁶ Frederick Denison Maurice, *The Doctrine of Sacrifice Deduced from the Scriptures*, p. 150.

Part One: Muscular Christians

Although muscular forms of Christianity were present throughout the nineteenth century, it was arguably in the active years of prominent preachers like John Cumming from the 1830s to the 1870s, Charles Haddon Spurgeon from the mid-1850s to the 1880s, and Frederick Brotherton Meyer from the 1870s to the early twentieth century, that the spirit of active Christianity took hold of the public. Between these decades and pontificators, the concept of ‘redemption’ shifted between autonomous self-help, and conceptions of inherent or elect virtue. Mid- to late-Victorian modes of preaching ranged from mild to extreme forms of verbal expostulation. This section, then, uses these preaching habits as points of reference to locate readings of Shakespeare’s Hamlet and Isabella around the influences of Victorian pontificators so as to question what effect religious figures like Spurgeon had on Shakespearean interpretation.

Preaching

It is necessary to begin by noting the characterisation of Isabella and Hamlet as preachers in the second half of the century. Although both characters invited discussions on Catholicism and idolatry, their interactions with sinners often mirrored those of Evangelical rather than Catholic pontificators.

The Church of Scotland’s John Cumming advocated active Christianity. ‘You must [...] die alone – you must be judged alone – you must bear the sentence alone’.⁷ Because, as Altholz observes, Victorian religion centred on ‘moralism’, preachers often asserted the duties, moral and spiritual, of the individual soul. However, the solitary

⁷ Rev. John Cumming, *Apocalyptic Sketches: Lectures on the Book of Revelation* (London: Hall, Virtue & Co., 1850), p. 458.

soul preparing itself for judgement often required guidance, and it is here that muscular preaching becomes pertinent. Spurgeon argued:

You and I must continue to drive at men's hearts till they are broken; and then we must keep on preaching Christ crucified till their hearts are bound up; and when this is accomplished, we must continue to proclaim the gospel till their whole nature is brought into subjection to the Gospel of Christ.⁸

This particular extract is taken from a work of 1895, but Spurgeon's linear method of breaking, binding and subjecting the hearts and souls of penitents, was something ingrained in the sermons and works throughout his life. Reserving discussion of the implications of such preaching until the next section, it is important to turn to examples of interpretations of Isabella and Hamlet as preachers who, like Spurgeon, break and bind hearts in pursuit of redemption.

Isabella

Through her piety and seclusion, Isabella was often perceived as a religious guide.

William Watkiss Lloyd observed that Isabella has an ability to 'play with reason and discourse'.⁹ The discourse of reason, unlike the internalised despair of Constance, manifests itself in Isabella's spiritual guidance of Angelo, Claudio and Vincentio at various stages throughout the play.

An important indication of this Victorian interpretation of Isabella can be found in Mary Cowden Clarke's short story, discussed in Chapter One. While a female response to Isabella might be expected to be appraising, it is no coincidence that Cowden Clarke demonstrated an admiration for Isabella's preaching. Because these stories were part of what Marshall and Thompson have recently called a 'moral

⁸ Charles Haddon Spurgeon, *The Soul Winner: How to Lead Sinners to the Saviour* (1895; repr. Michigan: Eerdmans's Printing Company, 1995), p. 28.

⁹ William Watkiss Lloyd, p. 38.

pedagogy',¹⁰ Cowden Clarke's Isabella, a precocious preacher, was clearly an ideal role-model for young women. As well as depicting religious seclusion, Cowden Clarke used her story to demonstrate the value of redemption. The young Isabella learns at an early stage that salvation cannot be a literal path to heaven, as in the bestseller *A Pilgrim's Progress*;¹¹ rather, the character earns her spiritual reward by redeeming others. Thus Cowden Clarke represented Isabella's preaching as an unconscious and harmless form of conscience wringing.

Although Cowden Clarke's Isabella does no deliberate verbal 'breaking' or indeed 'proclaiming', she is able to 'drive at men's hearts' in much the same way as Victorian Evangelists. In the story, Isabella befriends a young prostitute called Nannie. Spurgeon's theory of breaking, probing and mending the heart is mirrored in Isabella's ability to awaken Nanni's repentance, purge her of guilt and assure her of heavenly mercy at her death bed. Upon their initial meeting, Isabella's 'little body strained against her' and she asks, 'do I hurt you, dear Nanni?'¹² This recalls attention to Spurgeon's notion of 'driving' at the weaknesses of sinners in order to 'break' them and, finally, to re-construct the individual as a Christian. It is only after Isabella has imposed upon Nanni that the latter 'breathed an unwonted prayer and thanksgiving'.¹³ The assumption here is that Isabella has somehow removed the impediment between the sinner and her creator. Instead of enforcing doctrine onto Nanni, Isabella promotes

¹⁰ Gail Marshall and Ann Thompson, 'Mary Cowden Clarke', in *Jameson, Cowden Clarke, Kemble, Cushman: Great Shakespeareans*, ed. by Gail Marshall, 18 vols. (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2011) VII, 58-91 (p. 63).

¹¹ Bunyan's story of the lone traveller, Christian, in *A Pilgrim's Progress* (1678) was considered an essential read in the second half of the nineteenth century. See Emma Mason, 'The Victorians and Bunyan's Legacy', in *The Cambridge Companion to Bunyan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 150-61.

¹² Mary Cowden Clarke, p. 146.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 147.

Christianity by penetrating the individual conscience, becoming a feminised – with the connotations of affection and benevolence – muscular Christian.

Cowden Clarke's appropriation of Isabella's rhetorical power into her image of an unconsciously redemptive youth, demonstrates her perception of the character as a hub of morality. Isabella's infantile probing of Nanni and the latter's immediate lapse into a state of contrition, presuppose an inherent spiritual power within the girl that is independent of the rhetorical devices and doctrine used by mid-century preachers. In other words, Isabella's 'preaching' is emotional rather than fear-inducing. It is tempting to find something naïve about assuming an inherent power to convert others, and projecting this fantasy onto Shakespeare's heroine. But it is important to recall that Cowden Clarke's response to Isabella has been extrapolated from a didactic context where the authority of Shakespeare was employed to disseminate practical morals about youth, faith, love and marriage. In this case, the moral pertains to redemption which must be earned through the kind of useful didacticism that Cowden Clarke herself appropriated into her stories.

Hamlet

Just as Cowden Clarke depicted Isabella as a spiritual guide, so too was Hamlet often perceived as a preacher. In 1894, Rev. James Bell proposed that Hamlet can be likened to the 'priest and judge' Eli from the Old Testament.¹⁴ Both figures, Bell claimed, were well-meaning but weak moral centres of worlds where 'disorganisation was everywhere, confusion in Church and state alike'.¹⁵ Bell's conception of Hamlet as a didactic figure with biblical connotations was hinted at earlier, in 1856, by William

¹⁴ Rev. J. T. Bell, *Biblical and Shakespearean Characters Compared: Studies in Life and Literature* (London: Simpkin & Co., 1894), p. 38.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

Watkiss Lloyd. According to Lloyd, 'Hamlet baits and perplexes and satirizes the qualities that are really base'.¹⁶ 'Baiting' and 'satirizing' offer to align Hamlet with the Evangelical preachers of the mid-century. In the 'disorganised' world where 'base' qualities rule, Hamlet, by this logic, acts as a moral judge.

In one particular episode of the play, Hamlet enters Gertrude's chambers in order to pontificate on her wickedness. Dowden suggested that Hamlet enters with a distinct purpose: 'he has a great essay to make towards the deliverance of a human soul from the bondage of corruption'.¹⁷ He seeks to 'uplift his mother's weak soul and breathe into it courage, strength, and constancy'.¹⁸ The 'uplifting' of a soul, though seemingly overlooking the cruelty with which Hamlet treats his mother in the opening exchanges of their interview, is entirely deliberate and demonstrates Hamlet's didactic agenda. In fact, Hamlet employs three stages to his diatribe: 'let me wring your heart', 'where is thy blush' and 'confess yourself to heaven' (3.4.34,81,149). In short, he alerts his mother to her crimes, awakens her contrition, and prepares her for absolution. Although the discourse here is Catholic, it is significant that the very same approach was employed by Spurgeon in his paradigm of 'breaking', 'binding' and 'subjecting' the soul through preaching. Indeed, Hamlet's claim 'I must be cruel only to be kind' (3.4.178) is one that would not seem incongruous in any of Spurgeon's sermons.

The sermonising quality of Hamlet was satirised, almost inevitably, by *Punch* in 1861. In a mock scene between Bishop Hamlet and a group of parsons – a humorous parody of Hamlet's advice to the players – *Punch's* Prince claims that 'the purpose of preaching [...] was and is to hold as it were the mirror up to conscience [and not to]

¹⁶ William Watkiss Lloyd, p. 45.

¹⁷ Edward Dowden, p. 117.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 117.

split the ears of the sanctified'.¹⁹ Notwithstanding the potential for parody, Hamlet's 'baiting' and 'delivering' of his mother's soul is spiritually responsible, just as Isabella's 'reason' allows sinners to rectify their errors.

Muscular Preaching

Nevertheless, both characters and their methods of preaching began to be read in terms of the muscular verbal diatribes that swept over England. Perhaps, for this reason, much critical attention on Isabella and Hamlet from the 1860s until the 1870s alluded to the didactic, potentially intolerant, nature of each character.

A key feature of muscular preaching was the condemnation of sinners. In 1861, Spurgeon likened sinners to 'shrews', claiming that it is necessary to 'tame' them.²⁰ Aside from the references to *The Taming of the Shrew* in his sermon, this image of 'taming' the sinner in much the same way that Petruchio redeems his wife of her 'shrewish' tendencies, is both fascinating and disturbing. In the juxtaposition of shrew and sinner, Spurgeon clearly perceived himself as a superior authority with a right to impose upon and morally restrain the untamed masses. *John Bull* described him as a 'swash-buckler scion' and 'church militant', and claimed that 'sweeping a whole world of mild dissentients to perdition is to the Spurgeonites a proof of truthfulness'.²¹ While this statement seems dismissive, it is a good indication of Anglican attitudes towards nonconformist preaching.

¹⁹ 'Bishop Hamlet's Advice to the Parsons', *Punch*, 5 October 1861 <<http://galegroup.com>> [accessed August 2009].

²⁰ Charles Haddon Spurgeon quoted in 'Lecture', *Trewman's Exeter Flying Post or Plymouth and Cornish Advertiser*, 23 October 1861 <<http://galegroup.com>> [accessed April 2010].

²¹ 'Pulpit Theatricals', *John Bull and Britannia*, 25 October 1856 <<http://galegroup.com>> [accessed July 2011].

In a similar manner to Spurgeon, both Isabella and Hamlet consider themselves saviours of inferior souls and are willing to condemn sinners to ‘perdition’. First, Isabella sentences her brother to what she calls ‘perpetual durance’ for believing his ‘sin’ to be ‘a trade’ (3.1.149). Claudio’s fear of purgatory is not alleviated by Isabella, nor does she demonstrate any compassion for his spiritual plight. Secondly, Hamlet seeks to ‘trip’ his uncle so that ‘his heels may kick at heaven’ (3.4.93). In a comment that seems apt to the circumstances of Claudio and Claudius, Spurgeon argued that sinners who ‘die without pardon must expect to receive a double portion of the wrath of God, and a more wonderful manifestation of the unutterable anguish of the torment of eternal punishment in the pit that is digged [sic] for the wicked’.²² Needless to say, this response to sinners was never particularly tasteful to liberal nonconformist assumptions about universal charity and eternal punishment. Condemning souls to an everlasting doom conflicted with the ethos of liberal Christians like F. D. Maurice. With this in mind, the preaching methods of Isabella and Hamlet were hard for liberal-minded critics writing after the 1860s to ignore.

Hamlet

Despite her culpability for his disillusionment and despair, Hamlet attracted criticism for his treatment of Gertrude. As alluded to earlier, Hamlet ‘wrings’ his mother’s conscience in order to elicit contrition. Critics such as Hunter, Marshall and Furnivall characterised the scene between son-preacher and mother-penitent as an explicitly didactic episode and Marshall, as will be discussed shortly, specifically referred to it as a ‘sermon’.

²² Charles Haddon Spurgeon, ‘Presumptuous Sins’, sermon delivered 7 June 1857, *The Spurgeon Archive* <<http://spurgeon.org/sermons/0135.htm>> [accessed August 2010].

For the Unitarian Joseph Hunter, in the 1840s, Hamlet's desire to 'speak daggers' to his mother was unjustified. Hunter protested against Gertrude's culpability and argued that for Hamlet to avenge himself by using daggers on his mother would result in 'universal odium'.²³ Hunter suggested that the meeting is ultimately futile except for, dramatically, allowing the death of Polonius and the return of Gertrude to Hamlet's 'side'.²⁴ So, despite acting as a plot device, Hamlet's discussion with his mother was held by Hunter to be cruel and unnecessary.

But the cruelty of using metaphorical 'daggers' on his own mother seemed to have bypassed the more liberal Charles Cowden Clarke who, two decades after Hunter, dismissed any notion of Hamlet as a man attempting to preach: 'there is nothing dictatorial or dogmatical [sic] in Hamlet [...] he is not didactic [...] he moralises almost unconsciously'.²⁵ Setting aside Hamlet's exchanges with his mother, it is fair to concede to Cowden Clarke's logic here. Hamlet seems to stumble across universal and, as Marshall suggested, scientific truths by virtue of his ability to observe. But, when Cowden Clarke's logic is extended to Hamlet's encounter with Gertrude, then the claims about didacticism offer a significantly altered interpretation of the closet scene. If Hamlet is 'moralising unconsciously', then remarks like 'Assume a virtue if you have it not' (3.4.160), become spontaneous expressions of morality rather than calculated rhetoric aimed at indoctrinating. In effect, Cowden Clarke was distancing Hamlet from the contemporary preaching styles of Cumming and Spurgeon.

²³ Joseph Hunter, *New Illustrations of the Life, Studies and Writings of Shakespeare*, 2 vols. (London: J. B. Nicols & Son, 1845), II, p. 255.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 255.

²⁵ Charles Cowden Clarke quoted in *Critical Responses to Hamlet 1600-1900*, ed. by David Farley-Hills, John Manning and Johanna Procter, 4 vols. (New York: A. M. S. Press, Inc., 2006), IV, pp. 142-3.

This reasoning, however, was contradicted in the criticisms of Furnivall, MacDonald, Marshall and Walters, all of whom suggested that Hamlet was on a divine mission to set the world to rights. In fact, this God-given duty resonates with the Victorian muscular Christian sense of ‘burden’ or responsibility towards the heathens of the colonies. At Spurgeon’s sermon delivered after the Indian Mutiny of 1857, he argued that ‘as the arrest of a murderer by authority of the law is not war, so the arrest of Indian sepoy, *and their utter destruction* is not war – it is what earth demands, and what I believe God sanctions’.²⁶ Along with the supposedly divinely sanctioned tyranny over imperial subjects, Spurgeon advocated verbal attack: ‘it is no aim of ours to please our enemies in our mode of warfare, but the reverse; and if we have discovered a weapon which galls you, we will use that same arm more freely than ever’.²⁷ Spurgeon’s theory has interesting implications for critical readings of Hamlet, in that ‘warfare’ and sermonising appear as recurring themes in discussions of the character.

Furnivall argued that Gertrude’s marriage affects Hamlet’s ‘inmost soul [and] against his mother and her sin all the magnificent indignation of his purity and virtue speak [and] he tells her what he’d have her do’.²⁸ The image of the soul wounded by the transgression of others would suggest that Hamlet’s salvation lies in the redemption of sinners around him. He is, here, a morally sensitive martyr, crucifying himself for the sins of others. Martyrdom ties in with Frank Marshall’s claim that the tragic hero is ‘fulfilling a mission with which he had been charged, indirectly, by the deity’.²⁹ Such Victorian imbuing of holy purpose or ‘mission’ into *Hamlet* was noted by Russell

²⁶ Charles Haddon Spurgeon, ‘Fast Day Service’, sermon delivered 1857, *The Spurgeon Archive* <<http://spurgeon.org/sermons/0154.htm>> [accessed September 2009].

²⁷ Charles Haddon Spurgeon, ‘The Church as She Should Be’, sermon delivered 1871, *The Spurgeon Archive* <<http://spurgeon.org/sermons/0984.htm>> [accessed September 2009].

²⁸ Frederick James Furnivall, p. lxxii.

²⁹ Frank A. Marshall, *A Study of Hamlet*, p. 53.

Jackson in the 1980s. 'In Gertrude's closet' Jackson argues, 'Hamlet becomes a preacher' and the episode is 'a clash of domestic pieties now coupled with religion'.³⁰ Marshall, as Jackson has also observed, compared Hamlet's interview with his mother to a 'noble sermon'.³¹ Together with the essays of Dowden and Furnivall a decade later, Marshall clearly contributed to interpretations of the character, in the final quarter of the century, as a muscular pontificator.

Despite the charitable intentions at the root of probing the consciences of sinners, it was the implied sense of righteousness amongst converts and converters that elicited scorn from opposition. During the 1870s the Higher Life Movement emerged, which advocated 'sanctification' through Christ. This meant that salvation was not dependent on autonomous struggle or outward forms of worship, but on implicit faith and a belief that Christ has redeemed man from the condition of sin. Higher Life advocates who believed themselves to be 'saved' and spiritually superior, often elicited opposition from orthodox as well as nonconformist congregations. George MacDonald, for instance, claimed that sanctification, meaning liberation from sin through faith, is impossible because 'the working out of this our salvation must be pain'.³²

The sense of inherent righteousness amongst the Higher Life advocates was one that could be discerned in the character of Hamlet. Hamlet's rationalising over the destination of Claudius' soul was, perhaps not surprisingly, a source of contention. Although Furnivall argued that the whole episode is a means of delaying action, he

³⁰ Russell Jackson, 'Another Part of the Castle: Some Victorian Hamlets', in *Images of Shakespeare: Proceedings of the Congress of the International Shakespeare Association*, ed. by Werner Habicht, D. J. Palmer and Roger Pringle (Canada: Associated University Press, 1988), pp. 111-19 (p. 118).

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 118.

³² George MacDonald, *Unspoken Sermons*, p. 287.

observed that ‘he keeps him for hell [being conscious of] the conditions for entry’.³³

Consciously committing a soul to eternal torment was far from charitable, echoing concerns such as that raised by *John Bull* about Spurgeon dooming sinners to perdition.

That Hamlet, the ‘noble sermon’ maker, could seek the damnation of a penitent was rationalised by Victorian critics through the character’s belief in providence and, of course, his own sanctity. To repeat Dowden’s claim, quoted in Chapter Two, Hamlet has a ‘disposition to reduce to a minimum the share which man’s conscious will and foresight has in the disposing of events’.³⁴ Like Dowden, Furnivall found Hamlet’s levying of culpability onto providence unsettling. Having murdered Polonius, Furnivall lamented Hamlet’s ‘delightfully cool and self-deceiving way’ of blaming heaven.³⁵ Much later than Dowden, in the 1880s, Marshall argued that Hamlet ‘works himself’ into agitation, and believes himself to be divinely chosen to carry out his task; he tries to ‘awaken his mother’s conscience [using] words not deeds [and] is urged into violence at attacks against himself’.³⁶ The propensity towards violence, together with this repeated notion that Hamlet is sanctioned by heaven, suggests that the hero believes himself to be on a holy crusade. In other words, Hamlet engages in a similar ‘warfare’ against sinners to that advocated by Spurgeon.

In fact, Hamlet’s sense of inherent spiritual superiority was noted by MacDonald. In his preface to *Hamlet*, MacDonald proposed that ‘I hope to help the student of Shakespeare understand [...] Hamlet himself, whose spiritual and moral nature are the real material of the tragedy, to which every other interest of the play is

³³ Frederick James Furnivall, p. lxxii.

³⁴ Edward Dowden, p. 158.

³⁵ Frederick James Furnivall, p. lxxii.

³⁶ Frank A. Marshall, ‘Introduction to *Hamlet*’, pp. 20-1.

subservient'.³⁷ That the plot hinges on Hamlet's religious sensibilities offers to redeem the character's existential despair by imbuing his actions with 'spirituality' and 'morality'. But this reading of Hamlet the 'spiritual' man arguably derived from earlier ideas, such as those of Fletcher and Knight about the character's attachment to religion.

Nevertheless, MacDonald claimed that Hamlet seeks 'to open the door of repentance'.³⁸ Rather than using Hunter's 'daggers', Marshall's 'violence' and Furnivall's 'indignation' from earlier in the century, MacDonald's image of 'opening' repentance is pleasant and even naively spiritual. By believing himself imbued with divine purpose, despite submitting himself to providence and engaging in a catholicised 'tragic' sacrifice, Hamlet is able salvage the souls of others. In this way, Hamlet's was a teleological journey from turmoil to eventual salvation, fuelled by the knowledge or 'ideal' of a higher order. According to MacDonald, Hamlet's 'reverence for God [...] was the sole stay left to him in the flood of human worthlessness'.³⁹ In other words, MacDonald's Hamlet was redeemed from accusations of pessimism and despair, meaning that he was a kind of muscular preacher without the self-righteous pontificating.

However, while MacDonald's interpretation of Hamlet's faith was more lenient than the critical approaches of Hunter and Furnivall, for instance, the very fact that the character needed to be distanced from what Charles Cowden Clarke called 'dictatorial' qualities, suggests that being aligned with judgemental muscular preachers was far from complimentary. Though Hamlet makes a 'noble sermon' and 'delivers' souls, he uses his spiritual superiority to condemn others irrevocably to hell. Perhaps it was this

³⁷ *The Tragedy of Hamlet*, ed. by George MacDonald, p. 2.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 179.

³⁹ George MacDonald, *A Dish of Orts* (1893; repr. Montana: Kessinger Publishing, 2004), p. 79.

misjudgement of the very souls he ought to salvage that induced Boas to conclude, at the end of the century, that Hamlet culminates in ‘partial paralysis of the moral sense’.⁴⁰

Isabella

This troubled response to Hamlet’s sense of self-importance can also be found in attitudes towards Isabella. Whereas Mary Cowden Clarke’s mid-century re-writing of *Isabella* indicates that the character’s preaching is charitable, at the end of the century the Scottish critic Andrew Lang suggested that her pontificating, particularly her condemnation of Claudio, proceeded from selfish motives.⁴¹

Despite quoting Isabella’s plea for mercy in a bid to demonstrate the ‘need of an infinite forgiveness’,⁴² it is intriguing that elsewhere Richard Chenevix Trench declared Isabella to be morally uncompromising. According to Maria Trench, R. C. Trench once claimed that ‘Isabella is grand, but rather rigid and stern’.⁴³ The rigorous sermonising of Isabella, though justified in her discourse with Angelo, becomes callous before the plight of her brother. Her final expostulation, ‘’tis best thou diest quickly’ (3.1.151) is hardly indicative of the virtuous, innocent girl depicted by Mary Cowden Clarke. Trench’s concerns about rigidity and sternness do not, therefore, seem unfounded.

⁴⁰ Frederick S. Boas, p. 407.

⁴¹ Further to Cowden Clarke’s ‘re-writing’ of *Isabella*, it is worth noting that the redemption of Shakespeare’s characters through appropriation seems to have been a skill of George Eliot. Isabella’s dilemma was evoked by Eliot in *Middlemarch* (1871), for instance. The heroine Dorothea is compared to St. Theresa at the start of the novel. Much earlier than Eliot, in 1832, Jameson had compared Shakespeare’s Isabella to the same St. Theresa. That both Eliot and Jameson chose to allude to St. Theresa, places Isabella and Dorothea on a par with one another in a way of which, it is reasonable to assume, Eliot may well have been aware. That Eliot described Theresa as a ‘foundress of nothing’, circles back to Isabella and her pontificating and self-imposed chastity, neither of which amount to anything tangibly useful in the play. See Anna Jameson, p. 109; George Eliot, *Middlemarch*, ed. by W. J. Harvey (1871; repr. London: Penguin Book Ltd., 1965), p. 28.

⁴² Richard Chenevix Trench, p. 8.

⁴³ Maria Trench, *Letters and Memorials*, 2 vols. (London: Kegan Paul, Trench and Co., 1888), II, p. 29.

However, Isabella's eagerness to be rid of a man with an apparent laxity towards 'sin', demonstrates her consciousness of duty towards the transgressor. Claudio, by this reasoning, must die in order to preserve the sanctity of his own soul. In this way, Isabella seeks to redeem her brother's *soul*, rather than rescuing his *life*. This will be explained shortly. For now, it is necessary to note Trench's reference in his sermon to 'infinite forgiveness'.⁴⁴ Given that the play is about earthly mercy and the avoidance of hellfire, Trench offered to scorn Isabella's earthly cruelty while embracing and admiring her spiritual charity.

This logic was pursued by Charles Cowden Clarke who claimed that Shakespeare's character is 'very young [...] unvain and unselfish'.⁴⁵ The sternness with which Trench suggested Isabella is imbued was swept away by Cowden Clarke's claim that the novice is 'bashful' and full of 'self-doubt'.⁴⁶ This conception of Isabella as a modest girl, however, conflicts with Charles Cowden Clarke's claim that she also has 'a prodigal regardlessness of life': 'of her own, of her brother's, of Marianna's, she is, each in turn, equally prodigal when misfortune threatens'.⁴⁷ The connotations of 'prodigal' suggest that Isabella is wasteful or careless of earthly existence, and it is this indifference to what Trench later called 'God's world'⁴⁸ that, paradoxically, earned Isabella Charles Cowden Clarke's respect. Having come into contact with 'the stern griefs of life', Charles Cowden Clarke argued that Isabella would naturally wish death upon sufferers.⁴⁹ But it is important to note that Cowden Clarke made no reference to Isabella's belief in heavenly reward. The 'prodigal' nun spends lives, presumably, to

⁴⁴ Richard Chenevix Trench, p. 19.

⁴⁵ Charles Cowden Clarke, *Shakespeare's Characters: Chiefly Those Subordinate* (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1863), p. 498.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 142.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 142.

⁴⁸ Richard Chenevix Trench, p. 8.

⁴⁹ Charles Cowden Clarke, p. 500.

buy salvation, but it was precisely Charles Cowden Clarke's failure to state this openly that hints at a sense of discomfort about the matter of condemning life out of Christian charity.

Returning to 'rescuing' and 'redeeming', the distinction between these terms was a significant theme amongst the Evangelical preachers of mid-Victorian England. In 1857, Spurgeon spoke of 'regeneration' instead of 'renovation', arguing that Shakespeare is full of 'moral maxims' but does not preach or encourage a complete change of attitude towards Christ.⁵⁰ This difference between complete 'regeneration' and slight 'renovation' was especially pertinent to discussions about *Measure for Measure*. Despite Isabella's sternness, together with her preaching, the play lacks the justice and moral absolutism so revered by the character. Angelo's pardon, Marianna's marriage to him, and the Duke's readiness to forgive all transgressors, suggest that the only lesson extracted by each character is one of 'renovation' rather than 'regeneration'. With respect to Isabella, it is interesting that Charles Cowden Clarke was essentially contradicting Spurgeon's generalisation about Shakespeare's plays, given that the nun seeks to probe and *reform* her brother as well as Angelo at the end of the play, rather than excuse and release the sinners.

In terms of pontificating, in 1874, Walter Pater argued that Isabella is skilled at 'playing' upon Claudio and Angelo with her verbal piety and 'grand imaginative diction'.⁵¹ The focus on 'diction' and verbal 'skill', far from evoking Catholicism and casuistry like Cardinal Wolsey earlier in the century, seems more likely to pertain to the

⁵⁰ Charles Haddon Spurgeon, 'Christ Lifted Up', sermon delivered 5 July 1857, *The Spurgeon Archive* <<http://spurgeon.org/sermons/0139.htm>> [accessed May 2010].

⁵¹ Walter Horatio Pater, p. 179.

‘swash-buckling’⁵² didacticism of Evangelists such as Spurgeon. The use of martial rhetoric like ‘weapons’ and ‘warfare’ in Spurgeon’s preaching is of particular note, because it suggests that unbelief transcends theology: it becomes a physical threat to Christianity at large, not just Protestantism. Therefore violence, physical or otherwise, is vital in order to survive in a rapidly disillusioned world. According to Spurgeon: ‘the holy martyrs of God have been ready to endure the most terrible torments rather than step so much as one inch aside from the road of truth and righteousness’.⁵³ Isabella arguably embodies this ‘holy martyr’ who endures the ‘torment’ of her brother’s death in exchange for her eternal salvation. She becomes the Evangelical preacher, breaking her brother’s pride and ‘heart’ so as to resurrect it again with Christian virtue.

Given the similarity in preaching styles between Spurgeon and Isabella, it is interesting that the Christian socialist Frederick J. Furnivall focused his reading of the nun’s preaching on salvation. Isabella, he argued, is ‘Shakespeare’s first wholly Christian woman’.⁵⁴ Her condemnation of her brother’s crime derives, as Charles Clarke hinted, from the need to save his soul from damnation. In this way, Isabella engages in constant struggles or ‘warfare’ with sin; for this reason, Furnivall argued, she is able to ‘fight God’s fight’.⁵⁵ Henry Morley, moreover, aligned *Measure for Measure* with the Sermon on the Mount, and argued that the entire play is a lesson and a way of enforcing morality.⁵⁶ Isabella, therefore, falls into this probing, teaching category but without the rhetoric of warfare; also without the sense that the nun, by virtue of her chastity and piety, exists either metaphorically or literally above the others.

⁵² ‘Pulpit Theatricals’, *John Bull and Britannia*, 25 October 1856 <<http://galegroup.com>> [accessed July 2011].

⁵³ Charles Haddon Spurgeon, ‘Little Sins’, sermon delivered 17 April 1859, *The Spurgeon Archive* <<http://spurgeon.org/sermons/0248.htm>> [accessed February 2010].

⁵⁴ Frederick James Furnivall, p. lxxiv.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. lxxv.

⁵⁶ Henry Morley quoted in ‘Henry Morley: A Lesson from the Sermon on the Mount’, in *Measure for Measure*, ed. by George L. Geckle, pp. 199-200.

Far from concluding that Isabella was immune to the Higher Life ethos, the very fact that critics had to defend her against the possibility of being termed selfish or ‘cruel’ reveals a deeper paranoia about the nature of the character’s faith. In 1891, Andrew Lang suggested that though Isabella is a virtuous woman, she is ‘self-regarding’, and nothing in the play turns out to be morally comforting: ‘we are such stuff as nightmares are made of’.⁵⁷ Lang’s conception of the ‘nightmare’ of hypocrisy and selfish ascetics in *Measure for Measure*, can be read as a candid response not only to the overall sense of injustice within the play, but also to Isabella’s readiness to sacrifice all, in Clarke’s ‘prodigal’ sense, in the pursuit of salvation. The redemptive quality of verbal dexterity within the parameters of Christianity, it seems, did not rescue Isabella from her own ideological subscription to sanctification.

Conclusion

Putting the Catholicism of each character aside, it seems that references to didacticism in criticism evolved with the equally shifting attitudes towards preaching in the second half of the century. It would seem that, ultimately, the muscular Christian method of breaking and reforming straying souls had become unfashionable and even callous by the end of the century. However, there was arguably a lingering respect for both characters’ abilities to convey belief in his or her infallibility through condemnation of all transgression. The combination of rhetorical prowess and genuine piety in both Hamlet and Isabella did not escape a generation that admired the, albeit zealous, techniques of Charles Haddon Spurgeon. ‘I have’, Spurgeon claimed, ‘written for ploughmen and common people. Hence refined taste and dainty words have been

⁵⁷ Andrew Lang quoted in ‘Andrew Lang: A Disconsolate Play’, in *Measure for Measure*, pp. 205-14 (p. 214).

discarded for strong proverbial expressions and homely phrases'.⁵⁸ Over the decades when rationalism was, from an orthodox perspective, growing out of control, education itself was increasingly secularised, and the Church of England was losing its congregations to nonconformist sects, there was no time to spare for 'dainty words' in the pursuit of redemption.

Part Two: Liberal Christians

It is now necessary to turn to more liberal conceptions of redemption. Frederick Denison Maurice sought to deliver a merciful theology to previously overlooked Christians by 'escaping' from 'dogmas' associated with Anglicanism⁵⁹ and, of course, the verbal attacks of muscular Christians. Crucially, Maurice rejected the concept of eternal damnation, advocating universal redemption along with mercy and liberal judgement. The way in which this liberal ethos was brought into Shakespearean criticism forms the focus in this section.

Maurice's moral objections to damnation challenged the Evangelical 'warfare' of Spurgeon against sinners, as well as Anglican and Roman Catholic doctrine. In the 1850s, the Roman Catholic preacher and children's writer, John Furniss, published *The Sight of Hell* which offered details about damnation. Eternal torment in hell was presented by Furniss as a fact from which even the most innocent of children could not escape.⁶⁰ But Catholic eschatology encompassed the concepts of hellfire and purgatory in ways that were often glossed over and rejected, respectively, in Anglican theology.

⁵⁸ Charles Haddon Spurgeon, 'Preface', *John Ploughman's Talk: Or Plain Advice for Plain People*, *The Spurgeon Archive* <<http://spurgeon.org/misc/plowman.htm>> [accessed July 2010].

⁵⁹ Frederick Denison Maurice, *The Epistles of St. John: A Series of Lectures on Christian Ethics* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1867), p. 166.

⁶⁰ John Furniss, *The Sight of Hell* (1855; repr. Baltimore: Kelly and Piet, 1864).

The liberal Anglican Frederick William Farrar, who advocated universal salvation, for instance, argued that all doctrine is a mixture of ‘threat’ and ‘promise’, claiming:

It would be just as senseless to tell you positively “ye shall die in your sins” leaving out the conditions “except ye believe” as it is senseless to say “the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth [sic] from all sin” leaving out the condition “if we walk in the light, if we love one another”.⁶¹

Here, the focus was not, as Furniss argued, on the fear of damnation, but on the hope of redemption. It is logical, therefore, to assume that there were Shakespearean characters that appealed to the liberal Christian ideology. Unlike Hamlet and Isabella, who readily condemn Claudius and Claudio, respectively, to damnation, there are three characters that were praised for demonstrating the kind of charity towards others that was advocated in liberal Christianity. First, Katharine from *Henry VIII*, as explored in Chapter One, was critically admired for her verbal debate with Cardinal Wolsey. Secondly, Friar Laurence, Catholicism aside, was praised for his benevolence and practicality. Finally, Philip Falconbridge from *King John* was invariably cited in newspapers and pamphlets as a source of fidelity and patriotism, particularly during the papal aggression in 1850.

The first thing to note about this trio is their peripheral nature in relation to the protagonists. In 1863, Charles Cowden Clarke published essays on Shakespeare’s subordinate characters, noting that they are ‘consistent in fulfilling the designs of the poet or creator [...] their intention and action combine in imparting unity [to the] design and progression’.⁶² By this logic, the dignified queen, kindly priest and loyal knight were perceived as contributors to the redemption or ‘progression’ of the plays. There

⁶¹ Frederick William Farrar, *Everyday Christian Life or Sermons by the Way* (1888; repr. Montana: Kessinger Publishing, 2004), p. 215; Norman Vance, ‘Farrar, Frederic William (1831-1903)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography Online 2004* <<http://oxforddnb.com/view/article/33088>> [accessed March 1011].

⁶² Charles Cowden Clarke, p. 4.

are two key ways by which these peripheral figures, historical and fictitious, were read as redemptive. Each character is, to some extent, representative of loyalty. By remaining true to Romeo, John and Henry, Laurence, Falconbridge and Katharine, respectively, move the plots from dispute towards reconciliation. It is their presence in each play that prevents, or at least attempts to prevent, the protagonists from diving into a regressive trend not unlike damnation. Secondly, all three sacrifice some aspect of themselves to bring about this semblance of universal redemption without lapsing into the 'tragic' sacrifice admired by Bowden. While Katharine offers up her life to enable the births of the Church of England and, ultimately, Elizabeth, Laurence forgoes his scruples of honesty to reconcile the lovers' families, and Falconbridge sacrifices his entire sense of independence for the protection of his king and country.

Each character is capable of and willing to actively save others, not by dogmatising like Hamlet and Isabella, but through patience and tact. These figures, because of their natures as illegitimates, divorcees, and friars, appealed to the emerging Christian Socialist desire to identify with the marginalised.

Teaching and Healing

Given that mid- to late-century liberal Christians like Maurice and Farrar sought to revise understandings about soteriology, it seems reasonable that focus on forgiveness and benevolence came to the fore in criticisms of Shakespeare. In a sermon preached in Stratford-upon-Avon in 1900, Farrar claimed that though Shakespeare teaches lessons with 'a thunderclash of reproof' towards immoral conduct, 'faith and goodness' are invariably present in his plays.⁶³ Contrary to the *fin de siècle* attitudes of Shaw and

⁶³ Frederick William Farrar, p. 215.

Santayana about Shakespeare's religious pessimism, Farrar suggested that the plots and characters appeal to these universal qualities: faith and goodness.

Further to Farrar's reference to 'lessons', it is worth noting the Christian Socialist attitude towards education. Maurice established the Working Men's College in order to counteract the fact that 'colleges and universities [have become] traders in divinity, politics, law [producing] insolent pedants [...] who did not do God's work in the world but rather the devil's'.⁶⁴ The transmission of knowledge, Maurice argued, is a means by which teachers make 'the society in which they move, better, purer, nobler',⁶⁵ without making education exclusive or even mercantile. Bringing together Farrar's focus on 'faith and goodness' in Shakespeare's drama with Maurice's campaign to utilise virtue to educate society, this section assesses the intersections between liberal Christian conceptions of redemption and teaching, and critical responses to Laurence, Falconbridge and Katharine.

Friar Laurence

As discussed in Chapter One, Cardinal Wolsey was read by Victorian commentators as an unhelpful, selfish and uncharitable man. The figure of the Roman Catholic high priest with power over policy and religion was, therefore, no comparison to the benevolent, albeit potentially perverse, Friar Laurence. Whereas Macready, in the 1830s and 1840s, seemed to dislike the minor role of the supposedly unchallenging Friar,⁶⁶ and Phelps famously refused to play the character in Kean's 1841 production,⁶⁷ by the tercentenary Laurence appears to have been considered a chief figure within the play. In

⁶⁴ Frederick Denison Maurice, *Lectures to Ladies on Practical Subjects*, 3rd edn (Cambridge: Macmillan & Co., 1857), p. 6.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

⁶⁶ William Charles Macready, p. 110.

⁶⁷ 'The Stage', *The Odd Fellow*, 24 July 1841 <<http://galegroup.com>> [accessed July 2011].

May 1864, for instance, a pageant took place in Stratford-upon-Avon to commemorate Shakespeare's achievements. The *Birmingham Daily Post* reported the affair, sneeringly noting that 'the lower classes [...] wanted a pageant' which was provided by 'an independent committee [...] for the benefit of the masses and publicans'.⁶⁸ Setting aside the paper's dismissal of the event as 'descending to that level', it is fascinating that in the *Romeo and Juliet* procession the lovers appeared in a chariot, followed only by Friar Laurence.⁶⁹ Although a Catholic monk in his cowl was a conspicuous enough choice for a pageant, that the organisers chose to include him in the procession is perhaps testament to the importance of the character to later Victorian audiences.

But to reach this conclusion, it is necessary to recall early readings of Laurence, by Coleridge and Knight, which demonstrate an admiration for the 'kind old man'.⁷⁰ Contrary to assumptions discussed in Chapter One about impractical religious seclusion, Knight focused on Laurence's medicinal skills, claiming that he is 'valuable' and able to 'exercise useful functions when thrust into the world'.⁷¹ Similarly, Coleridge suggested that the Friar's speeches are 'immediately necessary to the carrying on of the plot'⁷² and that 'the priestly character' is depicted 'with love and respect'.⁷³ The vocabulary used to describe Laurence in these early century readings implies his benevolence and centrality in the progression of the plot.

⁶⁸ 'Shakespeare Entertainments at Stratford', *Birmingham Daily Post*, 3 May 1864 <<http://galegroup.com>> [accessed June 2010].

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Charles Knight, *William Shakespeare: A Biography*, p. 108.

⁷¹ Charles Knight, *Studies of Shakespeare*, p. 225.

⁷² Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *The Literary Remains of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. by Henry Nelson Coleridge, 4 vols. (London: William Pickering, 1836), II, p. 155.

⁷³ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Seven Lectures on Shakespeare and Milton* (1856; repr. New York: Ayer Publishing, 1968), p. 75.

While the focus here was on Laurence's practical guidance, criticism after the tide of anti-Catholicism had died down appropriated his flaws into the progressive paradigm of late-century redemption. Being a Catholic and, by inclination, more likely to defend Laurence, Henry Sebastian Bowden observed that the character 'speaks of the physical not the moral order [...] his is no utopian, rose-coloured optimism; he sees things as they are [...] through the light of faith in his own soul'.⁷⁴ Using 'faith' to direct the tides and flows of earthly existence, though a potentially naïve idea, is fascinating when applied to Laurence; it offers to redeem the character of culpability and imbues his actions with a redemptive agenda. Bowden's reference to the 'moral order' echoes Farrar's notion of inherent 'faith and goodness', and it was to this human aspect of Laurence that Dowden, Marshall and Boas turned.

Since Friar Laurence was not directly accused of impropriety by commentators, his hands-on approach appealed to the emerging liberal tastes for accessible Christianity. Religious or otherwise, this subscribes to the concept of an instinctive guide towards 'goodness'. It is this sense of inherent virtue that is discernable in Dowden's critique of Laurence who, he argued, uses 'prudence [...] moderation [...] sage counsels [and] amiable sophistries [to] guide two young passionate lives'.⁷⁵ The connotations of these virtues pertain to practicality in the same way that the term 'amiable' attributes Laurence's dealings with the lovers to benevolence. Like Dowden, Bowden's acknowledgement of Laurence's 'physical' preoccupations offers to re-evaluate the definition of redemption, turning it away from an endeavour for spiritual sanctity, towards the idea of *earthly* wisdom and, ultimately, survival.

⁷⁴ Henry Sebastian Bowden, p. 410.

⁷⁵ Edward Dowden, p. 91.

In fact, survival through sophistry, far from prioritising practicality over the saving of the soul, emphasises the necessity of earthly experience in the pursuit for salvation. Because, as Maurice sought to argue, ‘the lord of the universe is a healer, and that we are to be healers under him’,⁷⁶ the task of redeeming souls is an entirely human affair. By this logic, Laurence too is a ‘healer’ with his herbs and elixir, not as an overseer or a moraliser, but as a human, flawed man. This was precisely what Dowden sought to emphasise in his claim that Laurence is ‘misled by error as the rest [and] he too, old man, had his lesson to learn’.⁷⁷ Similarly, Frederick S. Boas suggested that ‘the Friar, when he has briefly told his tale, is dumb; moralising maxims can avail nothing in the sight of those fair bodies stretched in death’.⁷⁸ He is, Boas observed, just as much ‘fortune’s fool’ as the lovers,⁷⁹ making him a fallible figure rather than just a ‘useful’ or ‘necessary’ plot device, as suggested by Coleridge and Knight earlier in the century.

The humanisation of the ‘kind old man’ was demonstrated by Frank Marshall who discussed Laurence in terms of a father figure. Marshall suggested that the playwright ‘has thoroughly entered into the affectionate relations which existed between a young man, like Romeo, and his spiritual director’.⁸⁰ The focus here on ‘relations’, ‘affection’ and ‘spiritual director’ fuses together the roles of teacher and guardian of the soul. But together with this mutual relationship between a guide and his pupil, Marshall likened Romeo’s affection for Laurence to ‘filial love and implicit reliance’: neither of which pertains to the soul.⁸¹ Laurence, as well as being Knight’s ‘kind’ man and Dowden’s ‘prudent’ guide, became the active paternal figure – that Romeo would

⁷⁶ Frederick Denison Maurice, *Lectures to Ladies on Practical Subjects*, p. 40.

⁷⁷ Edward Dowden, p. 91.

⁷⁸ Frederick S. Boas, p. 214.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 214.

⁸⁰ Frank A. Marshall, ‘Introduction to *Romeo and Juliet*’, in *Henry Irving Shakespeare*, I, 177-84 (p. 184).

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 184.

otherwise lack – eliciting respect and love from his son. Far from usurping the paternal role, as lamented by mid-century objectors to the confessional, Marshall perceived Laurence as a benevolent parental guardian, embracing rather than coveting the privilege of confession.

The transformation from peripheral and, potentially, perverse Roman Catholic into benevolent father figure is arguably attributable to the shift in religious priority in the second half of the century. Laurence's lack of religious discourse, lamented by Birch in 1848, subscribed to the later century prioritising of earthly guidance and universal redemption over rhetoric calculated to elicit fear and submission.

Falconbridge

Unlike Laurence, responses to Philip Falconbridge do not appear to have undergone a shift of focus so much as a difference in degrees of critical attention. Since the eighteenth century – after Colley Cibber had, in the words of Thomas Davies in 1785, 'murdered'⁸² Falconbridge in his *Papal Tyranny in the Reign of King John* – the character of the Bastard was regarded with respect by critics like Knight, Lloyd and Charles Clarke.

According to Lloyd, Falconbridge is 'uniformally bluff and outspoken, [has] an English spirit [and] loyalty to ideal qualities'.⁸³ There are three distinct facets to Lloyd's appraisal: candour, patriotism and didacticism, all of which echo the discourse of self-help. Like Smiles' concept of the working or lowly man toiling to improve himself materially and spiritually, Falconbridge elevates himself from the stigma of a marginal

⁸² Thomas Davies, *Dramatic Miscellanies Consisting of Critical Observations on Several Plays of Shakespeare*, 3 vols. (Dublin: S. Price, H. Whitestone, W. Wilson, R. Moncreiffe, L. White, R. Marchbank, T. Walker, P. Byrne, R. Burton, J. Cash, W. Sleater, 1785), I, p. 2.

⁸³ William Watkiss Lloyd, p. 384.

position (illegitimacy) through loyalty to his king. One of the most prominent observations about Falconbridge was the difference between the character as conceived by Shakespeare, and that of Bale's Bastard in the *Troublesome Reign of King John* (1591). For instance, according to Knight,

He is a bold, mouthing bully [...]. There is not a particle in this character of the irrepressible gaiety – the happy mixture of fun and sarcasm – the laughing words accompanying the stern deeds – which distinguish the Bastard of Shakespeare.⁸⁴

Like Lloyd, Knight's focus on words and deeds offers to revere Falconbridge as a man of principle and action. It was this sense of duty and honour in the character that made him especially pertinent to the second half of the nineteenth century where patriotism was welcomed during the papal aggression as well as the Crimean and Boer Wars.⁸⁵ It is worth noting that Smiles' conception of the ideal man, in *Self Help*, was tied to what he called 'English liberty' and the national pursuit of prosperity and continual progress of 'the English character'.⁸⁶ Resting 'true' to England, by contributing in some way towards its success, seemed to offer Smiles a sense of belonging. For Falconbridge, this belonging is crucial. According to Knight, 'the Bastard is the one partisan who never deserts' the King and, by implication, England.⁸⁷ In fact, in newspapers ranging from the liberal *Morning Chronicle* to the conservative *Morning Post* – on topics as broad as Irish home rule, Catholic emancipation, and trade disputes – Falconbridge's closing couplet was repeated and even made into a flag: 'nought shall make us rue/ If England to itself do rest but true' (5.7.126-7).⁸⁸ Because, as Dowden argued, the Bastard is the only representative of 'genuine and hearty patriotism' in the play who 'urges the duty of

⁸⁴ Charles Knight, *Studies of Shakespeare*, p. 199.

⁸⁵ For more on *King John* and the Boer War see pp. 260-2.

⁸⁶ Samuel Smiles, *Self Help* (1859; London: John Murray, 1905), pp. 18-19.

⁸⁷ Charles Knight, *Studies of Shakespeare*, p. 199.

⁸⁸ 'Advance in the Price of Coal', *The Morning Post*, 29 September 1879; 'Lord Salisbury in Ulster', *Aberdeen Weekly Journal*, 25 May 1893; 'Lord Winchilsea and The People of England', *The Morning Chronicle*, 9 June 1834 <<http://galegroup.com>> [accessed March 2011].

an effort at self-defence for the sake of honour',⁸⁹ he is a man absolutely certain of his duty in life.

Together with his patriotism, Falconbridge would appear to be in just as credible an educational position as Friar Laurence. In fact, Falconbridge went a step further than the 'kind old man' by actually employing religious or, more specifically, eschatological rhetoric. Falconbridge condemns Hubert to what would amount to eternal torment for his suspected murder of Arthur: 'Beyond the infinite and boundless reach/ Of mercy [...] art thou damned, Hubert [...] thou'rt damned as black [and] more deep damned than Prince Lucifer' (4.3.116-8, 121-2). Frank Marshall, in his notes on the line 'damn'd as black', quoted Howard Staunton's reference to the blacked faces of actors playing doomed souls in Mystery plays.⁹⁰ Rather than addressing Falconbridge's actual speech, these editors directed attention to historical accuracy. Furthermore, Charles Cowden Clarke argued that Falconbridge's expostulations at Hubert are 'sublime vituperation'.⁹¹ Being 'sublime' releases the Bastard from the full weight of his seemingly callous condemnations. In other words, and in whatever way, Falconbridge seemed to have been cleared of responsibility for his invective.

Furthermore, the historian Henry Halford Vaughan argued in his work on Shakespeare's tragedies that 'persons guilty of such crimes [as murder] contracted thereby for themselves and their offspring a constitutional debility incapable of resisting injuries which would not affect other men'.⁹² Despite Falconbridge's clear references to damnation, that Vaughan focused on the earthly torment of the murderer is arguably

⁸⁹ Edward Dowden, p. 172.

⁹⁰ Frank Marshall, 'Notes to *King John*', in *Henry Irving Shakespeare*, III, 207-40 (p. 232).

⁹¹ Charles Cowden Clarke, p. 334.

⁹² Henry Halford Vaughan, *New Readings and New Renderings in Shakespeare's Tragedies*, 3 vols. (London: Kegan, Paul, Trench & Co., 1886), III, p. 76.

testament to the credit given to the Bastard's own desire to be merciful. Returning to Clarke's interpretation of this episode, along with his claims to the Bastard's 'sublime' use of damnation, he suggested that 'we discover working in him that divine maturer insight into the rottenness of contest and strife'.⁹³ It would appear that, for Clarke, Falconbridge's references to hellfire and eternal torment were a product of his frustration and anger at the cruelty of the world, rather than proceeding from a suspicion of Hubert.

Falconbridge's intentions in this episode have important theological implications for both himself and Hubert. Clarke suggested that Hubert's 'temptation by the King' is not consistent with his character. This, in turn, renders Falconbridge's 'if thou did but consent' far less applicable to the situation. From a theological perspective, Falconbridge's argument conflicts with that of Isabella when pleading for Angelo: 'His act did not o'ertake his bad intent/ And must be buried but as an intent' (5.1.456-7). Benjamin Jowett toiled, more generally, over the implications of 'original sin'. According to Romans 5:12, 'sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned'.⁹⁴ Jowett examined what is meant by 'death', 'one man' and 'sin', and questioned whether Adam's act was the first transgression, or the first introduction of sin into the world, and how this one action can feasibly be said to condemn the entirety of humanity. Jowett concluded that:

God can never [...] judge us without reference to all our circumstances and antecedents [...] if he requires holiness before he will save, much more [...] will he require sin before he dooms us to perdition.⁹⁵

⁹³ Charles Cowden Clarke, p. 335.

⁹⁴ *The Holy Bible, Quarcenary Edition*, ed. by Gordon Campbell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 158.

⁹⁵ Benjamin Jowett, 'Imputation of the Sin of Adam', in *A Collection of Theological Essays From Various Authors*, pp. 265-72 (p. 270).

‘Consent’ or ‘intent’ to commit an act of sin, by Jowett’s logic, cannot be weighed equally with the undertaking of the act itself. Clarke’s forgiveness of Hubert, then, despite conflicting with Falconbridge, feeds into the wider eagerness to excuse the Bastard by imbuing his eschatological reasoning with ‘sublime’ and, by implication, subjective connotations. Superficially, the Bastard’s words are stronger and more condemning than any of Hamlet’s or Isabella’s most vehement denunciations of their enemies. However, it was his overall character of inherent nobility and genuine abhorrence at the idea of Arthur’s murder that softened, for Clarke, Marshall and Vaughan, at least, his references to damnation.

While Laurence was humanised so as to turn the spiritual leader into an approachable, fatherly man, rather than a self-important preacher, Falconbridge seems to have been elevated from an illegitimate nobody to a patriotic role model. As Boas concluded, ‘the blacker the dangers that threaten, the higher does his spirit mount, till in the end he fills the role [...] of national leader and hero [allowing] the nation to renew its youth’.⁹⁶ These concepts of mounting, leadership and renewal all contribute to the grander sense of redemption in the play, whereby the bodies and souls of Englishmen are drawn together to protect the interests of the nation. Through his recognition of sin and endeavour to correct sinners, Falconbridge became the true ‘hero’ of both the play and what Smiles called ‘English character’.

Katharine

In the same way that Laurence and Falconbridge were read as earthly guides or models of conduct, Katharine was admired for her ability to direct others towards right action.

⁹⁶ Frederick S. Boas, pp. 248-9.

But just as Laurence's 'clandestine stratagems'⁹⁷ were troubling for Birch, so too was the Catholicism of Katharine an issue of contention for critics in the early Victorian period. Despite being praised as the character who insists on her rights to thwart the corrupted prelate, Katharine's inherent respect for and adherence to her religion did not go unnoticed. As Lloyd noted, 'even she can endure to style him [Wolsey] his noble grace'.⁹⁸ Ultimately, in her plea for the aid of 'his holiness the Pope', Katharine could not be placed into a tidy Protestant category.

A balance was found by Anna Jameson in her claim that Katharine is depicted with 'opposing yet harmonising' qualities which include 'inflexible resolution [...] soft resignation [...] temper [...] a deep sense of religion [and] a degree of austerity'.⁹⁹ Although resolve and submission seem 'opposing', that Katharine submits to the wills of Henry and Wolsey unwillingly can hardly be seen as inconsistent with her determination. If Katharine truly has 'opposing' qualities, it is possible to attribute their source to her 'deep sense of religion'.¹⁰⁰ How, Jameson seems to demand, can Katharine be assertive, resolute and virtuous, and a Roman Catholic? Jameson's answer lies in her use of the term 'harmonising', because it is the character's ability to reconcile her faith in God, heaven and miracles with a consciousness of corruption and fallibility in her spiritual leaders, that is mirrored in Katharine's propensity to forgive and reconcile those around her through guidance.

Although Katharine's speeches in the play are lifted from historical chronicles, critical focus was often directed at her ability, like Laurence and Falconbridge, to guide.

⁹⁷ William John Birch, p. 217.

⁹⁸ William Watkiss Lloyd, p. 310.

⁹⁹ Anna Jameson, p. 304.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 304.

In Katharine's first scene, she not only explains the details of taxation on 'the sixth part' of every man's income (1.2.58), but she makes a logical connection between the people's allegiance and the King's duty to earn the respect of his subjects. It is through her lucidity that Henry is forced to turn his attention to fiscal concerns. As Jameson observed, this scene depicts Katharine's 'upright reasoning of mind'.¹⁰¹ Like Laurence and Falconbridge, Katharine is able to guide those around her in matters of earthly affairs. More importantly, Jameson referred to the 'intrinsic excellence' of Katharine's 'moral firmness', which comes back to Farrar's concept of inherent 'faith and goodness'.

If Katharine was an instinctive earthly guide, she was no less of a spiritual director. Just as Falconbridge awakens Hubert's conscience with the terrors of damnation, so too does Katharine alert her tormentors to the inevitability of eternal judgement: 'Heaven is above all yet; there sits a judge/ That no king can corrupt' (3.1.99-100). Although far from the eschatological discourse of Falconbridge, Katharine's ability to remind two supposedly holy men about the infallibility of divine judgement seems to be just as powerful and possessed of equal conviction.

Despite being a queen, Katharine is able to relate to her subjects and inferiors through what Boas called 'whole-hearted charity and powers of forgiveness'.¹⁰² Her initial concerns after Henry's call for a divorce are not so much for herself as for her ladies in waiting, just as her dying thoughts are not for her own soul as for that of the King. To echo Lloyd, 'to bless those who curse and injure us is consistent with

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p. 304.

¹⁰² Frederick S. Boas, p. 548.

Christian principle'.¹⁰³ But, as Lloyd also argued, Katharine's charity is mingled with her sense of 'absolute sovereignty' which makes her appear 'vindictive'.¹⁰⁴ When the messenger fails to kneel in her presence, Katharine expostulates, 'deserve we no more reverence?' (4.2.100), before ordering him out of her sight. Far from being what Lloyd called 'the pride of aristocracy', however, that Katharine never forgets her inherent supremacy, suggests that she resists the disillusionment and abandonment to fate suffered by characters like Hamlet, Romeo and Constance. Through her inherent virtue of nobility, then, Katharine acted as an example both to women, as Jameson argued, and, as Lloyd observed, to Christians.

While the three characters are historically and even, in terms of plot and situation, disparate, that each one was described in terms of charity, virtue and guidance is highly complimentary. Though none of the three characters is 'fighting' for God – as Furnivall argued of Isabella¹⁰⁵ – they all believe in the goodness of others, and forgive not only out of mercy, but a genuine concern for humanity at large. Benevolence that is free from the selfish taints of Isabella and Hamlet, coupled with the flawed yet realistic natures of Laurence, Falconbridge and Katharine, made these characters seem like advocates of a new way of thinking about religion and what it means to be 'redeemed'.

Sacrifice

Moving away from the images of benevolent guide and heroic model, it is vital to focus on the concept of sacrifice. From a Catholic perspective, according to Henry Sebastian Bowden, redemption was closely bound up with 'sacrifice', 'prayer' and

¹⁰³ William Watkiss Lloyd, p. 310.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 310.

¹⁰⁵ Frederick James Furnivall, p. lxxv.

‘confession’.¹⁰⁶ Bowden argued that sacrifice (physical, emotional or intellectual) is necessary to obtain salvation. This Catholic reading of sacrifice or spiritual martyrdom was, for Bowden, a quintessential aspect of Shakespeare’s drama. On the other hand, Maurice conceived of sacrifice as something inherently human, rather than necessarily religious and, most significantly, something that can be exchanged for blessings:

[...] it lies at the very root of our being; our lives stand upon it; society is held together by it; all power to be right and to do right, begins with the offering up of ourselves, because it is thus that the righteous lord makes us like himself.¹⁰⁷

There is, by this logic, no need for fasting, prayer and confessing in an act of purging to be ‘sacrificial’; rather an ethos is required, at an ideological level, allowing all humans to act in the interests of the many over the few. Universal charity, in all of its manifestations, seems to be the true sacrifice that pays homage to Christ’s Atonement.

Nevertheless, conceptions of sacrifice, from without religious parameters, fit into wider concerns about population, survival and evolution. Thomas Malthus’ theory on population famously influenced Darwin who asserted that all existence is ‘selected’ and sacrificed according to the laws of nature.¹⁰⁸ By this logic, all life is constantly being redeemed and improved upon in, what Darwin called, the existential ‘progress towards perfection’.¹⁰⁹

Although these three understandings of sacrifice seem incongruous, each one holds at its core a redemptive agenda. Whether offering the body, soul or life itself, sacrifice seemed to be held as absolutely indispensable to the progression and

¹⁰⁶ Henry Sebastian Bowden, p. 29.

¹⁰⁷ Frederick Denison Maurice, *The Doctrine of Sacrifice Deduced From the Scripture*, p. 44.

¹⁰⁸ See Charles Darwin, *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection*, ed. by J. W. Burrow (1859; repr. London: Penguin Books Ltd., 1985).

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 459.

redemption of humanity. Returning, then, to Katharine, Laurence and Falconbridge, all three were perceived as plot healers, sacrificing themselves or some aspect of their souls to a better cause.

Katharine

Since Katharine was considered a pious woman with genuine ‘faith and goodness’, it was impossible for critics to overlook her role in the collapse and restoration of established religion within the play. In other words, Katharine’s sacrifice brings about redemption.

Lloyd alluded to the ‘great internal reconstruction of the Church’ which followed ‘Henry’s rejection of the authority of the Pope’.¹¹⁰ This combination of ‘rejection’ and ‘reconstruction’ is encapsulated in the life and death of Katharine. Her implicit respect for the Pope, coupled with her belief that ‘heaven is above all yet’ (3.1.101), combine to make her demise all the more symbolic of the simultaneous death of Roman Catholicism in England. As Boas noted at the end of the century,

It is evident that if Shakespeare meant the play originally to turn on the separation of the English from the Roman Church, the adherents of the latter would at least have had no cause to complain of the picture drawn of one of its representative figures’.¹¹¹

The one *good* Catholic in other words, arguably in the entirety of Shakespeare’s cannon, perishes along with her religion, accepting her fate willingly.

But, as Boas also observed, Katharine’s presence in the play introduces an element of confusion:

Our sympathy is for the grief and goodness of Queen Katharine, while the course of the action requires us to entertain as a theme of joy and

¹¹⁰ William Watkiss Lloyd, p. 312.

¹¹¹ Frederick S. Boas, p. 448.

compensatory satisfaction the coronation of Anne Bullen and the birth of her daughter; which are in fact a part of Katharine's injury, and amount to little less than the ultimate triumph of wrong.¹¹²

Because Katharine's demise occurs an entire act before the end of the play, concerns were raised by Knight, Marshall and Lloyd, amongst others, about the dramatic credibility of the plot. Nevertheless, Boas' parallel between Anne and Katharine offers an intriguing solution to the plot predicament. Since Lloyd perceived the play as the 'reconstruction' of religion itself, Katharine and her respect for Roman Catholicism were part of the old order, which goes some way towards explaining the miracle and spectacle of her death-bed vision of angels. Jameson called Katharine 'meekly pious', and claimed that her 'vision of celestial joy [is a form of] beautiful religious enthusiasm'.¹¹³ This 'enthused' anticipation of death is far from the bleak fear of purgatory expected by Claudio in *Measure for Measure*. Katharine's anticipation of immediate heavenly ascent acts as a morally feasible exchange of her life for the regeneration of the Church. So Katharine's demise is followed immediately by Anne going into labour and giving birth to Elizabeth. In fact, the washing away of the past is quite literal, with the play culminating in the baptism and, by implication, regeneration of England's future under a new ideological order. The struggle between Rome and England is, simultaneously, washed away allowing all Englishmen and women to become one society under a single Church. If the virtuous Spanish queen had to give up her life for that, then Boas' concern about the 'triumph of wrong' was unnecessary.

Several decades before Boas, Knight concluded that 'when the grave hides that pure, and gentle noble sufferer', Elizabeth is born and it is at this point that 'the link is complete between the generation that is past and the generation which looks upon' the

¹¹² Ibid., p. 547.

¹¹³ Anna Jameson, p. 317.

future.¹¹⁴ As discussed in relation to Falconbridge, Smiles' sense of 'English character' seems to have been born from the Reformation. The Protestant man labours and toils on his linear journey towards salvation without the encumbrances of ritual and liturgy. In Shakespeare's world, without Katharine, the birth of English Protestantism could not have taken place. Perhaps the fascination with Katharine in the second half of the century pertained to the equally increased obsession with establishing and maintaining Smiles' 'English character' in a country united, if not under one Church, then certainly by Farrar's notion of 'faith and goodness'.

Falconbridge

While Katharine was often read as a sacrifice in exchange for national and religious redemption, Falconbridge the 'hero' tended to be perceived as a man who offers himself to a greater cause without necessarily expecting anything in return. Lloyd suggested that 'when, transferred to the court, he recognises the genius of the place, it is in self-defence that he proposes to cope with it'.¹¹⁵ Falconbridge renders himself up to the services of England, fighting in the name of his king and remaining steadfast in his allegiance to his country while others choose to forsake it. It is this offering of the self – without the destructive tendencies of Hamlet to vengeance and Romeo to passion – that attracted the admiration of Lloyd.

The King, therefore, was the key to understanding Falconbridge. In Macready's production in 1836, while his John was 'mean and selfish', the Falconbridge of Kemble was 'noble [with] chivalry and natural dignity'.¹¹⁶ That such a character could conscionably align himself with John, implied that the King is deserving of his

¹¹⁴ Charles Knight, *Studies of Shakespeare*, p. 403.

¹¹⁵ William Watkiss Lloyd, p. 384.

¹¹⁶ 'Theatrical Examiner', *The Examiner*, 9 October 1836 <<http://galegroup.com>> [accessed February 2009].

allegiance. By this logic, which was shared by Knight and Dowden, Falconbridge's loyalty acts as a prop upon which John can rest his reputation. Falconbridge, to all intents and purposes, redeems the cowardly and irreligious John by offering himself as a knight and subject. 'He feels' Boas suggested, 'darkly that all is not well with John and the English cause, but he has too much patriotism to imitate the nobles and join the country's foes'.¹¹⁷ Fighting in the name of the King, by this logic, becomes Falconbridge's sacrifice. Unlike Katharine who literally gives herself to heaven for another equally literal regeneration, Falconbridge seems to enact Maurice's notion of sacrifice not through suffering or torment, but by a conscious endeavouring after something outside of himself.

On a literal level, Falconbridge sacrifices prosperity, associated with his brother, for the sake of his king. Despite his insight into the material preoccupations of the 'mad kings' in the 'mad world' (2.1.587), that Falconbridge chooses to forgo wealth and land in favour of loyalty and soldiering, suggests that his sacrifice is daily and a kind of existential choice, rather than a transitory or single act that purchases divine favour. Morally speaking, Boas argued, Falconbridge is 'the very salt of the play'.¹¹⁸ To admire a comparatively peripheral character, possessed of a short temper and with the stain of illegitimacy, is, in itself, a liberal undertaking. It seems that Falconbridge was admired for his self-sacrificial patriotism and candour in a world where clerical and monarchical corruption were inescapable.

Friar Laurence

Moving away from the heroic Bastard's sacrifice for his country, along with Katharine's noble offering for the future of England, Laurence's exchange of integrity for the lovers

¹¹⁷ Frederick S. Boas, p. 247.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 247.

and, subsequently, the lovers for peace, invites a different kind of redemptive discourse. Laurence's sacrifice, ultimately, pertains to his religious duty to salvage souls which he appears to forgo in favour of redeeming earthly lives.

Contrary to Birch's later claim that Laurence's 'clandestine stratagems' are a result of his 'abuse of the confessional',¹¹⁹ William Maginn had suggested that the Friar acts only out of a wish to unite the two families. To achieve this, Maginn observed that the lovers have to become 'poor sacrifices', however unintentional, in the move towards a healed conclusion.¹²⁰ By this logic, while Katharine and Falconbridge offer themselves, Laurence makes a sacrifice of the young couple in order to bring about reconciliation and, by extension, redemption. While Maginn seemed to make no judgement about Laurence's interference, Lloyd observed that when the time comes for him to make his apologies to the Prince, the Friar makes no mention of his 'hope of making the marriage effect a peace'.¹²¹ Lloyd's focus on culpability in Laurence's actions would suggest that the character was placed into a conscionable but not entirely guilt-free category. Maginn's and Lloyd's early Victorian interpretations, however, can be said to fit into the parameters of the anti-Catholic ideologies discussed in Chapter One.

Although Laurence does indeed exchange the lovers for peace, it does not follow that the sacrifice was selfish. The human aspect of Laurence, as observed earlier, was noted by Dowden in his illustration of a man in need of a 'lesson'.¹²² Like Dowden, the Anglican F. W. Robertson was interested in the humanity of Shakespeare's characters.

¹¹⁹ William John Birch, p. 217.

¹²⁰ William Maginn, p. 76.

¹²¹ William Watkiss Lloyd, p. 367.

¹²² Edward Dowden, p. 91.

Robertson argued that the Atonement was sufficient to save humanity from ‘the feeling of God’s wrath [and] the sense of banishment from the presence of his beauty and his love’.¹²³ In other words, redemption is an unconditional part of the fabric of existence. This is arguably a theological perspective that redeems all action and individuals from the stain of sin. The sense of godly presence in earthly existence was, for Robertson, implicit in *Romeo and Juliet*’s thematic focus on destiny. In the play, Robertson observed, ‘there is no act which has not its excuse and its apparent inevitableness [sic]’ which teaches the reader that ‘our blessedness and our misery is the exact result of our own acts’.¹²⁴ Robertson’s generalisation about the plot corresponds with Dowden’s image of Laurence as a man who makes unfortunate decisions and must learn from his errors. Within the context of Robertson’s theology, his interpretation of acts and repercussions offers to redeem Laurence from those earlier accusations of Maginn and Lloyd about his seemingly careless sacrifice.

It is important to be aware that, though Robertson was himself an Anglican, he held the Roman Catholic practice of penance in high esteem. The Church of Rome, he argued, ‘dwells chiefly on that which is the most glorious element in the nature of God – love. Whereas Protestantism fixes attention more on that which is the strongest principle in the bosom of man – faith’.¹²⁵ If Laurence acted selflessly then, like the Catholic penitents Robertson appeared to admire, his transgression was made under the belief that God’s forgiveness extends to all good intentions in the offices of love. So far from ‘investing’ in and losing his gamble with the lovers, as Dowden suggested, Robertson’s logic would imply that Laurence’s sacrifice is just as earthly as his reward will be heavenly.

¹²³ F. W. Robertson, *Life and Letters*, 2 vols. (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1866), I, p. 305.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 300-1.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 303.

Crucially, whereas Katharine and Falconbridge offer themselves up to better their country and people, Laurence's sacrifice pertains to his profession. Rather than discoursing in complex theology, and moralising on the implications of his actions, Laurence consistently focuses on earthly affairs with little reference to a hereafter or the condition of the soul. Although this led critics like Birch towards an anti-Catholic reading of the character, Laurence's lack of spirituality was praised by critics such as Knight and Dowden. In fact, it was perceived as a conscious choice, resulting in clear and clarified discussions with penitents. Though Laurence does indeed 'have his lesson to learn',¹²⁶ his selfless desire to assist others made his sacrifice appeal to the socialist agenda of liberal Christianity.

Conclusion

Through their willingness to help others, and by virtue of their marginal statuses within each play, Katharine, Falconbridge and Laurence earned the respect of critics like Marshall and Boas, together with clerics such as Robertson and Farrar. The shift in spiritual priority from fear and punishment to hope and redemption can be seen not only in the critical responses to these peripheral characters, but also in the very fact that comparatively subordinate figures were offered attention. As Charles Cowden Clarke asserted in his work on Shakespeare's minor characters, figures like Falconbridge act as 'harmonising' agents.¹²⁷ Far from being dramatic tools in the linear movement towards a conclusion, what critics like Clarke, Lloyd, Dowden and Boas sought to demonstrate was the humanity implicit in those hitherto overlooked individuals. In the words of Smiles, 'many are the lives of men unwritten, which have nevertheless as powerfully

¹²⁶ Edward Dowden, p. 91.

¹²⁷ Charles Cowden Clarke, p. 4

influenced civilisation and progress as the more fortunate great whose names are recorded in biography'.¹²⁸

Chapter Conclusion

Forgiveness, mercy and a conscious effort to improve the self, though part of the ethic of mid-Victorian preachers like Spurgeon, did not invariably call for verbal diatribes and pontificating that reduce congregations into fear and submission. Because, as Farrar was convinced, Shakespeare's characters represent 'faith and goodness', the stories of figures like Hamlet, Isabella, Falconbridge, Laurence and Katharine serve as warnings as well as inspiration in the earthly journey of self-improvement. Charity and guidance, for the Christian Socialists of the Victorian era, were the cornerstones of society and spirituality. If escaping the fear of eternal punishment through love of God and others was the aim of the second half of the century, then it is fitting that Bishop Wordsworth concluded that Shakespeare's fundamental moral is 'that redemption is no partial gift, as the disease it was mercifully designed to cure is universal, so the application of the remedy is universal also'.¹²⁹

Whether through preaching or noble conduct, actively seeking the redemption of the self and others played up to the increasing Victorian desire to create an England and so-called 'English character' from self-sufficient, benevolent and hard-working individuals. However imminent hellfire may be, any deliberate damning or condemning of souls to eternal torment flew in the face of the emerging liberal Christian ethic of universal salvation. It was this universality that made peripheral dramatic characters

¹²⁸ Samuel Smiles, p. 19.

¹²⁹ Charles Wordsworth, p. 131.

come to the fore as heroes and heroines in their own right, and become agents of the universal concept of 'redemption'.

Part One: Critical Readings
Conclusion

The purpose of this section has been to identify a correlation between religious concerns and Shakespeare reception using Catholicism as a point of reference. Three questions were asked with reference to Wordsworth's observations about Shakespeare. First, how do Shakespeare's Catholic characters transgress the moral laws to which they themselves claim allegiance? Secondly, to what extent do Shakespeare's characters, religious or otherwise, demonstrate a lack of 'thankfulness' towards God? And how can redemption be universal?

The previous chapters have shown that moral laws were considered transgressed within Shakespeare's drama through deviation from the Protestant ideal of domesticity. Celibacy was tied up with clerical corruption, as well as sexual abnormality, if not pathology. Reading characters as ignorant cardinals and marriageable nuns not only appropriated Shakespeare's figures into respectable or comprehensive paradigms, but it provides an invaluable indication of mid-century approaches to Catholicism as a theme within the plays.

Secondly, self-sacrificial suicidal trajectories, like those of Romeo and Constance, meant that these characters failed to subscribe to the survivalist ethic that emerged in the Victorian era. Because Hamlet, Romeo and Constance experience disillusionment, self-pity and despair, they demonstrated a lack of 'thankfulness' for life; instead they submit themselves to what Bowden perceived as Catholic tragedy. While there was no room for such destructive disillusionment in the forward march towards evolutionary perfection and salvation, Shakespeare's despairing characters were analyzed in terms of caution: they were to be admired but not emulated.

Finally, with the rejection of ritualism and institutionalism associated with Roman Catholicism, preaching to and leading others in a communal pursuit for salvation, something that was fundamental to Protestant nonconformism, meant that all willing souls could find redemption. Shakespeare's characters, though Catholic, appealed to an era famed for its pontificators, one that engaged in debates about sanctification and where faith had become a right to which all could lay claim. By assessing non-Catholic responses to distinctly Catholic characters, addressing these questions throughout the previous chapters has allowed for the placing of Shakespeare criticism into a historiographical framework, outlined by a universal and controversial topic: religion.

From the anti-Catholicism of the 1850s to the idolatry and regressive disillusionment associated with rationalism in the 1860s and 1870s, through to the liberal Christianity of the final quarter of the century, it is possible to trace critical approaches to Shakespeare back to these periods of religious change in the Victorian era. Conflicting opinions of Isabella seeking a life of piety; the priorities of Cardinals Pandolph and Wolsey; the struggles of Hamlet with his disillusionment and quasi-scientific 'experimentation', and the duty of Laurence administering to the earthly tribulations of his penitents, were all stories inherently bound to the themes and concerns of Victorian Christianity. Despite inviting discourse on conventual seclusion, papacy, imagination and purgatory, the plays and their characters seemed to transcend their Catholic contexts, and were 'performed', by Poole's definition, within the eclectic world of Victorian religion.

Nevertheless, whether critics sought to offer analysis of the plays or to discover the key to Shakespeare's ideological affinities, certainly made a difference to their interpretations. Finding assurance of moral and religious soundness in the plays was a means of gratifying individual beliefs, as well as laying claim to the mind of Shakespeare himself. Indeed, G. F. Thompson observes that 'what emerged during the nineteenth century [...] was character and performance read as pertaining to a moral object. Here character is a projection or correlate of the reader's or audience's moral self or personality'.¹ But reading the plays through the medium of what Russell Jackson has called 'moral significance'² allowed for critics to impose ideological frameworks, deliberately ignoring or rejecting deviant themes. This is clear in Wordsworth's, Simpson's and Birch's determinations to prove Shakespeare a Protestant, Roman Catholic, and atheist, respectively. Though such speculations were not uncommon throughout the period, it is worth quoting Dowden: 'the spirit of his [Shakespeare's] faith is not to be ascertained by bringing together little sentences from the utterances of this one of his *dramatis personae* and of that'.³ Indeed, there is something naïve about the desire to re-invent Shakespeare's works by seeking out the man beneath them. The point, here, is that critical agenda cannot be extracted from reception history and certainly not in a context where religion and religious identity were at the stake.

To repeat Prince's claim quoted in the introduction, non-linear explorations of Shakespeare reception are a rejection of 'any organizing framework that would

¹ Grahame F. Thompson, 'Approaches to "Performance": An Analysis of Terms', in *Performance: Critical Concepts in Literacy and Cultural Studies*, ed. by Philip Auslander, 4 vols. (London: Taylor and Francis, 2003), I, 138-52 (p. 149).

² Russell Jackson, 'Victorian Editors of *As You Like It* and the Purposes of Editing', in *The Theory and Practice of Text-Editing*, ed. by Ian Small (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 142-56 (p. 145).

³ Edward Dowden, p. 38.

foreground the concerns of social historians'.⁴ It seems that, though historical events like the Oxford and muscular Christian Movements, for instance, offer fixed points around which to navigate critical responses, from a literary perspective it is necessary to take a broader view of the century's Shakespearean interpretation; after all, critical readings, like ideologies, take time to cultivate and manifest themselves in print. It is clear that pertinent religious debates about the Church of Rome, disillusionment and liberal Christianity provided conceptual ground on which to interpret, engage with and investigate Shakespeare's texts, themes and characters. Religion, in a broad sense, was inherent in the scholarly, or otherwise, eclectic 'interpretive word',⁵ to borrow Gadamer's terminology, that formed responses to Shakespeare's work.

⁴ Kathryn Prince, p. 1.

⁵ Hans Georg Gadamer, p. 469.

Part Two: Performance

Introduction

The second half of this thesis explores the intersections between the Church and stage using a variety of productions from William Charles Macready's early-century *King John* (1842) through to Oscar Asche's twentieth-century *Measure for Measure* (1906). From the theatrical phenomenon of the 'prop' to the spoken word, and the play as an instructive entity, the following chapters collectively explore the ways in which religion was performed within the context of Shakespeare on the Victorian stage.

It seems contradictory that 'moralism', as a vestige of Evangelism, was the ethos of the Victorian era and that the theatre was increasingly hailed as moral, because the most vehement objections to actors and the stage often derived from Evangelical sources.¹ Nevertheless, various clerics began to contest the Church's dismissive attitude towards theatricality. For instance, the Public Reading Society was established in 1859 to encourage working-class audiences to attend readings of plays, novels and poetry.² Rev. John Montesquieu Bellew was one amongst many clergymen who read plays, including *Hamlet*, for public 'education'.³ While the Public Reading Society bridged the gap between Church and stage by offering readings, rather than explicit performances, it was properly Stewart Headlam who brought the two spheres together in a public light through his establishment of the Church and Stage Guild in 1879. In addition to the Guild, the long-standing institution the Actor's Church Union was established in 1898.⁴ Towards the end of the century, moreover, actor-managers like Irving and Barrett had their productions frequented by respected members of the Anglican Church. So,

¹ See Richard Foulkes, *Church and Stage in Victorian England*, p. 238.

² 'Public Reading Society', *The English Journal of Education*, 13 (1859), 75-6.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 75-6.

⁴ Rev. Donald Hole, *The Church and Stage: The Early History of the Actor's Church Union* (London: Faith Press, 1934), pp. 23-30.

eventually, there was a link between Church and stage that resisted traditional objections to theatrical ‘morality’.

Within this context of growing religious tolerance towards theatre, particularly Shakespeare, it is necessary to turn to the second half of this thesis. Just as themes emerge from the study of written responses to the plays, so too is it possible to identify specific religious concerns in actual performances of the drama. Debates about religious symbols, language and scriptural interpretation can be traced to contemporary discussions about liturgy, theology and biblical criticism. How to perform or communicate ‘religion’ on stage, specifically Roman Catholicism, was an important question in a period where the symbols and language of Catholicism were charged with spiritual and even political weight.

In order to assess the intersections between the ‘Church’ and stage, this part of the thesis approaches the pertinent issues of ornaments, theology and interpretation through the helpful twentieth-century paradigm of performance theory. According to the performance theorist Bert O. States, theatre operates through a ‘symbiotic relationship’ between language and setting.⁵ Through the medium of these visual and spoken communicants, States argues that a metaphor or meaning is created.⁶ Using these two elements (setting and language) and their outcome (meaning), this section discusses the visual aspects of religion (ornaments and props); spoken language (verbal theology) and the delivery of meaning in the form of a parable.

⁵ Bert O. States, *Great Reckonings in Little Rooms: On the Phenomenology of Theatre* (London: University of California Press, 1985), p. 59.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 60.

Chapter Four examines the use of props and settings, or the visual aspect of drama, and their function within various productions. How crosses and symbolic ceremonies were used in performance reveals the shifting approaches to religious ornaments and, crucially, attitudes towards the enactment of Christianity within the context of entertainment. Moving away from the 'visual', Chapter Five discusses the linguistic features of theatre, focusing on the editing and performance of religious discourse within the context of the plays. As well as examining what was unspeakable on the stage, this chapter deals with the experience of listening to, and being persuaded by, language weighted with religious arguments. The final chapter of this section and thesis as a whole, looks at the meaning constructed out of language or setting, and argues that the play, as an entity, can be interpreted as a parable or metaphor from which an overall moral may be extracted. But as with parables, meaning cannot always be communicated in such a way as to control or 'fix' interpretation. This chapter, therefore, explores how the plays could be performed as parables and how, in turn, these parabolic narratives were interpreted by theatre audiences.

It is necessary, briefly, to note that theatrical records require a different kind of intellectual approach than the engagement with written criticism called for in Part One. Examining sources such as prompt books, illustrations, reviews, playbills, programmes and photographs is a way of interacting with theatrical material on a tangible level. These items all paint an elusive picture of transient events that cannot, in truth, be accurately reproduced. Nevertheless, attempting to reconstruct historical productions of the plays is necessary as a means of understanding the interactions between religion, theatre and Shakespearean interpretation in the period.

Chapter Four: **Ornaments and Ceremony**

Introduction

Beginning with the visual aspect of theatre, this chapter is an examination of the ways in which religious ornaments and ceremony were engaged with on the stage throughout the period. In order to determine how ornaments were used within the context of Shakespeare's drama, it is necessary to outline two things: first, the significance of the religious ornament and secondly, the notion of the stage 'prop'.

The use of 'ornaments' (thurible, crucifix, candles, credence table, vestments) was never openly condemned by the Ornaments Rubric from the Book of Common Prayer (1559). However, this usage had irrevocable associations with Medieval Christianity and, therefore, Roman Catholicism. Thus engagements with and displaying of such items within churches was controversial ever since the Reformation. In 1855, the liturgical ambiguities left by the Ornaments Rubric had come rapidly to the attention of the law. The High Anglican Robert Liddell of St. Paul's in Barking, was brought to ecclesiastical court on account of his use of a raised wooden high altar, a wooden cross, gilded candlesticks that were used during the Communion, a credence table in the chancel, and embroidered altar cloths.¹ As Dominic Janes notes with respect to this incident, "architectural ornaments" rather than objects in danger of idolatrous employment' were deemed acceptable.² This case is indicative of the hypersensitivity surrounding Roman Catholicism's influence over Anglican liturgy. Such anxiety was emphasised in 1874 with the Public Worship Regulations Act which limited all Church services to those prescribed in the Book of Common Prayer, and ruled that any

¹ 'Consistory Court, Tuesday July 24', *The Times*, 25 July 1855 <<http://galegroup.com>> [accessed August 2010].

² Dominic Janes, *Victorian Reformations: The Fight over Idolatry in the Church of England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 79.

ornamentation, as décor or part of practice, was to be approved by legal authority. This act openly sought to outlaw any Church liturgy that had ‘ritualistic’ or Catholic connotations. Ornaments, then, were both religiously and politically charged objects in the final quarter of the century.

‘Charged’ objects tie with the topic of stage ‘props’. Recently, Andrew Sofer has argued that props ‘are three-dimensional objects launched into performance time and stage space [...] they come to life only by exciting the spectator’s imagination’.³ Because, as Sofer suggests, props ‘not only impersonate other objects but perform *as* objects’,⁴ there is an immediate moral dilemma as soon as these objects perform as the very religious ornaments that constituted the subject of legal and doctrinal dispute. Sofer discusses the manifold meanings that centre on the *actual* religious ornament, looking at holy cloths and church crucifixes, and the presence of the object which signifies a realm supernaturally extraneous to the physical world.⁵ But what happens when the prop is a religious signifier rather than a genuine church ornament? Sofer suggests that in this case, ‘we are no longer in the realm of the real presence of the signified’.⁶ In order to determine whether this was true of Victorian drama, it is necessary to turn to the theatre.

The ‘miracles’ of pageantry coupled with the adoption of personae could easily have recalled, for those who were minded of such things, the gesticulating and performance of High Church priests within the ornamented surroundings of a church. As F. S. Boas suggested in 1896, ‘the liturgy of the mass, including the actions and

³ Andrew Sofer, *The Stage Life of Props* (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2003), p. 202.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 60.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 50.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 55.

gestures of the consecrating priests, the chants and confession, the reading of portions of scripture, the prayers and responses of the congregation, contained from the first true dramatic elements'.⁷ Furthermore, according to John Cumming, rituals within cathedrals encouraged 'divine service to become a pantomime, and religions preistcraft [sic] [with] strict observance of ceremony everywhere'.⁸ These notions of ceremony and pantomime suggest that elaborate church services have the same spiritual value as the spectacular performances recycled night after night in the playhouse.

But, since liturgy was supposed to be inherently holy, to have enacted or copied it for entertainment arguably crossed a line between the sacred and profane. Given the connotations of ornaments like crucifixes and the debates surrounding their use during this period, it seems defiant for theatres to have used them as props on stage. While in the plays *Hamlet*, *Henry VIII*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *King John*, and *Measure for Measure*, the Catholic faith is prominent, there is no call for ostentatious displays of anything symbolising the Church beside the clothes of Wolsey, Pandulph, Laurence, Isabella and possibly Duke Vincentio. Nevertheless, ornaments were invariably used in most professional performances of each of these plays. For instance, in Kean's *Romeo and Juliet*, produced and revived throughout the 1840s and 1850s, Garrick's funeral dirge – used in the majority of productions in the first half of the nineteenth century – was retained.⁹ Kean had actors depict eleven monks, six virgins in white, six incense boys, twelve choristers and twelve nuns, and used five hand-held crosses in the funeral ceremony.¹⁰ The spectacular nature of this scene was emphasised by the fact that it was

⁷ Frederick S. Boas, p. 2.

⁸ Rev. John Cumming, *Apocalyptic Sketches*, p. 178.

⁹ Charles Kean, Promptbook for *Romeo and Juliet*. London, 1841. *Folger Promptbooks*. Prompt Rom. 13. Shattuck Catalogue, *Romeo and Juliet* 16, p. 413; Charles Shattuck, *The Shakespeare Promptbooks: A Descriptive Catalogue* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1965).

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

unnecessary. Such displays of religion deliberately drew attention not only to the spectacle and ritual associated with Catholicism but, more importantly, to the Catholic ideology ingrained in the minds and actions of the characters.

With respect to this chapter, the first part examines the image of the cross in various productions over two periods: the 1840s and post 1880. Moving away from the use of crosses and crucifixes, the second part discusses productions, again within the same time periods, that recreated churches on the stage, within which actors would engage in religious ‘performance’.

Before engaging with the productions, it is necessary to expound on the choice of dates. As explained in Chapter One, the histories *King John* and *Henry VIII* were frequently performed and revived in the 1850s by Kean, Phelps and Macready. As with the Westerton vs. Liddell case in the same decade, introducing symbols of Catholicism on the stage during the period of heightened hostility towards the religious hierarchy infused each ornament with political as well as religious significance. Thus most of these productions were received as pieces of rhetoric against the Church of Rome: Macready’s *King John* was ‘appropriate’ to the time, Katharine ‘touched the feelings’ of the audience, and Kean’s *King John* obtained ‘sympathies completely in favour of the tyrant’.¹¹ Since ornaments introduced on stage in this period could not be considered neutral, it is prudent to shift focus to the previous decade (1840s) when religious props were still politically charged, but with less explicit connotations of hierarchy and aggression.

¹¹ ‘The Modern Pandulph and Quasi King John’, *John Bull*, December 1850. December 2008; ‘Princess’s Theatre’, *The Standard*, 10 February 1852 <<http://galegroup.com>> [accessed August 2010].

Secondly, although Shakespeare was performed by Charles Calvert at the Prince's Theatre in Manchester very successfully during the 1860s and 1870s,¹² the English stage was being revolutionised by foreign actors such as the Anglo-French Charles Albert Fechter, and the Italian actor Tommaso Salvini. Post 1880, then, is arguably the period in which English actors like Irving, Barrett, Tree and Forbes-Robertson re-claimed the stage and, of course, Shakespeare. Bearing this in mind, it is possible to perceive a difference in the employment of religious ornaments and ceremony on stage without necessarily overlooking mid-century anti-Catholicism, together with the influence of European, Catholic performers in the intermediate decades.

This chapter uses productions of each of the five plays by a selection of actor-managers: William Charles Macready, Charles Kean, Samuel Phelps, Wilson Barrett, Henry Irving, Frank Benson and Herbert Beerbohm Tree, all of which bar Benson's were London performances. By exploring engagements with crosses and ceremony in these productions, the shifting attitudes towards the theatre can be seen to take shape alongside equally changeable concerns about rituals and ornamentation, both within and outside the parameters of church walls.

Part One: Crosses

According to the twentieth-century theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar, the human connection with God is bound up with language: written, spoken and unspoken. Von Balthasar conceptualises the cross as a 'nonword', or a non-verbal means of communication: 'the formless is taken up as some element into a higher form, that is, is

¹² See Richard Foulkes, *The Calverts: Actors of Some Importance* (London: The Society for Theatre Research, 1992).

integrated into expression or word'.¹³ Given its connotations of death, sacrifice and resurrection, brandishing the 'nonword' expression of the physical cross on the stage was tantamount to displaying *Christianity* within a performance context. Although this was legal, it was never free of disapproval from both clergy and laymen. But since Shakespeare was hailed as morally elevating – as was argued in the debates before the abolition of the Theatre Monopoly – displaying the religion of the characters was necessary to create a visually accurate environment within which to place the 'instructive' action. This meant that 'nonwords' like cathedrals, vestments, crucifixes and ritualistic gestures, such as the sign of the cross, were used to signify the spiritual allegiances of the Catholic characters.

Notwithstanding the Anglican view of ornaments, it is significant that several prominent Catholics disapproved, generally, of any misapplied use of the crucifix. For John Henry Newman, Medieval Christianity was more than a 'service of the eyes', because it required 'voices [...] bodies [and] hearts'.¹⁴ This emotional piety was echoed by Pusey who claimed that all depictions of the crucifix 'fix the attention, by the sight of the sufferings [while] moving the affections of love and contrition'.¹⁵ By this logic, the crucifix is a symbol of 'divine love' rather than an object of direct worship. Similarly, at the end of the century, the Anglo-Catholic Vernon Staley argued that 'man is a being composed of a reasonable soul and a material body, and worship is a thing in which the whole man, soul and body, must take part'.¹⁶ The common factors here

¹³ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory*, 5 vols. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1990), II, p. 28.

¹⁴ John Henry Newman, *Lectures on Justification* (London: J. G. & F. Rivington, 1838), pp. 203, 386.

¹⁵ Edward Bouverie Pusey, *A Letter to the Right Honourable and Right Reverend the Lord Bishop of London in Explanation of Some Statements Contained in a Letter by the Reverend W. Dodsworth* (Oxford: John Henry Parker, 1851), p. 104.

¹⁶ Vernon Staley, *Ceremonial of the English Church* (1899; repr. Montana: Kessinger Publishing, 2004), p. 5.

pertain to emotional and spiritual engagement with a benevolent, self-sacrificial Christ through the medium of the crucifix.

Despite the reasoning of Newman, Pusey and Staley, anti-Catholics like Charles Kingsley still argued that the crucifix is a distraction from God. Kingsley claimed that fascination with the crucifix was akin to ‘seeking Christ among the dead’.¹⁷ The connotations are of death and misdirected worship, both of which Pusey and Staley acknowledged were erroneously signified by the image of the worshipped crucifix.¹⁸ Because of the Catholic Emancipation in 1829, the Tractarian movement and the conversion of High Anglicans to Catholicism between the 1830s and 1840s, and the re-establishment of the Catholic Hierarchy in 1850, the crucifix became a politically and religiously charged symbol. It follows that the use of crucifixes on stage within plays dealing with Roman Catholic individuals could not have been unintentionally provocative.

The 1840s

In the 1840s, there were large-scale London productions of *King John* (1842) and *Measure for Measure* (1846), by Macready and Phelps respectively. Each production received much critical attention for scenery and interpretations of the protagonists. What is most striking about the selection of plays, however, is the Catholic ideology running throughout each plot. A king being punished for angering the Pope and a nun using sophistry to retain her chastity were intriguing choices in the decade following the Oxford Movement.

¹⁷ Charles Kingsley, *All Saints Day and Other Sermons* (1878; repr. Montana: Kessinger Publishing, 2003), p. 75.

¹⁸ Edward Bouverie Pusey, *A Letter to the Right Honourable and Right Reverend The Lord Bishop of London*, p. 105.

King John

Although the sets and costumes in Macready's 1842 production of this ostensibly anti-Catholic piece were designed to evoke historical accuracy, the directions added to the text, together with the use of props, suggest that antiquarianism was not Macready's chief motive in producing this play. One indication of Macready's interpretation can be found in the use of crucifixes.

There seems to be a tradition of crucifix depiction in *King John*, particularly in the scene between Hubert and Arthur. First, Macready used a crucifix in a window in the apartment at Northampton Castle where Arthur was threatened by Hubert.¹⁹ The emotional weight of the scene – Macready's directions suggest that Arthur shrieked and desperately clung to Hubert²⁰ – was amplified by the presence of the crucifix, which drew attention to the immorality of John, the helplessness of Hubert, and the innocence of the boy. Macready's crucifix in the blinding scene may have been inspired by James Northcote's painting in the Boydell Shakespeare collection from the 1800s. Northcote depicted Arthur kneeling at the feet of Hubert who, in turn, leans his hand on a plinth bearing a large crucifix.²¹ Much later, in Henry Irving's illustrated edition of the play, a crucifix appears again to exaggerate the mortification of the child and the severance of England from the Church and, by extension, morality.²²

Notwithstanding the significance of the crucifix in the blinding scene, that it was employed by Macready is perhaps less indicative of religious themes in the production than another, less common, instance of crucifix usage in the same performance. In the

¹⁹ See Appendix F.

²⁰ William Charles Macready, Promptbook for *King John*. London, 1840s. *Folger Promptbooks*. Prompt John 12. Shattuck Catalogue, *King John* 18, p. 195.

²¹ See Appendix G.

²² See Appendix H.

camp of King Philip, there was a ‘table with a crucifix on it [...] at the right’.²³ In the ‘hall of state in King John’s palace’, however, there was no sign of a cross amid the ‘grey stone’, ‘high windows’ and ‘tapestry hangings’.²⁴ Although regal, this palace did not display any influence of the Church, suggesting that the King’s decisions and actions, in this production, were kept within the realm of politics. By this logic, the crucifix in the French camp became a symbol of allegiance to Rome, rather than a sign of worship or idolatry. While the crucifix and Church of Rome were associated with France, Macready sought to put John on a par with politics and practicality. This was asserted by the fact that when negotiating with King Philip, John took his seat upon the dais, the political sphere, at the opposite end of the room to the crucifix, the religious territory.²⁵ A combination of prop and direction, here, indicates Macready’s interpretation of John and Philip as men with very different priorities.

Nevertheless, the presence of the crucifix lent a sense of gravity to the action that took place within the tent. When Philip declared that the successful negotiations between France and England constitute a ‘holyday’, Constance rose and began cursing the festivity: ‘This day, all things begun come to ill end/ Yea, faith itself to hollow falsehood change’ (3.1.94-5). Macready foregrounded the spiritual weight of this argument by having Constance curse with a crucifix immediately behind her. The promptbook indicates that Philip turned his back and went up to the dais to be seated next to John at the exact moment when Constance’s dialogue switched from secular to religious discourse:

Arm, arm you heavens against these perjured kings!
[...] Let not the hours of this ungodly day

²³ See Appendix I; William Charles Macready, Promptbook for *King John*. London, 1840s. *Folger Promptbooks*. Prompt John 12. Shattuck Catalogue, *King John* 18, p. 195.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

Wear out the day in peace [...]
Set armed discord 'twixt these perjured kings! (3.1.107-11).²⁶

Philip's physical shift away from Constance at this point symbolised a detachment from the crucifix or the prop 'performing', as Sofer suggests, as a holy ornament.

This crucifix formed a contrast to the Church crosses of Pandulph whose entrance into the tent acted as a response to Constance's prayers, bringing with it the clout of the Church. The attendants in Pandulph's procession included two priests with crosiers, two bishops with crosiers, two priests with crosses, and two Templar Knights with red crosses on their cloaks.²⁷ Despite the sense of divine justice, the intrusion of such religious iconography into the space still bearing the traces of Constance's expostulations, arguably drew the scene down from the incorporeal realm of curses and prophesy, to the earthly reality of Church and doctrine. Constance's grief-stricken curses, which were associated with the crucifix and martyrdom, clearly formed a contrast to the pageantry and crosses (not crucifixes) of the celibate, domestically ignorant Pandulph. The crosses were distinctly unlike the crucifix and Constance's heart-felt suffering. Without this pain and sense of physical and emotional mortification, the papal cross was simply a badge of identity.

But this 'identity' was far from negative. To argue this it is necessary to turn first to Macready, then to the architect Augustus Welby Pugin. Macready interpreted *King John* as the tragedy of a man who rejects morality itself through his condemnation of the Church. After a performance in April of 1836, Macready lamented the cheers of the audience at the anti-Catholic expostulations of the King: 'some fools set up a monstrous

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ See Appendix J; Charles Shattuck, *William Charles Macready's King John* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1962), pp. 19-22.

hubbub at the passage of defiance to the Pope'.²⁸ Similarly, in 1851 he observed that 'part of the audience came to the play, not to see it, but to act themselves in a foolish demonstration of hostility of Papistry'.²⁹ If we extrapolate from this Macready's dismissal of anti-Catholicism within the play – despite the fact that there were no 'neutral' choices – then it is possible to find his 'true' interpretation elsewhere in the production, specifically the end. According to the *Examiner*, Macready played John's death as a 'tortured [...] body, without a hope that can light it to the grave'.³⁰ Since John rejected the Church, it was fitting that the Church administered his punishment. Thus Macready retained Hubert's reference to the 'resolved villain' (5.6.36) of a monk who poisoned the King, and had six monks present at his expiration. The demise of John, here, was both a piece of poetic justice and an expression of divine retribution.

Detachment from the Church of Rome and its ideology, despite being admirable for many English non-Catholics, was considered a sign of social and moral decay by A. W. Pugin. Pugin was a Catholic convert who began his career by designing stage sets and buildings, eventually becoming an important figure in the Gothic Revival.³¹ Pugin argued that the social, political and religious cohesions under Catholicism in the Middle Ages were wanting in the nineteenth-century obsession with survival. For Pugin, 'Catholic piety and zeal covered the face of the land and all hearts and hands were united'.³² He lamented that, 'many persons of wealth and influence do oppose the Catholic principle of making the house of God the centre of earthly splendour [...] by

²⁸ William Charles Macready, p. 18.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 284.

³⁰ 'The Theatrical Examiner', *The Examiner*, 14 December 1850 <<http://galegroup.com>> [accessed July 2010].

³¹ Alexandra Wedgwood, 'Pugin, Augustus Welby Northmore (1812-1852)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography Online 2008* <<http://oxforddnb.com/view/article/22869>> [accessed March 2011].

³² A. W. Pugin, 'Elevation of the Cathedral Church of St. Chad, Birmingham', *The Dublin Review*, 10 (1841), 301-47 (p. 301).

urging the miserable arguments of Protestants'.³³ By 'splendour' Pugin evokes aesthetic ornamentation.

Nostalgia for religious uniformity, coupled with Pugin's theories about work ethic and productivity, were contemporaneous with the Oxford Movement, cathedral restorations and, most importantly, Macready's *King John*. A single Church of 'splendour' that creates social unity was, by this logic, the cornerstone of a stable moral order. For Pugin, corruption (moral and social) was a very real consequence of deviation from the established Church. Though Macready's original *King John* predated Pugin's *Dublin Review* essay, the 1842 production coincided with these concerns about Church and state. Therefore, Macready's depiction of John as a man consciously outside of both religion and morality was arguably enhanced by the use of politically charged ornaments that, as well as suffering, indicated belonging and identity. Perhaps for this reason, Macready steeped his religious characters in cross imagery, while Constance was alone with her introspective grief and a 'dead Christ' on a crucifix.

Measure for Measure

While Macready's uses of the cross and crucifix cohered with growing concerns about religious identity and belonging, Phelps used the ornament to indicate the negative associations of being bound to a single Church. Following this theme of religious identity, it is important to turn to Phelps' version of *Measure for Measure* performed at Sadler's Wells in 1846.

To understand the relevance of the religious prop and costume in this production,

³³ Ibid., p. 301.

it is necessary to begin with the acting text. As was the fashion, started by John Philip Kemble, the conclusion was adjusted to verify Vincentio's actions, and to assert his genuine affection for Isabella:

For thee, sweet saint – if, for a brother saved
From that most holy shrine thou wert devote to,
Thou deign to spare some portion of thy love,
Thy duke, thy friar tempts thee from thy vow:
(Isabel is falling on her knees, the Duke prevents her – kisses her hand, and proceeds with his speech)
In its right orb let thy true spirit shine,
Blessing both thee, and people: – thus we'll reign,
Rich in possession of their hearts, and, warned
By the abuse of delegated trust,
Engrave this royal maxim on the mind,
To rule ourselves before we rule mankind.³⁴

In relation to eighteenth-century endings of the play, Edward L. Rocklin has observed that the Duke's additional 'pleas to Isabella to renounce the cloister [...] could have been written to appeal to the sensibilities of the largely Protestant audience'.³⁵ As Rocklin notes, the line 'thy duke, thy friar tempts thee from thy vow' was introduced in 1773, and recycled by Kemble and Phelps.³⁶ Since the play had not been performed in London for two decades, Phelps' inclusion of Kemble's altered ending, particularly given the Tractarian movement throughout the 1830s and 1840s, clearly drew attention to Isabella's choice of a Protestant matrimony or 'right orb' of experience, over a confined, Catholic withdrawal.

Although Phelps' ending did not necessarily condemn the convent or Isabella's desire to enter it, her costume and bearing were calculated to draw attention to the uninviting prospects of religious confinement. The performance opened with Laura

³⁴ Samuel Phelps, Promptbook for *Measure for Measure*. London, 1846. *Folger Promptbooks*. Prompt Measure 3. Shattuck Catalogue, *Measure for Measure* 8, p. 270.

³⁵ Edward L. Rocklin, 'Measured Endings: How Productions from 1720 to 1929 Close Shakespeare's Open Silences in *Measure for Measure*', *Shakespeare Survey*, 53 (2000), 213-32 (p. 220).

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 220.

Addison as Isabella – replaced by Isabel Glyn in 1850 – who gave the impression of being burdened with impediments. According to the *Era*, Isabella had ‘the cumbrous costume of a “sister” in her new noviciate to contend with; her suit to Angelo; her repulse of his libertine proposals; her indignant spurning of the brother [...] and her taunting appeal for justice in the final act’.³⁷ Equating Isabella’s habit with the uninvited proposal of Angelo, betrayal of Claudio, and the trouble of having to declare her misfortunes in public, clearly aligns religious chastity with earthly injustice. That Vincentio expounded on his love for Isabella, therefore, made his proposal welcome to the audience, and to the nun who bore the burden of the ‘cumbrous’ habit.

With respect to ornaments, an image of Isabel Glyn as Isabella indicates the ‘cumbrous’ robes to which the *Era* reporter was referring, together with a crucifix suspended from her waist belt.³⁸ While her habit signified the weight of chastity, the crucifix hanging from her robes was Isabella’s equally cumbersome badge of identity, clearly placing her within the realm of Roman Catholicism. Phelps’ choice of burdensome crucifix for Isabella tied with his equally subjective choice of the altered ending. Aside from communicating the love of Vincentio for Isabella, Phelps could have restored the original ending of the play in his production and subsequent revival. But, that the Duke was able to ‘tempt’ Isabella from her vow in order to ‘bless’ both herself and her people, carried with it the implication of liberty. Isabella could, thanks to Vincentio’s additional declaration of affection, justifiably shed her garments and ‘cumbrous’ crucifix for the lighter attire of a wife.

³⁷ ‘Music and the Drama’, *The Era*, 8 November 1846 <<http://galegroup.com>> [accessed September 2009].

³⁸ See Appendix K.

This need for escape from the crucifix can be said to derive from anti-Catholic conceptions of idolatry attached to the Catholic ornament. Two years after Phelps opened *Measure for Measure*, John Cumming published a collection of seventeenth and eighteenth-century objections to the Church of Rome. Here, Cumming reproduced the eighteenth-century Archbishop of Canterbury, William Wake's claim that 'a piece of wood or stone, carve it into what figure or shape you please [is still] a piece of wood'.³⁹ Wake also argued that worship before icons like the crucifix is 'more like magical incantations than Christian prayers'.⁴⁰ Concerns about idolatry and icons, though not unique to the nineteenth century, were repeated, echoed and published throughout this period, implying that they were a genuine cause of anxiety in the mid-century.

Returning to Phelps, if the moral of Macready's *King John* was to assert the necessity of obedience to the Church, how could audiences celebrate Isabella's abandoning of it? The answer lies in Pandulph's crosses and crosiers which, unlike the crucifix, signify resurrection and hope rather than death and sacrifice. The less troubling image of the cross, though superficial in the context of *King John*, still offers the sense of identity and unity without the idolatry and suffering explicit in the crucifix. In the case of Isabella, abandoning her weighty robes meant that she could step into the world of the cross with a sense of belonging, without the ideological and emotional martyrdom signified by her cumbersome crucifix. From these two productions from the 1840s, it is possible to conclude that, whether the on-stage crucifix was signifying piety, superficiality, or an imposing burden, it always signified belonging and allegiance, both political and religious, to the Church of Rome.

³⁹ William Wake, 'An Answer to the Reply Etc. Being a Further Defence of the Exposition of the Doctrine of the Church of England', in *A Preservative Against Popery in Several Select Discourses upon the Principal Heads of Controversy Between Protestants and Papists*, ed. by Rev. John Cumming, 13 vols. (London: The Society's Office, 1848), XIII, 1-154 (p. 115).

⁴⁰ Ibid.

1880-1900

Moving away from the 1840s and the use of ornaments to indicate religious identity, two late-century productions of Shakespeare toyed with the image of the crucifix as a symbol through which individuals, rather than groups, could derive comfort. These were Wilson Barrett's *Hamlet* (1884) and Henry Irving's *Henry VIII* (1892). The personal crucifix or keepsake, as well as representing the religion of the characters, can be seen as a channel between the individual and his or her conception of God. Here, the prop is physically engaged with by the actor, drawing attention to it, not as a peripheral object, but as a meaningful symbol.

Hamlet

As James Thomas has observed, the affinity between father and son was exaggerated in Wilson Barrett's *Hamlet* (1884), drawing out the theme of revenge that drives the plot.⁴¹ It is through this relationship between Hamlet and his father that the image of the cross became significant. While delivering his traditional farewell speech and entreaty to Horatio, Hamlet called for the portrait of his father. Like the American actor Edwin Booth before him, Barrett's Hamlet wore this portrait around his neck throughout the duration of the play.⁴² This miniature was kissed by Hamlet before his demise, drawing the revenge cycle to a close and settling the filial debt between father and son.⁴³

Although this episode involved a portrait, it is fascinating that reviews often juxtaposed, both mistakenly and consciously, Hamlet's respect for his father with an act of faith. According to Clement Scott, 'it was this loved picture that the faithful Horatio

⁴¹ James Thomas, *The Art of the Actor-Manager: Wilson Barrett and the Victorian Theatre* (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1984), p. 76.

⁴² Charles Shattuck, *The Hamlet of Edwin Booth* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1969), p. 187.

⁴³ Clement Scott, *Some Notable Hamlets of the Present Time* (London: Greening & Co., 1900), p. 109.

held to the dying lips of his friend instead of a cross – the emblem of salvation’.⁴⁴ Since the cross at a death bed is often associated with the hope of resurrection in heaven, the absence of the symbol in this case drew attention to the spiritual weight Hamlet placed on the fulfilment of his filial mission. Rather than completing his earthly journey and seeking his cross of salvation, Barrett’s Hamlet made the task of vengeance his existential purpose, meaning that his death was preceded not with a final confession or expression of hope, but with a declaration of faith in and reverence for his father.

In Barrett’s American tour, a similar juxtaposition can be found in reviews. After a performance in Boston, a review in the *Boston Globe* observed that, ‘with the crucifix at his lips, the young prince ends his troubled career’.⁴⁵ Whether this was a conscious parallel between the crucifix and the portrait or a simple misunderstanding, the fact is that the emotional proximity of Hamlet towards his trinket is exactly what can be expected of an ascetic towards his religious ornament. The *Boston Herald*, having recognised the portrait, drew a link between Hamlet’s religion and obsession with his father: ‘he constantly gazes upon it [the portrait] with touching fondness, and it is this portrait, good Catholic though he is (he frequently crosses himself during the play), that he kisses when he is in the embrace of death’.⁴⁶ This business of crossing the self occurred frequently throughout the action, but does not appear to have been mentioned by English reviewers. This suggests one of three things: that the action was not frequent enough to be noteworthy; that it was distasteful and, therefore, better to ignore; or that it simply did not occur in the English performances. Whatever the reason, it seems that

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 109.

⁴⁵ *The Boston Globe* quoted in ‘Wilson Barrett as Hamlet’, *The Era*, 4 December 1886 <<http://galegroup.com>> [accessed August 2010].

⁴⁶ *The Boston Herald* quoted in ‘Wilson Barrett as Hamlet’, *The Era*, 4 December 1886 <<http://galegroup.com>> [accessed August 2010].

Barrett's emphasis on Hamlet's fidelity to his father was inextricably linked to his Catholicism.

As well as a devotion to his father's portrait, Barrett drew attention to the complex web of contradictions within the fabric of Christian eschatology. Because Barrett chose to set the play in a barbaric Denmark with open-air theatres, stone walls, and 'unbecoming costumes',⁴⁷ the use of religious symbols provided a sense of hope and stability that was indispensable in the harsh landscape of the 'extremely ugly' state.⁴⁸ During the scene with the gravediggers, Hamlet was surrounded by 'Scandinavian gloom' with 'scattered crosses'.⁴⁹ While sitting beneath one of these gravestones, Hamlet contemplated the existential propensity towards decomposition through the medium of Yorick's skull. Hamlet's fleshly, corporeal rhetoric in this scene formed a contrast to the large cross, signifying salvation, beneath which he sat.

A sketch of this scene in the *Pall Mall Gazette* indicates Hamlet seated with his back towards the cross while busy with the skull.⁵⁰ By turning away from eschatology, Hamlet focuses entirely on the earthly deconstruction of the body. From Hamlet's Catholic outlook, departed souls would presumably be awaiting judgement in purgatory; but from the non-Catholic perspective of Barrett, the souls awaiting judgement have no designated resting place. Between the set and dialogue, there was a visual and aural conflict which must have challenged audiences' preconceptions about burial and divine judgement. According to Scott, Barrett's choice of scenery for this episode 'robs the

⁴⁷ Clement Scott, *Some Notable Hamlets*, p. 100.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 102.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 101.

⁵⁰ See Appendix L.

churchyard scene of its peace, beauty and significance'.⁵¹ Were Hamlet to contemplate the rotting of corpses 'amidst scenes of rural simplicity', Scott suggested that the whole incident would have appeared both visually and intellectually palatable.⁵² But it was precisely this combination of subject matter and 'ugly' landscape set against the symbol of Christian hope that pooled together various human anxieties about death. With the image of Hamlet resting beneath a cross yet failing to recognise its value, it is no wonder that critics were apt to draw a parallel between his father's portrait and a crucifix. The symbol of Christian salvation, for Hamlet, appeared to signify only earthly suffering, meaning that for all his crossing and religious allusions, the character failed to grasp the fundamental hope within Catholicism and Christianity at large.

Rather than the identity-performing props of Macready and Phelps, Barrett's evocation of the crucifix in his miniature, the graveyard cross and self-crossing all seem to be indicative of a deliberate engagement with ornaments and religious gesticulations on stage. Such props and engagement with them foregrounded the themes of faith, loyalty and death within the play itself.

Henry VIII

This engagement with the religious prop can be seen in Henry Irving's production of *Henry VIII* (1892) at the Lyceum. In the second act, Buckingham, played by Forbes-Robertson, delivered a farewell speech while producing a crucifix. As reported by the *Bury and Norwich Post and Suffolk Standard*, Forbes-Robertson lifted up a crucifix while entreating the spectators to 'weep' (2.1.72). The stage crowd duly took to its

⁵¹ Clement Scott, *Some Notable Hamlets*, p. 101.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 101.

knees and began praying for the restoration of Buckingham's soul to the tolls of church bells.⁵³

While the *Bury Standard* claimed that this episode was 'most dignified and touching [with] rapt devotion',⁵⁴ the *Pall Mall Gazette* suggested that 'nothing of character, dignity of mein, and true pathos were skilfully wielded together [because there was a] literalism which so often marred the beauty of the performance'.⁵⁵ The 'rapt devotion' with which the *Bury Standard* claimed Buckingham elicited prayers from his spectators implies that the execution scene evoked a sense of piety. On the other hand, the crucifix and the conspicuous praying of the masses were too 'literal' for the London reporter. Here, far from experiencing a sublime moment of faith, the actions, sounds and symbols in the scene became too theatrical and inherently false. The apparent lack of 'dignity' and 'pathos' in Buckingham's declaration of faith and call for sympathy seem to be bound up with the 'literal' signifier of salvation.

In a play depicting the severance of England from the Church of Rome, this particular use of a crucifix was calculated to communicate the inherent faith, rather than superficial allegiance, of the characters. Wolsey was played by Irving in this production with a 'malignity which is almost Mephistophelian'.⁵⁶ That this malign Wolsey did not produce a crucifix in a similar fashion to Buckingham, drew attention to the superfluity of the religious establishment when faith and a small crucifix were sufficient to draw Christians into prayer. Unlike Macready's background crucifix in the tent in 1842,

⁵³ "'King Henry the Eighth" at the Lyceum Theatre', *The Bury and Norwich Post, and Suffolk Standard*, 14 June 1892 <<http://galegroup.com>> [accessed September 2009].

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ "'King Henry VIII" at the Lyceum', *The Pall Mall Gazette*, 6 January 1892 <<http://galegroup.com>> [accessed January 2010].

⁵⁶ 'Lyceum Theatre', *The Times*, 6 January 1892 <<http://galegroup.com>> [accessed September 2009].

Irving's employment of the symbol became part of the action, being just as literal and present as the living actors.

When a crucifix or cross is physically held up, on stage or otherwise, whether it elicits prayer, penitence, awe or even love, the symbol arguably transcends the discourse of experience, appealing chiefly to the senses. Wilson Barrett's melodrama *The Sign of the Cross* (1895) explored this during a scene when a Christian girl brandishes her cross, resulting in the conversion of a Roman Pagan. While Barrett suggested that the cross has an *inherent* value beyond Christianity, Buckingham's audience would have recognised his crucifix as part of the ideological arrangements of Catholicism. Here, the crucifix exists within the fraught anti-Catholic context of Victorian England, as well as within the theatrical space involving actors and costumes.

Indeed, Forbes-Robertson was particularly scrupulous about his appearance as Buckingham, having convinced Irving to supply the character with a 'rich [robe] in black velvet and fur'.⁵⁷ Forbes-Robertson had seen Kean's 1855 *Henry VIII* as a youth, and was eager to recreate 'Buckingham's farewell' which was delivered before 'devoted crowds'.⁵⁸ As a crucial scene, Forbes-Robertson clearly took advantage of the tragedy and spiritual weight of the doomed Duke's speech. This made himself, his actions and farewell just as, if not more, memorable than the scene which had inspired him as a child.

By kneeling down and praying at the sight of Buckingham's crucifix, the people were spiritually awakened and plunged into the mystical state of asceticism which was

⁵⁷ Johnston Forbes-Robertson, *A Player under Three Reigns* (London: T. Fisher Unwin Ltd., 1925), p. 151.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 149.

triggered by the presence of the equally mystical symbol. Remembering that the Catholicism of the characters would have been conspicuous against the largely Protestant and increasingly secular audiences, the reaction of Buckingham's crowd clearly indicated the collective, inherent belief in the value of the crucifixion and the need for prayer. Perhaps for this reason, the entire episode was dismissed by the *Pall Mall* as possessing too troubling a 'literalism'.

Romeo and Juliet

The success of crucifix brandishing by Barrett and Forbes-Robertson was sufficiently lingering to inspire Frank Benson in his touring production of *Romeo and Juliet* (1898-1899). Like Barrett's portrait that evoked the crucifix, Benson juxtaposed the physical object of a dagger with the metaphorical presence of a cross.

Throughout Benson's promptbook is the repeated instruction for Romeo to draw his dagger. Romeo's dependence on the instrument was far from a simple matter of stage business. This is clear in one incident towards the end of the play. Upon his banishment, when Romeo retreated to Friar Laurence for sanctuary, the dagger transcended its inherent value or purpose as a weapon of defence, becoming instead a complex symbol of betrayal and faith. At the point when Romeo draws his dagger to 'sack/ The hateful mansion (3.2.106-7),⁵⁹ Benson turned the prop upon himself in an act of suicidal rage. Laurence, played by Mr Warburton, took hold of the dagger, delivering his lines, 'hold thy desperate hand/ Art thou a man?' (3.2.108-9). At this point, Laurence held up the weapon as a cross, before which Romeo knelt in repentance. With the cross held aloft, Laurence declared:

⁵⁹ See Appendix M.

Thy wild acts denote
The unreasonable fury of a beast:
[...]
Thou hast amazed me: by my holy order,
I thought thy disposition better tempered (3.2.110-15).⁶⁰

Although these lines were common in performance, their utterance alongside the brandishing of a dagger symbolising a cross, arguably turned the scene into a kind of exorcism. Romeo is 'wild' and twice referred to as a 'beast', while being forced into obedience with a Christian symbol. The 'holy order' that Laurence invokes seems calculated to banish whatever 'beast' resides within Romeo and recall the youth back to his usual 'disposition'. Like Barrett's converted Pagan, Benson's Romeo abandons his sinful thoughts at the mere evocation of a cross.

It is worth noting that the concept of the sword as a religious ornament on stage was introduced by the Hamlets of Charles Fechter and Edwin Booth. Fechter, when he performed his version of *Hamlet* in London (1861), played a significant part in this trend. When meeting the Ghost, Horatio raised the hilt of his sword to make a cross.⁶¹ In the following decade, Edwin Booth repeated Fechter's use of the cross as a crucifix on the London stage. In Booth's performance, Hamlet's sword was held 'so that light from the stage right throws his own shadow and the shadow of the sword as a cross upon the ground'.⁶² The functional and spiritual propensities of the sword, within the realm of theatre, were ones that were to appeal to the collective English imagination; it was only after this period of Fechter's sensational, and Booth's vengeful yet piously energised Hamlet that deliberate juxtapositions between the sword and the cross or crucifix entered English performances. While prop crosses had hitherto been a matter of scenery

⁶⁰ Frank Benson, Promptbook for *Romeo and Juliet*. Stratford-upon-Avon, c. 1905. *Shakespeare Centre Library*. 72.929 4172 ASC. Shattuck Catalogue, *Romeo and Juliet* 79, p. 426.

⁶¹ Charles Fechter, Promptbook for *Hamlet*. London, 1864. *Folger Promptbooks*. Prompt Ham. 25. Shattuck Catalogue, *Hamlet* 72, p. 106.

⁶² Charles Shattuck, *The Hamlet of Edwin Booth*, p. 146.

or signifiers of identity, the sword was laden with connotations beyond religion itself. Though this juxtaposition of the cross and sword may be perceived as tenuous now, on stage in an era obsessed with various forms of Christian redemption, it was a symbol charged with Christian ethos without necessarily evoking scandal and anti-Catholic rhetoric: especially in a time when ornamental crucifixes were outlawed in Anglican churches.

Returning to Benson, though his *Romeo and Juliet* was not performed in London, it offers a fascinating insight into the stage practice of brandishing a cross or crucifix. Rather than delivering his lines of woe before a background ornament signifying his Catholicism, physically kneeling and rapidly repenting his suicidal thoughts upon an *evocation* of the cross was a powerful act that communicated Romeo's inherent belief in the sanctity of God. The prop, in this context, certainly enacts Sofer's concept of the 'three dimensional' performance object depending on and toying with 'audience imagination'.⁶³

Conclusion

Compared with the background signifiers of religion in the performances of Macready and Phelps, the employment of crucifixes by Barrett, Irving and Benson in the last quarter of the century seems comparatively personalised. Although legislation placed the stamp of Catholicism on crucifixes in the 1870s – while the connotations of papacy were always suspected within such ornaments earlier in the century – the value signified by religious symbols became more poignant as church practices and liturgy were increasingly scrutinised.

⁶³ Andrew Sofer, p. 202.

While the crucifix was never truly rid of its connotations of suffering, martyrdom and idolatry, or its function as a badge of identity, its increased use on the stage as an object offering *personal* comfort and hope implies that the cross, in all its manifestations, transcended its value as an ornament and become a signifier of autonomous faith. As the American psychologist William James observed in his lectures of 1902, the cross is ‘inexplicable by the intellect, yet has its indestructible vital meaning’.⁶⁴ Deconstructing the significance of the cross reveals a complex web of Christian concepts: sacrifice, hope and faith. There was, perhaps, no more suitable territory upon which to place, engage and experiment with the mystical ornament than in the performance space of the theatre.

Part Two: Ceremony and Prayer

While the cross is tangible, within the context of theatre religious ceremony transcends the logistics of ‘props’ because the mimetic performance of sacred ritual draws attention to the inherent performativity of Church formality. In contrast to the ‘prop’ cross and crucifix, this discussion questions what sort of action was considered morally permissible within a replica church or set, and what enacting rituals like funerals and baptisms for entertainment can reveal about Victorian interpretations of Shakespeare’s drama.

An article in the women’s magazine *Hearth and Home* – one example of many Victorian protestations against religion on the stage – expressed concern over the depiction of prayer within a theatre. In response to Henry Arthur Jones’ *Michael and His Lost Angel* (1896) the critic observed that ‘an entire act of his play takes place in the

⁶⁴ William James, p. 518.

interior of the Minster Church of Clevedon [...] a cold shiver went down my back when the smartly dressed supers went down on their knees and affected to pray'.⁶⁵ Erecting a copy of a church then performing Church practices within it clearly approached the realm of profanity for this critic. Such reactions to Jones' play prompted Bernard Shaw to respond with his article 'Church and Stage' for the *Saturday Review* (1896). Here, Shaw demanded that if 'a stage representation is only a pretence, a mockery, a sham [then] what is to be said of the pictures in the National Gallery which [...] are made to simulate not only churches and priests, but the very persons of the Trinity themselves?'⁶⁶

Notwithstanding this discrepancy in approach to art and theatre, it is fascinating that *Hearth and Home* went on to offer an explanation for the rich scenery in Shakespearean productions: 'prayers, hymns, processions and the other outwardly accompaniments of religion may be excused in a historical or quasi-historical play, but they should find no place in a modern drama'.⁶⁷ That Shakespeare's plays should have been mounted with what were considered to be historically accurate churches, funerals, weddings, and even prayers, suggests that a degree of leniency was allowed in the staging of his drama, while those of Jones, for instance, were the subject of moral anxiety.

Before exploring the 'lenient' use of churches in the plays, there are two things that must be noted. First, the most famous case of a 'church on the stage' occurred in Irving's production of *Much Ado About Nothing* (1882). During the wedding scene,

⁶⁵ 'At the Play', *Hearth and Home*, 23 January 1896 <<http://galegroup.com>> [accessed July 2010].

⁶⁶ Bernard Shaw, *Our Theatre in the Nineties*, 3 vols. (London: Constable and Company Ltd., 1948), II, p. 23.

⁶⁷ 'At the Play', *Hearth and Home*, 23 January 1896 <<http://galegroup.com>> [accessed July 2010].

Irving included a 'red lamp burning before the altar, a crucifix [and] incense that fills the air'.⁶⁸ According to Bram Stoker, the entire wedding ceremony was supervised by a Catholic priest:

When the reverend critic pointed out that the white cloth spread in front of the tabernacle on the High Altar meant that the Host was within, Irving at once ordered that a piece of cloth of gold should be spread in its place.⁶⁹

Stoker claimed that, due to evocations of the sacrament, a lamp over the altar together with the garments of the priest performing the ceremony were removed and replaced with secular or less spiritually weighted objects. Since Irving was 'scrupulous against offence',⁷⁰ signifying the presence of God through transubstantiation within the parameters of a performance area would have been an act of blasphemy, with or without the Regulations Act. The 'high altar' was, in this case, rendered sufficiently secular for Anglican audiences, while retaining respect for Catholic spectators and maintaining a proper degree of 'accuracy'.

Nevertheless, the church episode did invite some discomfort from a *Telegraph* reviewer: 'after [...] a scene enacted before the high altar [...] with all its sacred ornaments left, the playfulness of Beatrice and Benedick comes with dangerous suddenness. Instinctively we long for the altar to be veiled, or a scene dropped'.⁷¹ This response suggests that the connotations of 'sacred ornaments', even in the fictional paradigm of drama, held too weighty a significance for them to be used as anything but symbols of piety. Irving's Catholic wedding scene, despite its antiquarian accuracy,

⁶⁸ 'Much Ado About Nothing at the Lyceum', *The Era*, 28 October 1882 <<http://galegroup.com>> [accessed December 2009].

⁶⁹ Bram Stoker, *Personal Reminiscences of Henry Irving*, 2 vols. (London: Heinemann, 1907), I, p. 105.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 105.

⁷¹ *The Telegraph* quoted in 'Much Ado About Nothing', *The Era*, 28 October 1882 <<http://galegroup.com>> [accessed September 2009].

offers an important indication of the limits around what constituted permissible religious ceremony in the context of Shakespeare and contemporary theatre.

The second point of interest is the apparent conflict, experienced in both theatre and reality, between historical preservation and contemporary religion. While debates raged about the acceptability of ritual and ornaments, the restoration of medieval Catholic cathedrals throughout England was underway. Cathedrals in Winchester, Ely, Chester, Worcester and Lichfield, to name a few, revived interest in Catholic architecture. While the Public Worship Regulations Act of 1874 was considerably later than the Gothic Revival of the mid-century, because the latter continued throughout the second half of the century, it seems that the Victorian penchant for cathedral restoration collided with the increased Anglican denial of ritual and ornamentation.⁷²

The Victorian eagerness to preserve and restore the past while shunning Catholic influences seems to have been nowhere more fittingly demonstrated than on the stage. Shakespearean revivals were expected to be historically accurate, morally instructive and textually faithful, without, as Irving's production demonstrates, transgressing the unofficial parameters of religious propriety. Beginning, then, with the depiction of ceremony, and moving to the enactment of prayer, this section questions how religious sets and practices were employed in Macready's *King John* (1842) Charles Kean's *Henry VIII* (1855) and Herbert Beerbohm Tree's *Hamlet* (1892).

⁷² In 1876, for instance, the Dean of Bristol Cathedral was involved in a dispute with the Restoration Committee regarding statues of Mary, Jesus and an image of St. Jerome. See 'Church News', *The Graphic*, 22 April 1876 <<http://galegroup.com>> [accessed August 2010].

Ceremony

Ceremony encompasses rituals such as coronations, baptisms and funerals, all of which were performed between the four plays. Importantly, church or prayer settings were utilised where they were not strictly unnecessary, but certainly uncalled for in the texts. This section, then, assesses to what extent religious ritual infiltrated the theatre, and what the presence of ‘accurate’ religious ceremony suggests about Victorian readings of the plays.

King John

Although, historically, performances of John’s coronation were invariably depicted in the palace – as in J. P. Kemble’s early nineteenth-century production – Macready chose to enact the scene in a reproduction of the Templars’ Church. As Shattuck notes, the medieval gothic arches were depicted on flats, and organ music was played throughout the various acts of ceremony.⁷³ First of all, that John’s kingship is dependent on the Roman Catholic Church, though historically feasible, within the context of the 1840s and 1850s, would have served as fuel to the fire of anti-Tractarianism. In fact, when Pandulph handed over the crown to John, the audience gave ‘a volley of hisses’,⁷⁴ clearly disapproving of the political union between Rome and England.

That Macready set the act of negotiation in a church imbued John with a sense of piety. It also brought the conflict of political priority within the Church to the fore. It is John’s return to the Church, therefore the threat of damnation, that awakens his guilt about Arthur. That is not to say, however, that belief in and belonging to the Church prevented war, murder, or adultery. The pathos invited in Macready’s death scene

⁷³ Charles Shattuck, *William Charles Macready’s King John*, p. 29.

⁷⁴ ‘Theatricals Etc.’, *Lloyd’s Weekly Newspaper*, 15 December 1850 <<http://galegroup.com>> [accessed August 2009].

sought to communicate the physical and emotional suffering of one who, however briefly, denied both himself and his people access to the one source of Christianity: the Church of Rome.

Nevertheless, the Church itself was not free from scorn in Macready's production. Like Pandulph's presence before the crucifix in the tent, his conduct at the coronation drew attention to his own disregard for the sanctity of his surroundings. Before John's opening line, 'Thus have I yielded up into your hand/ The circle of my glory' (5.1.1-2), the characters engaged in some stage business. Pandulph was seated on a low dais with 'bags of money before his feet'.⁷⁵ Leaning over his bribe money, John offered his crown to the Cardinal who put it onto a cushion, then 'John placed his hands between those of Pandulph as if doing homage'.⁷⁶ John clearly sacrificed the integrity gained in his rejection of Catholicism – on principle of its obsession with 'vile gold' (3.1.165) – by the implication that he buys his way back into the Pope's favour.

However, the corruption signified by the gold was tempered by John's homage to his newly accepted religious leader. Through this action, John disempowers himself, offering his body and soul up to the prelate. Although this simultaneously empowered Pandulph, it is possible to argue that Macready's church scene, despite introducing the image of corruption, also contained a degree of genuine piety. Later, in Kean's American and London revivals of Macready's production (1846 and 1852), John knelt down while placing his hands in those of Pandulph and, most importantly, there is no

⁷⁵ William Charles Macready, Promptbook for *King John*. London, 1840s. *Folger Promptbooks*. Prompt John 12. Shattuck Catalogue, *King John* 18, p. 195.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

mention of gold.⁷⁷ Kean's shift away from the implications of corruption within the Church, as well as avoiding storms of audience anti-Catholicism in the 1850s, indicates a move towards expressing the genuine spiritual value within Catholicism, its provision of peace and political stability.

Macready, in the 1830s and 1840s, was creating a striking contrast between the gold at Pandulph's feet, the sense of community and productive Christianity signified by the gothic architecture, and John's act of 'homage' to the Roman Catholic cardinal. Macready's Templars' Church interior can be said to have elevated the entire scene, so that the 'vile gold' became a charitable offering to the Church, Pandulph's 'take again [...] your sovereign greatness and authority' (5.1.3-5) was a holy blessing, and John's claim that his conversion is 'but voluntary' (5.1.29) was genuinely conscionable. In the decades riddled with religious conflict, although the corruption and pride of the Cardinal was not entirely omitted, Macready seemed to offer a vision of cooperation and tolerance. It is testament to the strength of anti-Catholic sentiment, however, that – as Macready's diary suggests – audiences failed to look beyond the papacy and its perceived corruption.⁷⁸

Henry VIII

Like Macready's coronation scene in the church, Charles Kean closed his 1855 version of *Henry VIII* in Grey Friars. Interestingly, Kean's *preparation* copy left the traditional Kemble set of the palace yard intact, with a grand procession including six bishops.⁷⁹ However, the *working* copy made by the prompter T. W. Edmonds, gives a detailed

⁷⁷ Charles Kean, Promptbook for *King John*. London, 1858. *Folger Promptbooks*. Prompt John 6. Shattuck Catalogue, *King John* 37, p. 163.

⁷⁸ William Charles Macready, p. 18.

⁷⁹ Charles Kean, Promptbook for *Henry VIII*. London, 1855. *Folger Promptbooks*. Prompt Henry VIII 12. Shattuck Catalogue, *Henry VIII* 36, p. 162.

account of the final act which took place around a font in a cathedral. The watercolour of the set depicts a gothic cathedral with a stained glass window at the rear of the stage. The space and architecture surrounding the font suggest that the baptism occurred in a chapel within the cathedral, rather than anywhere near the high altar. Considering Kean's affinity towards the spectacular, it is intriguing that he chose a chapel rather than a grand altar decked with the crucifix and cloths used by Irving twenty years later.

Nevertheless, Kean's focus was very decidedly on the corruption of the clergy. This is demonstrated by stage business in the second act. Having introduced Cardinal Campeius to the King, played by Walter Lacy, Kean's Wolsey prevented his papal colleague from following Henry out of the chamber, instead taking his place as second.⁸⁰ Wolsey's confidence in his station and influence over Henry were exaggerated in this manoeuvre to physically instate himself behind his monarch and, importantly, ahead of his religious comrade. This episode in Kean's production paints a picture of an ambitious and proud Roman Catholic cardinal who ranks himself with kings rather than faith and virtue.

Why, then, was the climactic event of the play set within the walls of a Catholic cathedral? Aside from the historical accuracy of recreating Elizabeth's baptism, the church was a symbol of faith united with ritual. By returning Elizabeth to the cathedral font, the significance of the baptismal ceremony was illuminated. Indeed, when placed into its historical context, Kean's mounting of Elizabeth's church baptism fell in the aftermath of the most infamous baptismal debate of the period.

⁸⁰ Charles Kean, Promptbook for *Henry VIII*. London, 1855. *Folger Promptbooks*. Prompt Henry VIII 12. Shattuck Catalogue, *Henry VIII* 36, p. 162.

While baptism was often debated throughout the nineteenth century, the infamous Gorham case that spanned the late 1840s until the turn of the decade, contributed to the already contested issue. Whereas the Church of England had, hitherto, expelled members who professed deviant approaches to or interpretations of scripture, George Cornelius Gorham appealed both to the ecclesiastical courts and subsequently the Privy Council in response to a decision to deny him the post of vicar in Devon on account of his understanding of baptism.⁸¹ Having been refused by the courts, Gorham went on to receive a favourable verdict from the Privy Council in 1850. The ability of a secular court to pass judgement over theological and doctrinal issues was a matter of spiritual and moral concern for Anglicans, including Pusey:

If the Privy Council may decide as to baptismal regeneration of all infants, which has been ruled by the whole church, why should it not as to the cases hitherto undetermined in the Church of England, [such] as the Inspiration of Holy Scripture [...]?⁸²

The intricacies of doctrine and its theological implications were, by this logic, made into a matter of legality rather than one of theology. The lack of resistance within the Church of England to the verdict of the Privy Council culminated in Pusey, along with others, converting and being baptised into the Church of Rome in 1851. With the echoes of the papal aggression hysteria still haunting attitudes towards Catholicism, the issue of baptism was clearly a topic of political as well as religious weight. That Kean chose to draw attention to this in his production of a play on the severance of England from Rome could not, therefore, have been a coincidence.

⁸¹ While the Church of England claimed full spiritual regeneration through baptism, Gorham argued that the ceremony cannot fully cleanse an infant of original sin. In other words, while salvation was only achievable to those who had undergone baptism, not all the baptised would be saved. See Kenneth Hylson-Smith, *Evangelism in the Church of England 1734-1984* (London: Continuum International Press, 1989), pp. 123-6.

⁸² Pusey quoted in Henry Parry Liddon, *Life of Edward Bouverie Pusey*, 4 vols. (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1897), III, p. 213.

In fact, the presence of the font implies that the infant was sprinkled or even submerged in the water for a spiritual cleansing in preparation for a sanctified beginning. This idea of a new beginning was certainly hinted at by Kean in his programme for the performance in which he summarised the play as ‘twelve years of a busy and most important reign [...] including those leading incidents which were the human means of establishing the standard religion of our country’.⁸³ The ‘human’ cost, presumably, of replacing Catholicism with Anglicanism included the lives of Buckingham, Katharine and Wolsey, all of whom perish as a kind of baptismal sacrifice. Interestingly, the reviewer of *Lloyd’s Weekly Newspaper* took exception to Kean’s comment, questioning ‘what does the man mean by the “standard religion”?’ and ‘would he [...] pat the Established Church on the cheek as the only standard faith, all sects of dissent being no better than so many pocket pieces? We fear the manager [...] believes himself the highest Church authority’.⁸⁴ But it was precisely Kean’s depiction of the ‘human means’ of bringing about the so-called ‘standard religion’ that was calculated to instruct audiences about the significance of the Reformation. The linear ‘twelve-year’ journey from Henry’s awakening of conscience, passing through the divorce from Katharine to the fall of Wolsey, made the baptism of Elizabeth – particularly at a time when baptism was being debated – seem a literal regeneration that could be beyond reproach. In other words, Kean offered a nostalgic vision of non-Catholic religious uniformity to an age riddled with Protestant dissent and inter-Christian theological collisions over matters such as baptism.

Returning to the article in *Hearth and Home*, the author concluded that affecting religious rituals within churches was feasible on a stage as long as such mountings were

⁸³ Charles Kean quoted in John William Cole, *The Life and Theatrical Times of Charles Kean*, II, p. 392.

⁸⁴ ‘Public Amusements’, *Lloyd’s Weekly Newspaper*, 27 May 1855 <<http://galegroup.com>> [accessed May 2009].

restricted to *representation*: ‘prayers, hymns, processions and the other outwardly accompaniments of religion may be excused in a historical or quasi-historical play’.⁸⁵ If by ‘quasi-historical’ the author was referring to plays set in the past, then it follows that all churches and actions within them in Shakespearean drama were permissible. But to claim that Macready’s and Kean’s historical church sets were ‘representative’ rejects the intricate interplay between set and action, together with the presence of genuine piety and religious unity within the conflicted worlds of both plays. Clearly, using church sets and rituals within *King John* and *Henry VIII* in the mid-century, contributed to the plays’ themes, meaning that being ‘quasi-historical’ was only ever a portion, albeit a large one, of the overall theatrical agenda.

Prayer

While Macready and Kean erected churches on the stage to signify the importance of religious community and ceremony, at the end of the century there was a move towards personalised prayer in small spaces, rather than rituals in grand churches. The employment of ornaments for prayer is an intriguing sphere of discussion, because it fuses together the concepts of spectacle, play and piety. When individuals engage in prayer, there is a private bond of trust and devotion between the penitent and the deity being addressed. The use of ornaments to inspire communication with God, therefore, renders the objects mediums or channels between earth and heaven. When translated into the paradigm of entertainment, this logic circles back to *Hearth and Home*’s objection to enacting prayer on stage. Once again, however, the rules were adjusted for Shakespeare, and *Hamlet* provides a good opportunity to examine late-century engagements with prayer on stage.

⁸⁵ ‘At the Play’, *Hearth and Home*, 23 January 1896 <<http://galegroup.com>> [accessed July 2010].

Hamlet

Given moral objections to the issue of worship as a spectacle, raised by *Hearth and Home* for instance, it is fascinating that designated prayer spaces were used in Tree's late-century production of *Hamlet*. Tree's *Hamlet*, though almost two decades after the Public Worship Regulations Act, seemed to play on the ideas contested within the Act itself about the need for material stimuli for prayer.

Tree employed a 'private oratory [and] a Madonna in a shrine, with a blue lamp [...] hung close to a *prie-dieu* containing a book of prayers'.⁸⁶ For the luring of Hamlet, Ophelia, played by Maud Tree, seated herself in the oratory with a prayer book. As soon as she perceived Hamlet, however, she 'naturally enough falls on her knees before the Virgin Mother to implore her intercession for this [Hamlet's] troubled soul'.⁸⁷ The abandoning of the prescribed prayers in a book of impersonal doctrine, suggests that Ophelia has an implicit faith through which she is able to pray effectively. According to Tree's notes, Ophelia 'sits down with a book in her hand before the *prie-dieu*' and upon hearing Hamlet's moralising on existence – or what Tree called his 'self-torturings [sic]' – she 'falls upon her knees praying for her lover'.⁸⁸ Since the whole purpose of settling down with her book of prayers was to attract Hamlet's attention, the spontaneous kneeling and praying formed a contrast with the superficial act of reading.

In short, Ophelia slipped out of her deceit into a genuine communion with God at the designated spot of prayer. If Tree's object was to communicate Ophelia's inherent faith, then there was no real need for a *prie-dieu*. Its presence, however, drew attention to the prominence of religion in the lives of the characters, and the instinctive godliness

⁸⁶ Clement Scott, *Some Notable Hamlets*, p. 138.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 139.

⁸⁸ Herbert Beerbohm Tree, p. 135.

ingrained into them from, presumably, birth. Assuming that Ophelia was genuinely seeking divine aid for Hamlet and herself, kneeling and offering autonomous words to heaven indicated her spiritual independence. Tree then, infused his interpretation of the play with a deeper spiritual reading than would have been suggested by, for instance, a church scene with incense and candlesticks.

Despite the absence of a church, the image of the Virgin Mary, within what Scott described as ‘a shrine in a little side oratory’,⁸⁹ created a sanctified space which was designated to the act of autonomous prayer. This seems all the more pertinent in light of the legislation rendering superfluous ornaments illegal. Requiring an image of the Virgin to pray was a clear violation of the Protestant rejection of Marian worship, together with theological objections to idolatry. But Tree used the icon within a space designed for worship. Rather than being representative – like the perceived function of the historical mountings of the mid-century – this seems more akin to the personalised ornament usage of Barrett, Forbes-Robertson and Benson in the last quarter of the century.

Turning briefly away from Tree’s *Hamlet*, it is important to be aware that praying within an explicitly religious space on the stage was something that was invariably performed by foreign actors. The American actress Charlotte Cushman’s Ophelia knelt before a crucifix and William E. Burton, also American, had Hamlet deliver his ‘sermon’ to Gertrude before a crucifix and book of prayers.⁹⁰ Furthermore, Claudius’ prayer scene was omitted on the English stage until Charles Fechter’s

⁸⁹ Clement Scott, *Some Notable Hamlets*, p. 138.

⁹⁰ Charlotte Cushman, Promptbook for *Hamlet*. Manchester, 1847. *Folger Promptbooks*. Prompt Ham. 10. Shattuck Catalogue, *Hamlet* 39, p. 99; William E. Burton, Promptbook for *Hamlet*. New York, 1852. *Folger Promptbooks*. Prompt Ham. 8. Shattuck Catalogue, *Hamlet* 50, p. 101.

production of 1861. Fechter grew up in France and would have been familiar with the Catholic faith and its practices. In fact, much of Fechter's stage business introduced the ritual acts of religion into the play. For instance, the American critic Kate Field observed that 'when Horatio described his encounter with the Ghost, Fechter crossed his hands at the moment his father was mentioned [...] the action was entirely natural to a Catholic'.⁹¹ Fechter's was clearly a world in which the gestures and symbols of religion were instinctive.

Like Fechter, and similarly exposed to Roman Catholicism, the King's confession of his crime and desire for forgiveness were retained by the Italian performers Tomasso Salvini (1875), and Ernesto Rossi. Although Rossi never staged his *Hamlet* in England, his views on the play were translated into English and published in an essay in 1884. Rossi claimed:

Claudius' monologue is cognate to Hamlet's soliloquy "to be or not to be". Each [...] is just a reflex of human thoughts anent the human conscience [...] neither the one nor the other results in immediate action; but both rightly appraise the infirmities of mankind.⁹²

Aligning Hamlet's existential crisis with Claudius' confession of culpability is a fascinating insight into a decidedly un-English way of approaching the prayer scene. But Rossi's retention of this episode, together with his use of Claudius' soliloquy as a parallel to that of Hamlet, imbued the King with the very same sense of humanity and fragility as his despairing nephew. Like Fechter, the Italian performers would have been familiar with and even adherents of Roman Catholicism, making Claudius' prayer for divine mercy a deliberate indication of his villainy through an inability to feel contrition. Whether or not prayer can be seen as 'a reflex of human thought', enacting

⁹¹ Kate Field, *Charles Albert Fechter* (1882; repr. New York: Benjamin Blom Inc., 1969), p. 99.

⁹² Ernesto Rossi quoted in *Critical Responses to Hamlet*, VI, 538-43 (p. 542).

prayer on stage before religious ornaments was not something commonly associated with English performances.

Returning to Tree's *Hamlet*, then, the inclusion of prayers in the oratory must have driven home the concepts of idolatry and disillusionment that were frequently debated in relation to this play in the second half of the century. For instance, Tree adopted the Catholic action of crossing himself. Hamlet's resolution, 'let not ever/ The soul of Nero enter this firm bosom' (3.2.411-12), was a prayer uttered on his knees before the Marian portrait: 'Hamlet stops before the Virgin, crosses himself, and it is to the "Mater Misericordiae" that he addresses the prayer "O heart, lose not thy nature!"' (3.2.411).⁹³ But the Public Worship Regulations Act made the signing of a cross in an Anglican church in any ceremony except infant baptism a crime punishable by imprisonment. In 1890, for instance, the ecclesiastical court concluded that making the sign of the cross in the ceremony of the Holy Communion was 'an innovation which must be discontinued'.⁹⁴ As with the current smoking ban in public places, making gestures such as the sign of the cross was also outlawed in specific contexts. However, like smoking, the sign of the cross – along with other ornaments – could be used in private and, most significantly, on the stage. By including the signing of the cross, then, Tree was making it clear that God and all the images and gestures that go with the evocation of the divine, were part of the very air that Hamlet breathed.

Together with gestures, icons were a distinct area of concern for Anglicans. Both Tree's *Hamlet* and Maud's *Ophelia* considered the Marian image necessary for effective prayer. In fact, after berating his mother in the closet scene, Tree led Gertrude,

⁹³ Clement Scott, *Some Notable Hamlets*, p. 142.

⁹⁴ 'London Correspondence', *Aberdeen Weekly Journal*, 22 November 1890 <<http://galegroup.com>> [accessed August 2010].

played by Rose Leclercq, ‘sternly to the *prie-dieu*, at which she kneels sobbing’.⁹⁵ It is significant that Hamlet, in this scene, attempts to elicit contrition from his mother: ‘confess yourself to heaven/ Repent what’s past; avoid what is to come’ (3.4.149-50). By physically manoeuvring her towards an area designed for prayer, Tree may have been drawing on the late-century paranoia about correct and incorrect forms of worship, as well as the earlier Evangelical attempts, discussed in Chapter Three, to elicit contrition out of penitents by ‘breaking’ and ‘binding’ their hearts.⁹⁶

However, visual stimuli were also associated with idolatry. Ruskin claimed that idolatry ‘delighted the sense [...] shaped the imagination [and] limited the idea of deity to one place’.⁹⁷ As with concerns about disillusionment, Ruskin’s vocabulary hinged around notions of ‘imagination’ and ‘senses’. Nevertheless, Ruskin, like Pugin, noted that gilded churches were an offering for the glorification of God. Apotheosising objects, images and buildings, far from signifying idolatry or even psychological abnormality for Ruskin, ‘is no dishonesty’.⁹⁸ Indeed, this was the kind of argument that gave Catholic worship its ecclesiological clout. However, Ruskin sought to fuse the visual splendour of gothic architecture, associated with Catholicism, with the work ethic of Protestantism so as to produce worthy churches and buildings for the praise of God. If grand architecture, crucifixes, and Marian images were genuinely calculated to trigger the imaginative process that culminates in a spiritual or mental proximity to God, there was certainly some good to be coaxed out of ornaments within the realm of religion. While the law would suggest that the Church of England and the state itself had grown less tolerant of Catholic or High Church ritualism, stage practice indicates an increased

⁹⁵ Herbert Beerbohm Tree, p. 148.

⁹⁶ Charles Haddon Spurgeon, *The Soul Winner*, p. 28.

⁹⁷ John Ruskin, *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* (New York: John Wiley & Son, 1865), p. 13.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

consciousness of the value behind religious symbols. By this logic, the Marian shrine within an oratory, and the *prie-dieu* in Gertrude's room symbolised a deep-rooted faith and connection to God, without necessarily evoking 'false' idolatry.

But this still leaves the problem proposed by *Hearth and Home* about erecting such charged items and enacting genuine religious practices on stage. Although Tree was respectful of the value behind the Virgin and the sign of the cross, coupled with the inherent faith of the characters kneeling down to pray, *performing* such pious activity for the purpose of entertaining bordered on profanity. Referring briefly back to Irving's *Much Ado about Nothing* and his removal of signs of the Host, Stoker observed that when playing the lead in Tennyson's *Becket*, Irving engaged in ritual and wore vestments without fear of offence because 'all sensitiveness [...] was merged in pity'.⁹⁹ Stoker's observation suggests that the content of a play, and the context of the activity being performed, had some sort of bearing on the feasibility of evoking rituals and ornaments on stage. If this logic can be applied to Tree's *Hamlet*, then it follows that the circumstances of murder and existential crisis allowed the actors to feasibly engage in ritualistic gestures without seeming superficial or performed.

Tree's notes on *Hamlet* suggest that his production drew attention to the spirituality of the characters by depicting the value behind religious icons. Rather than acting before crucifixes and bearing ornaments, Tree's characters actively engage with the *prie-dieu* and consciously pray. Unlike the supposedly 'representative' ornaments or ceremonial church spaces of Kean and Macready in the mid-century, the small oratory and *prie-dieu* used by Tree demonstrate a willingness to overcome the taboos of

⁹⁹ Bram Stoker, I, p. 106.

performing religion in order to truly access and communicate the minds of individuals toiling within the ideological parameters of Roman Catholicism.

Conclusion

The desire for architectural accuracy aside, depicting and parading characters in and around churches on a stage within a theatre is a fascinating indication of the ways in which performers and audiences approached the issue of religious establishments within Shakespeare's plays. The recreation of cathedrals and prayer booths raises questions about the perceived role of the stage: is it a space for illustration or 'representation', or a didactic ground on which religious ceremony is no less real than within the parameters of a church?

Rev. John Cumming argued convincingly in his series of lectures that 'it is the work that consecrates the place, not the place that consecrates the work'.¹⁰⁰ Although Cumming was a controversial figure, and probably unfashionable by the end of the century, his logic seems sound: 'if this vast auditory were assembled in Covent Garden Theatre in the name of Christ, it would be a congregation of the Lord'.¹⁰¹ As long as the sentiments governing the actions within the faux mountings of churches or prayer spaces were not necessarily holy but certainly chaste and respectful, then the theatre was making no claims to 'consecration'; rather, as *Hearth and Home* hinted, religion with all its trappings and rituals can only ever be *evoked* or *represented* within the realm of art, because piety, as Cumming seemed to suggest, transcends 'place' and repeated, performative action.

¹⁰⁰ Rev. John Cumming, *Apocalyptic Sketches*, p. 333.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 333.

Chapter Conclusion

This chapter demonstrates a shift from incidental to personal ornaments, and communal to individual religious spaces from the 1840s until the end of the century, within performances of Shakespeare's plays. Although the final decade of the century was no less anti-ritualistic than those during the Oxford Movement and papal aggression, Christian symbols such as the cross and crucifix, and rituals like prayer and baptism had undergone tempestuous legal and theological controversies. By the turn of the century the appearance of these items and themes on stage was just as controversial as the debates they inspired in real life.

Since a common conclusion that can be drawn from each example of ornament or ceremony usage is the representation of character ideology, it is prudent to question why such depiction of Catholicism was necessary. Hamlet, Isabella and Romeo do not need to engage with crucifixes in order for an audience to understand that they have Catholic affinities. However, by offering visual signifiers of their faith, these, and other, Shakespearean characters were somehow more justified in their actions. If, for instance, Benson's Romeo had not been calmed by the sight of a cross, the audience could not know for certain that it is a fear of damnation that prevents his suicide. Similarly, if Tree's Hamlet did not cross himself or lead his mother to a *prie-dieu*, his actions – including the potential damnation of Claudius and the murder of Polonius – would seem wicked rather than pious and self-sacrificial.

What is clear from these productions is that sets, props and business were never truly incidental. Exploring how ornaments and ceremony appeared on stage reveals the power of interplay between text, delivery and scenery in performance. While Macready,

Kean and even Phelps tactfully highlighted the superficiality of their Roman Catholic characters who claim piety and unity beneath the one Church, performers such as Barrett, Benson and Tree introduced audiences to Hamlets – and in Benson’s case a Romeo and Laurence – who were willing to *engage* with their faiths through the medium of iconography or ornaments. No matter that Irving swapped his sacramental ornaments for secular items, or that Macready’s crucifix was small and in the background; props and rituals had become part of the plays themselves signifying, as Sofer would suggest, not just ‘stage property’ but also the ‘three dimensional’ ideological and cultural worlds within which the characters exist.

Chapter Five Performing Theology

Introduction

Having explored engagements with the symbols of religion on stage, this chapter moves away from ocular towards aural experience. Observing religious signifiers differs experientially from the process of listening to the language of religion. Because ‘theology’ is obviously a broad theme, this chapter traces editing patterns of episodes in performances, where religious arguments and language were employed for the purpose of persuasion.

Before introducing the issues of editing and religious language, it is important to contextualise the matter of spoken religion on the stage. As Murray Roston has observed in his twentieth-century work on biblical drama, because scripture was banished from the theatre between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries,¹ biblical characters and scriptural messages were often buried beneath late-century melodrama and ‘crude sensationalism’.² In works like Barrett’s *The Sign of the Cross* (1895), according to Roston, ‘the sadism of the gladiatorial arena vied for first place with the passionate love theme’.³ It is fair to concede to Roston’s claim that scriptural matters had to be placed within a distracting context – in *Sign*’s case, within a love story – in order to make them stage worthy. While depictions of God and discussions of scripture were not permitted on stage, employing a general religious discourse was acceptable as long as it operated under the unspoken rule of the ‘distraction’.

¹ As Foulkes has observed, while the ‘Lord Chamberlain banned the Bible from the stage, from the tercentenary onwards, quotations from Shakespeare became increasingly unexceptional in the pulpit’. Richard Foulkes, *Church and Stage in Victorian England*, p. 102.

² Murray Roston, *Biblical Drama in England* (London: Faber and Faber, 1968), p. 225.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 226.

This ‘distraction’ is vital to understanding editing patterns in Shakespearean productions of the period. Adrian Poole has argued that ‘from Bowdler onwards, various forms of editing, censorship and abridgement [made] Shakespearean texts acceptable for an expanding number of readers and spectators’.⁴ But Bowdler’s Shakespeare is not indicative of Victorian attitudes towards his plays, nor is it feasible to dismiss Victorian editing patterns of the drama as prudish; rather, as Poole suggests, Shakespeare was made ‘acceptable’. But what, therefore, was ‘acceptable’ in the context of performance where the words, edited or otherwise, were spoken in a spatial, temporal environment within the context of a play’s action?

With respect to religious language, it is clear that pious wooing and comic jests about suicide, at least, were ‘acceptable’. In *Romeo and Juliet*, the lovers meet and engage through an elongated conceit about the reception of literal absolution from one body to another. But this was widely performed in the productions of Kean (1841), Irving (1882) and the Roman Catholic American actress Mary Anderson (1884), to name a few.⁵ Similarly, Hamlet’s expostulation ‘we defy augury [...]’ (5.2.230) was usually performed despite being an outright rejection of free will; and the exchange between the Gravediggers about eternal punishment and Christian burial was also retained. All three of these episodes express the importance of faith to these characters, and their dependence upon the discourse of Catholicism.

⁴ Adrian Poole, *Shakespeare and the Victorians* (London: Arden Shakespeare, 2004), p. 157.

⁵ Charles Kean, Promptbook for *Romeo and Juliet*. London, 1841. *Folger Promptbooks*. Prompt Rom. 13. Shattuck Catalogue, *Romeo and Juliet* 16, p. 413; Henry Irving, Promptbook for *Romeo and Juliet*. London, 1882. *Folger Promptbooks*. Prompt Rom. 12. Shattuck Catalogue, *Romeo and Juliet* 44, p. 419; William Shakespeare, ‘*Romeo and Juliet* as Performed by Miss Mary Anderson and Company’, in *Hamlet and Romeo and Juliet* (London: Nassau Steam Press, 1884), pp. 97-169 (pp. 120-1).

It follows, therefore, that the editorial pen did not fall hard upon passages of outright religion; rather that cuts and omissions were directed at areas of ambiguity. While the lovers and Hamlet, respectively, discuss absolution and providence in no uncertain terms, characters like Claudius, Henry and Angelo, from *Hamlet*, *Henry VIII* and *Measure for Measure* respectively, use religion to express their faith in ambiguous situations without the distractions of simultaneous love-making, revenge-seeking and grave-digging. But in order to determine why these, and other, episodes were subject to cuts, it is necessary to take a two-part view of religious language within the context of Shakespeare's plays: internal and external persuasion.

The language of persuasion was not unique to theatre. Sermons preached by Cumming, Spurgeon, and F. W. Farrar, for instance, were often persuasive pieces of rhetoric calculated to elicit emotional and intellectual responses from their auditors. R. H. Ellison has observed that there was an 'orality-literacy' combination underpinning Victorian preaching that made published sermons adaptable for 'oral performance'.⁶ The auditory response to a 'performed', persuasive sermon is based on the moral value of the written word and the experience of listening to, rather than reading, it.

The didactic agendas of church sermons, coupled with the arrangement between speaker or performer and audience, make an interesting parallel with the theatre. Returning to Irving's church scene in *Much Ado about Nothing* (1882), it was around this production that Hall Caine based an incident in his novel *The Christian* (1897). Glory, the daughter of a clergyman, at her visit to this production, refers to the seats as the 'pews', the audience as 'congregation', the box as the 'vestry' and 'was behaving as

⁶ Robert H. Ellison, *The Victorian Pulpit: Spoken and Written Sermons in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Canada: Associated University Presses, 1998), p. 126.

she behaved in church'.⁷ The juxtaposing of theatre and church, particularly in the context of the novel, offers an important indication of the role of the theatre towards the end of the century. Caine's career as a dramatist and active Christian Socialist lends credibility to this image of the stage as a pulpit. If audiences could flock to the theatre, just as congregations to the church, the stage would become a verbal mechanism for the dissemination of ideas in much the same way as sermons. Indeed, Forbes-Robertson claimed that 'drama [has] an inspiring influence [and] people are slowly beginning to understand the educational value of the spoken word upon the legitimate stage'.⁸

But convincing others to act or think, aside from the obvious connotations of temptation, was considered a genuine threat within the context of theatre. This is exemplified by an article in the *Religious Tract Society's* periodical the *Visitor* (1842). The article was based on moral hysteria that arose from the success of John Buckstone's play, based on a novel by W. H. Ainsworth. The play was about the notorious eighteenth-century thief Jack Sheppard. Sheppard, a thief condemned to hang for his crimes, was widely admired for his charm, ingenuity and escape from imprisonment no fewer than four times. The *Visitor* published a statement made by a prison chaplain about three men who were, allegedly, cajoled into crime after having seen the play, in which one of them was said to have made the unlikely confession:

I am quite convinced that if I had never seen the play, I should never have got into this trouble [...] I think the playhouse does a deal of mischief. I have known apprentices to steal money from their masters to go to the play.⁹

A character's ability to capture the imagination encourages a desire for emulation. Such emulation triggered by live theatre in which audience members applaud the characters,

⁷ Hall Caine, p. 67.

⁸ Johnston Forbes-Robertson, p. 172.

⁹ 'Evils of the Theatre', *The Visitor*, 1842 (1842), 115-16 (p. 116).

offers to replace ‘correct’ attitudes and conduct with the fictionalised and sensational morality of the stage.

This theatrical sub-morality was noted by Frank Marshall in his introduction to *Richard III*:

If one stops [...] to measure Richard by the moral standard of the Decalogue, we have nothing but horror and grave condemnation for him [...] but [...] as long as he is not ordering *us* to execution, or scathing *us* with his irony, we can only admire instead of reprobating his utter immorality.¹⁰

If audiences could be corrupted by the ill deeds of a ‘fine sharp fellow’¹¹ like Sheppard, and the ‘admirable’ *Richard III*, it follows that they could also be manipulated by drama using religious language or arguments to justify its own brand of immorality. This confirms Rev. Cumming’s lamentations, quoted in the introduction, that theatre distracts from ‘God [...] the soul [...] Christ and eternity’.¹²

This invites questions about interpretation. Andrew James Hartley has recently compared the performance of Shakespeare to quantum mechanics, whereby ‘until the moment of observation, there is only possibility’.¹³ The act of observing, in short, fixes the logical possibility of infinite variety into a comprehensive, stable state of existence. Hartley argues that ‘choices which come into being in the performance exist in a number of hypothetical states until that moment of observation by the audience’.¹⁴ If the hermeneutical ‘variety’ inherent in works like *Hamlet*, for instance, can be ‘fixed’ through performance, then it does not follow that the theatre can induce audiences into *more* dangerous thoughts and conduct than the act of reading. By this logic, the delivery

¹⁰ Frank A. Marshall, ‘Introduction to *Richard III*’, in *Henry Irving Shakespeare*, III, 1-14 (p. 13).

¹¹ ‘Evils of the Theatre’, *The Visitor*, p. 6.

¹² Rev. John Cumming, *Apocalyptic Sketches*, p. 255.

¹³ Andrew James Hartley, ‘The Schrödinger Effect’, *Shakespeare Survey*, 62 (2009), 222-35 (p. 224).

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

of words ‘fixes’ or reduces ‘possibility’, suggesting that the choice of these words and the context in which they are spoken determine their meaning and, by extension, propensity to persuade an audience.

In Shakespeare’s plays, characters often experience episodes of moral crisis during which they employ the rhetoric of religion to rationalise through their subjective situations. In other words, they persuade themselves and others of the moral validity or, as the case may be, contemptibility of thoughts, actions and desires. In order to examine theatrical dealings with this kind of verbal persuasion, it is necessary to split the experience into two categories: internal and external persuasive moralising. To determine whether religious language was consciously engaged with in Shakespeare’s plays in the same way that religious symbols were introduced into the scenic world of drama, this chapter asks whether any patterns can be found in the editing of religious persuasion for performance and what, precisely, was *unspeakable* on the Victorian stage, as opposed to *unshowable*.

Part One: Internal Persuasion

This section takes a broad look at the editing of passages that hinge around internal persuasion or casuistry. Using acting editions of *Hamlet*, *Henry VIII* and *Measure for Measure*, patterns of textual omission and retention are drawn out so as to determine whether questions of religious morality affected the delivery of Shakespeare’s language.

Casuistry was defined by the Professor of Casuistry and Moral Philosophy, F. D. Maurice, as ‘cases of conscience’.¹⁵ Though often aligned with the sophistry of Jesuits

¹⁵ Frederick Denison Maurice, *The Conscience: Lectures on Casuistry Delivered in the University of Cambridge* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1868), p. 91.

and Roman Catholicism, casuistry became a subject of intellectual discussion in the mid-nineteenth century. Maurice, in his series of lectures on casuistry, insisted on the significance of ‘conscience’ within moral discourse. Since the conscience is irrevocably linked with the concept of the self or ‘I’, Maurice claimed that it exists in spite of wider communal constructs such as society. Conscience is ‘the discovery in each man that he has responsibilities which no class, no majority of men has imposed upon him, and from which no class, no majority of men can release him [because] there is in him [...] signs of a parentage which must be divine’.¹⁶ Probing this conscience with logic is a way of understanding the nature of the ‘I’ around which existence revolves, and it is to this construct of the ‘I’ that persuasion in this part of the chapter relates.

What Maurice called ‘cases of conscience’ are situations in which an individual examines moral questions unique to his or her situation. This appears to be the case with characters like Claudius, Henry and Angelo, all of whom debate with themselves over whether or not their transgressions are morally permissible. Each character uses his situation to penetrate relevant doctrine and discuss the ethical position in which he finds himself. Through their internal persuasions or casuistry, Angelo, Claudius and Henry, respectively, potentially justify hypocrisy, murder, and adultery. This section questions how much of these casuistic discussions was actually performed on stage and speculates about what qualified as ‘acceptable’ within the context of performance.

Measure for Measure

Beginning with Angelo, the character rationalises upon the sin that is temptation. After engaging in a moral debate with the nun Isabella, Angelo persuades himself of the validity of transgression. He cajoles Isabella to justify sin, and persuades himself that

¹⁶ Ibid., pp. 91, 161.

temptation is relative to circumstance. After Helen Faucit's performance of Isabella in Glasgow (1849) – one which she did not repeat in London – the *Glasgow Herald* specifically referred to Angelo's discourse during this episode as 'sophistry [and] vile casuistry'.¹⁷ Though Angelo offers to justify transgression, he can hardly be said to have been 'vile'. While it is unclear what was omitted in Faucit's acting text, it is evident that Angelo's moralising upon sin and temptation was not, in performance, inappropriate, so much as indicative of his villainy.

Moving on to Angelo's casuistic dialogue, the character claims:

[...] most dangerous
Is that temptation, that doth goad us on
To sin in loving virtue (2.2.181-3).

That temptation is a sin is, doctrinally speaking, irrefutable. Indeed, in Angelo's case, Wordsworth argued that 'the tempter [...] adapts his temptations so that he may bring evil out of good, and that virtue itself may be made to minister to sin'.¹⁸ Wordsworth's interpretation of this episode seems to overlook Angelo's use of the word 'dangerous'. There is no bringing forth of 'evil' out of its paradoxical 'good'; rather the potential to err towards transgression or 'sin' *through* that good. Since Isabella (the tempter) is decidedly un-wicked, Wordsworth's conceptual polarising of virtue and evil has no place within Angelo's predicament. The moral void that appears when a tempter is unconsciously tempting, and worse still when said tempter is physically and spiritually virtuous, leaves Angelo with a theological dilemma: who or what is the sin?

Given the moral scope within Angelo's observation, it was cut in the stage versions of Samuel Phelps (1846), Miss Alleyn (1884) and Oscar Asche (1906). By way

¹⁷ 'The Theatres', *The Glasgow Herald*, 2 April 1849 <<http://galegroup.com>> [accessed June 2010].

¹⁸ Charles Wordsworth, p. 131.

of instance, fifteen of the twenty-five lines from Angelo's casuistry were removed by Phelps, leaving the following:

What's this, what's this? Is this her fault or mine?
Can it be
That modesty may more betray our sense
Than woman's lightness? Having waste ground enough,
Shall we desire to raze the sanctuary?
O, fie, fie, fie!
What dost thou, or what art thou, Angelo?
O, let her brother live!
Thieves for their robbery have authority
When judges steal themselves. What, do I love her,
That I desire to hear her speak again,
And feast upon her eyes?
This virtuous maid
Subdues me quite. Even till now,
When men were fond, I smiled and wondered how (2.2.166-80).¹⁹

Here, Angelo challenges the objectivity of 'fault' and, by extension, sin itself; but he does not delve into a discussion of his own 'corruption'. Instead, Phelps' cuts suggest that Angelo focuses almost exclusively on the morality of his own position rather than that of Isabella. The line 'what dost thou, or what art thou, Angelo?' is the most poignant question that the character demands of himself, enabling him to delve into the very nature of the 'I' and its relationship with the world. Crucially, Angelo does not reach a conclusion in this episode: he determines on neither a moral absolute nor a course of action, acknowledging only his own immorality in the case.

Debating the natures of Angelo's action and existence was clearly more acceptable, in a performance context, than his casuistic approach to *temptation*. Here, Miss Alleyn's rehearsal version of the text offers some insight. Alleyn, who performed her touring version of the play at the Memorial Theatre in Stratford-upon-Avon in April 1884 and May 1885, cut Angelo's speech further by removing the short lines 'this

¹⁹ Samuel Phelps, Promptbook for *Measure for Measure*. London, 1846. *Folger Promptbooks*. Prompt Measure 3. Shattuck Catalogue, *Measure for Measure* 8, p. 270.

virtuous maid/ Subdues me quite' (2.2.178-9).²⁰ Removing the extra lines suggests that direct references to Isabella's literal temptation of Angelo were distasteful. Discussing the roles of 'tempter' and 'tempted' clearly produces an indirect parallel between biblical temptresses such as Jezebel, Delilah and Eve and the supposedly saintly Isabella. By this logic, the moral acceptability of casuistry was dependant on the nature of the characters directly (Angelo) and indirectly (Isabella) implicated.

While the figure of Isabella offers a degree of explanation for the textual omissions in Angelo's dialogue, there is still the issue of casuistry to address. Angelo's 'case of conscience' pertains to the question 'what art thou?', and the very essence of what it means to be a 'good' man experiencing 'bad' thoughts. Claire Griffiths-Osborne has recently observed that Angelo's soliloquy of guilt is deficient in 'sincere and proper contrition [...] unrepentant and lacking in a purpose of amendment'.²¹ Griffiths-Osborne compares Angelo's discussion of his 'temptation' with that of the pregnant Juliet, concluding that while the latter is probed into contrition, Angelo has no confessor to guide him towards penance.²² But, because confession was distinctly Catholic, any enactments of or references to it were avoided by Phelps. Thus lines such as 'I have confessed her' (5.1.533), 'he wants advice' (4.2.153) and 'I will give him a present shrift' (4.2.224) were removed, along with the character of Juliet. This erased, as it were, all traces of the confessional habits of the Roman Catholic Friar/ Duke. It is fascinating therefore, that Angelo was permitted to speak his quasi-confession which reveals the machinations of his conscience. Poole's notion of making Shakespeare

²⁰ Miss Alleyn, Rehearsal Copy of Promptbook for *Measure for Measure*, Stratford-upon-Avon, 1830-60. *Shakespeare Centre Library Promptbooks*. 39.183 916 ASC. Not in Shattuck Catalogue.

²¹ Clare Griffiths-Osborne, "'The terms for common justice': Performing and Reforming Confession in *Measure for Measure*", *Shakespeare*, 5.1 (2009), 36-51 (p. 42).

²² *Ibid.*, p. 42.

‘acceptable’, here, seems to relate more to characterisation than moral or theological discussion.

As well as hinging upon Isabella, Angelo’s monologue pertains directly to his conscience. After all, if ‘who sins most?’ was invariably removed and ‘is this her fault or mine?’ was retained, it does not follow that expurgation occurred solely on *moral* grounds. Before Maurice sought to remove the taboo associated with casuistry in 1868, Phelps’s mid-century performances of *Measure for Measure* were, in fact, engaging with the rational aspect of moral debate. Angelo was not offering to justify his experience of temptation; rather, he proceeded to evaluate himself with respect to the polarised concepts of ‘virtue’ and ‘sin’, and it was this intellectual engagement with morally ambiguous questions that suggests a willingness, however minute, to explore theological issues on the stage.

Hamlet

While Angelo’s ‘case of conscience’ was cut due to its indelicate references to Isabella, patterns of editing for Claudius’ prayer scene in *Hamlet* range from marginal expurgations to complete omission. A comparison between the early Victorian production of Henry Betty (1843) – son of a famed child actor – and late-century versions by Barrett (1884, 1886) and Forbes-Robertson (1897), reveals an interesting shift in focus on religious material within this scene.

In the case of Betty, Claudius admitted that his ‘offence is rank’ and that his ‘stronger guilt beats’ his desire to pray (3.3.36, 40).²³ Here, Claudius was made to appear partly conscionable. Although most of the intervening casuistry, along with

²³ Henry Betty, Promptbook for *Hamlet*. London, 1843. *Folger Promptbooks*. Prompt Ham. 3. Shattuck Catalogue, *Hamlet* 32, p. 98.

Hamlet's entrance, was removed, Betty had Claudius conclude his short soliloquy with the lines:

[...] O wretched state
My words fly up, my thoughts remain below:
Words, without thoughts, never to heaven go (3.3.67-9).

Five years after Betty staged his *Hamlet*, Lord Edward Strachey published an insightful work on morality in the play. Strachey observed that in the prayer scene 'the metaphysical, moral and Christian philosophy [sic] are equally deep and true'.²⁴

Strachey traced the evolution of Claudius' 'despair' by conceptualising it as a struggle between will and inclination: 'the will, when once enslaved by sin, vainly desires to regain its freedom; and the inclinations of that earthly nature which first suggested the sin [...] are become as powerless for good as they once were for mighty evil'.²⁵ The desire for life, power and Gertrude weighed against Claudius' yearning for mercy, and led Strachey to conclude that 'the solution is in the divine *medium* of the Christian doctrine of expiation: not what you have done, but what you are must determine'.²⁶ Strachey's observations aptly summarise the underlying moral: 'such is the end of his efforts to repent [...] his heart has finally refused to part with the fruits of his crime, evil has become his good'.²⁷ Such was not the end, however, for Betty's Claudius. Betty's edited monologue on prayer rendered the character a guilty man unable to pray; not, as Strachey indicated, one who knowingly yet reluctantly sacrifices all to keep his crown and queen.

Although Strachey's essay of 1848 indicates that sophistry was perceived in Claudius' moral struggle – with the theological implications of human inclination and

²⁴ Edward Strachey, *Shakespeare's Hamlet: An Attempt to Find the Key to a Great Moral Problem* (London: J. W. Parker, 1848), p. 69.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 69.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 71.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 74.

will – it was not until 1884 that the prayer scene was mounted intact by an English actor on the English stage. While Kean (1850) and Irving (1874) removed the prayer scene from their productions, Barrett (1884) and later Tree (1892) performed the entire extract from the First Folio. This included speculations on prayer: ‘what’s in prayer but this twofold force/ To be forestalled ’ere we come to fall’; forgiveness, ‘I am still possessed/ Of those effects for which I did the murder [...] May one be pardoned and retain the offence?’; and judgement:

[...] ’tis not so above;
There is no shuffling, there the action lies
In his true nature; and we ourselves compelled,
Even to the teeth and forehead of our faults,
To give in evidence (3.3.48-64).

Here, Claudius recognises the theological unsoundness of unrepentant prayer, and resigns himself to the inevitable divine judgement that will befall his lot hereafter. It makes sense, then, that Barrett left Claudius’ confession intact in 1884, because it was precisely his desire for the crown and queen that infused the production with its sense of humanity.

Barrett’s Claudius and Gertrude were unprecedentedly youthful and engaged in amorous business during the opening and play scenes. According to a review in the *Standard*, ‘the King caresses the Queen’s hand as they sit. Claudius passionately loves Gertrude and it was, this version seeks to show, to gain her rather than to gratify his own ambition that he did the murder’.²⁸ Claudius’ evident love for Gertrude softened his culpability, lending a kind of pathos to his yearning for heavenly pardon in the prayer scene. ‘May one be pardoned and retain the offence?’ (3.3.56), a question omitted by

²⁸ ‘Hamlet at the Princess’s’, *The Standard*, 17 October 1884 <<http://galegroup.com>> [accessed June 2009].

Forbes-Robertson (1897),²⁹ emphasises Claudius' internalised struggle between spiritual 'will' and earthly 'inclination'. Depicting the Queen as young and amorous, by implication, made the 'offence' to which Claudius refers a feasible condition for the murder. Barrett's inclusion of the sophistry on the nature and flexibility of divine judgement – in another reminder of States' theatrical 'symbiosis' – added a degree of complexity to what was, hitherto, an unrepentant villain.

Barrett's treatment of Claudius' soliloquy is put into perspective when placed alongside his use of Hamlet's casuistry from the Second Quarto. While a published version of Barrett's text from 1884 suggests that Hamlet's speech was taken from the First Folio, a version published in 1886, later used by Tree, derives from the Second Quarto. The question is, why would Barrett have changed the text used in this episode after two years? The First Folio runs thus:

Oh, this is hire and salary, not revenge.
He took my father grossly, full of bread;
With all his crimes broad blown, as flush as May;
And how his audit stands who knows save heaven? (3.4.79-82)

The Second Quarto, however, is as follows:

Oh, this is base and silly, not revenge.
He took my father sleeping, his sins brim full,
And how his soul stood to the state of heaven
Who knows, save the immortal powers?³⁰

Essentially, the message is the same as the First Folio version, except that the mercantile concepts of hire, salary and audit are no longer present. Hamlet finds it more conscionable, from his moral position, to wish damnation upon Claudius, rather than simply executing a job to fulfil an oath. Moreover, the Folio version includes the lines

²⁹ William Shakespeare, *Hamlet as Arranged for the Stage by Forbes-Robertson* (London: The Nassau Press, 1897), p. 64.

³⁰ Herbert Beerbohm Tree, Promptbook for *Hamlet*. London, 1892. *Folger Promptbooks*. Prompt Ham. 52. Shattuck Catalogue, *Hamlet* 119, p. 115.

‘how his audit stands who knows save heaven’ which is semantically distinct to ‘how his soul stood to the state of heaven’. Despite having seen and spoken with his father after death, Barrett’s 1886 *Hamlet* referred to his soul in the past tense. The use of the present tense along with the noun ‘audit’, on the other hand, acknowledges the continuous and un-ending nature of divine judgement which must be purchased through continuous struggle. By changing this version in 1886, Barrett seems to have reduced the horrific implications of vengeance. Being ‘base and silly’ is less severe than ‘hire and salary’ which is cold and calculated, just as the idea of the Ghost being judged irrevocably only once was easier to cope with as a concept than the prospect of an on-going, purgatorial, by extension, Catholic torture.

In 1885, MacDonald published his edition of *Hamlet* based on the First Folio.

While retaining notes on the Quarto text, MacDonald clearly privileged the Folio:

It may be [...] that the reason he [Hamlet] gives to himself for not slaying the King was only an excuse, that his soul revolted from the idea of assassination, and was calmed in a measure by the doubt whether a man could thus pray – in supposed privacy, we must remember – and be a murderer [...]³¹

That Hamlet’s ‘soul’ could be ‘revolting’ against the idea of murder is hardly demonstrated by the First Folio’s mercantile language. MacDonald’s laboured attempt to make the reader ‘remember’ that Hamlet has a conscience of his own seems to excuse his spiritually abhorrent desire to send Claudius to an eternal hellfire.

Collectively, Claudius and Hamlet embark on their ‘cases of conscience’ in order to rationalise a course of action suitable to their respective situations. Here, it is important to recall Rossi’s argument about the parallel between Claudius’ prayer and

³¹ *The Tragedy of Hamlet*, ed. by George MacDonald, p. 165.

Hamlet's existential 'to be or not to be' (3.1.56). In the context of casuistry, it seems more apt to draw a connection between the consecutive episodes of conscience wringing. This is supported by the fact that while Hamlet's famed soliloquy was invariably retained and that of Claudius was omitted, the latter was rarely kept without also including Hamlet's discussion on revenge.³² In other words, it was not the existential crisis that was a problem in performance; rather, theological dilemmas occurred at the point where two men employed religious rhetoric and flexible morality to justify murder. However immoral, these episodes were deliberately spoken and enacted on stage, making them crucial to the plot and characterisation of both Hamlet and Claudius.

While Barrett retained the internal moralising of these characters, Forbes-Robertson's (1897) scene, played between himself and Cooper Cliffe, was heavily edited. Of the original sixty-three lines in the scene, twenty-seven were cut by Forbes-Robertson. What made questions like 'whereto serves mercy/ But to confront the visage of offence?' less performable than 'try what repentance can [...] yet what can it when one cannot repent?' (3.2.65-6)?³³ The problem arguably lay in what Strachey argued was the debate between will and inclination. The inherent will or sense of duty to God clashes with earthly inclinations. Although Claudius was shown to demonstrate a consciousness of his culpability, by removing his speculations on the purpose of prayer and mercy, Forbes-Robertson arguably evaded the difficulties presented by the middle ground between earthly and heavenly conceptions of transgression. Earthly inclination and spiritual will tied to the divine judge, in this instance, collide head on. Through the

³² An exception being Fechter who depicted Claudius at prayer, but omitted Hamlet's appearance and subsequent contemplations on damnation. See Charles Fechter, *Promptbook for Hamlet*. London, 1864. *Folger Promptbooks*. Prompt Ham. 25. Shattuck Catalogue, *Hamlet* 72, p. 106.

³³ William Shakespeare, *Hamlet as Arranged for the Stage by Forbes-Robertson*, p. 64.

expurgation of questions from the prayer, Claudius' desire for crown and queen became expressions of his greed rather than casuistic debates about the void between doctrine and reality.

Together with the editing of Claudius' casuistry, Forbes-Robertson omitted the potentially immoral aspects of Hamlet's monologue on revenge. While Barrett allowed Hamlet to speculate on condemning Claudius to hell, Forbes-Robertson's hero was practical without alluding to the more disturbing, bodily connotations of sin. First, there was no mention of the 'crimes' and the 'audit' of old Hamlet, which immediately removed any doubt about the moral superiority of Hamlet's father over Claudius. Secondly, prayer did not make the King 'fit and seasoned' (3.3.87). As well as removing the animal image of slaughter, Forbes-Robertson omitted the distinctly un-Protestant idea that death-bed prayer or confession can actively redeem a soul. Finally, the lines 'my mother stays [...]' and 'in the incestuous pleasure of his bed' (3.3.90, 95), both of which directly refer to Gertrude, were cut out, leaving behind a vivid depiction of Hamlet's disdain for his uncle.³⁴

If Forbes-Robertson omitted expostulations such as 'what's in prayer' and 'seasoned for his passage' (3.3.48, 87) in 1897, Barrett was able to leave these lines intact a decade earlier, and Betty omitted them entirely in 1843, no explicit pattern of editing emerges here. It is tempting to argue that the removal of moral sophistry was a matter of preference. While Barrett actively engaged with Catholic iconography and casuistry in performance, Forbes-Robertson – as will be explored later – favoured more subtle indications of religion and faith. Rather than concerns about propriety, whether or

³⁴ Ibid., p. 65.

not including theologically debatable speculations adds to the plot and characterisations, was arguably the question that actor-managers like Barrett and Forbes-Robertson asked themselves when preparing acting texts. In other words, theology, though often distasteful, was not, by implication, unspeakable.

Henry VIII

The editing of casuistry seems generally to have been undertaken for the benefit of characterisation. This is nowhere more fittingly demonstrated than in *Henry VIII*. While Angelo and Claudius are aware of their culpability and use logic to discuss and persuade themselves of their respective immorality, Henry's conscience has not reached a firm conclusion about the fundamental nature of his transgression.

When Henry expounds on his reasons for seeking a divorce from Katharine, his logic covers both moral and theological grounds. Not only does he claim that marriage with his brother's wife is unconscionable, but he also argues that the sin of binding himself, before God, to his sister-in-law is the cause of his earthly unhappiness. Henry's inability to produce a male heir is, therefore, bound intrinsically to his unholy match with Katharine which, being a sin, cannot be recognised as sacrosanct. The validity of marriage vows and divine punishment within earthly existence is brought to the fore in this particular 'case of conscience', meaning that Henry transgresses into the realms of theology in his attempt to justify a divorce. It is not wholly unsurprising, then, that from early acting versions like Macready's (1852), Kean's (1855) and Phelps (1845-1862), through to Calvert (1877) and Irving (1892), Henry's speech on the perils of his marriage was significantly reduced and contained no references to divine punishment.³⁵

³⁵ William Charles Macready, Promptbook for *Henry VIII*. London, 1852. *Folger Promptbooks*. Prompt Henry VIII 19. Shattuck Catalogue, *Henry VIII* 22, p. 152; Charles Kean, Promptbook for *Henry VIII*. London, 1855. *Folger Promptbooks*. Prompt Henry VIII 12. Shattuck Catalogue, *Henry VIII* 36, p. 162;

That the texts remained consistent in editing throughout the century is fascinating in its own right, because the following extract may never have been delivered in professional performances in the period:

[...] methought
I stood not in the smile of heaven; who had
Commanded nature, that my lady's womb
If it conceived a male child by me, should
Do no more offices of life to it, than
The grave does to the dead [...]
Hence I took a thought
This was a judgement on me; that my kingdom
[...] should not
Be gladdened in it by me (2.4.186-96).

Maurice's claim that casuistry proves that man has 'responsibility' outside of station and society seems to be refuted by Henry's twofold sense of guilt as a husband and a king. Although Henry uses casuistry to fill in the gap between his own situation and objective 'law', his conscience is bound to the very things that Maurice claimed ought to have nothing to do with the central 'I'. Henry's casuistry is, in essence, a form of meta-conscience wringing in which the 'case' in question is the state of his conscience under the *possibility* that it is already compromised by a paradoxically unholy 'holy' union.

Ignoring the above extract and acting around it, means that audiences were told only that Henry's conscience was 'pricked' and yet, paradoxically, that he sought scholars to 'prove but our marriage lawful' (2.4.171, 226). Far from 'hulling in the wild sea of conscience' (2.4.199), the stage Henry displayed very little genuine motive to be divorced from Katharine. It is no wonder, then, that the character was perceived as

Samuel Phelps, Promptbook for *Henry VIII*. London, 1845. *Folger Promptbooks*. Prompt Henry VIII 16. Shattuck Catalogue, *Henry VIII* 20, p. 159; William Shakespeare, *Henry VIII Arranged for Representation from the Text by Charles Calvert* (London: W. S. Johnson, Nassau Steam Press, 1878), pp. 40-1; Henry Irving, Promptbook for *Henry VIII*. London, 1892. *Folger Promptbooks*. Prompt Henry VIII 1. Shattuck Catalogue, *Henry VIII* 57, p. 167.

villainous in performance. For instance, in Kean's production (1855), in which Walter Lacy played Henry, the character was described as a 'monster': 'his walk [...] is that of the destroyer [and his] attempts to justify his murderous marriages on the plea of conscience [make him] a sneaking hypocrite'.³⁶ The villainy of the King, amplified by his references to 'conscience' without expounding on the details, served to elevate the figure of Katharine.

In Kean's production, before the court scene there was some business with what was, presumably, a book of prayers:

[...] O my Wolsey.
The quiet of my wounded conscience,
Thou art a cure fit for a king (*gives book to Wolsey. Wolsey introduces Campeius to the King and takes the book off L doors. Campeius advances and bends to the King, who raises him. Wolsey returns*).³⁷

Wolsey replaces the book with a priest, shifting Henry's attention from speculation and introverted piety to external politics. By the time the court scene took place, Wolsey's influence over Henry had been communicated to the audience, which led to the assumption that a combination of conscience and persuasion induced the King to request a divorce. By retaining Henry's reference to Wolsey as the 'quiet' of his conscience, Kean set up a complex relationship between the King, his religiously inspired guilt, and the representative of the institution that can free him from his predicament.

Again, the 'symbiotic' connection between language and the visual world communicated, in this case, the treachery of Henry while simultaneously eliciting sympathy for Katharine who was the victim of this collective scheming. As with the

³⁶ 'Princess's Theatre', *The Morning Post*. 18 June 1855 <<http://galegroup.com>> [accessed June 2009].

³⁷ Charles Kean, Promptbook for *Henry VIII*. London, 1855. *Folger Promptbooks*. Prompt Henry VIII 12. Shattuck Catalogue, *Henry VIII* 36, p. 162.

recurring scruples about libelling Isabella, performers were unwilling to malign the redemptive Katharine with the casuistry of a morally troubled man. So, while Barrett was able to have his characters discuss the nature of their souls on stage, not one Victorian Henry did the same with his own ‘case of conscience’. Perhaps, were he to do so, the legitimacy of the supposedly flawless Queen would have been compromised. By this logic, it seems that Henry, Claudius and Angelo had their episodes of internalised moral persuasion edited so as to avoid conflicting characterisations and unsavoury morality, not to circumvent the problem of performed theology.

Conclusion

A key concern that arises from this discussion is the extent to which actors, directors, and editors were aware of the implications (spiritual, moral, theological) of their textual amendments and delivery of these episodes of internal persuasion. While it is tempting to dismiss much of this section as presumption – and to a degree such speculations are presuppositions and guess work – it is important to be aware of the general pedantry involved in the editing of performance texts. Details from character age to pronunciation and choice of Folio or Quarto were invariably commented on by reviewers. This caused managers like Phelps, Kean and Barrett to offer justifications for their adaptations in interviews and production programmes. Any kind of cut or addition was documented and debated in knowledgeable circles such as the New Shakespeare Society; therefore it seems improbable that textual changes were made arbitrarily.

But returning to the theme of ‘performing theology’, Angelo’s, Claudius’ and Henry’s ‘cases of conscience’ and their omissions, excisions and even preservations, feed into important questions about why performing religion can be perceived as morally and dramatically problematic. William Archer, in his attempt to reason through

the psychology of acting, argued that ‘acting is imitation; when it ceases to be imitation it ceases to be acting and becomes something else’.³⁸ Transgressing the lines of imitation leads actors into the realm of experience or what Archer called ‘infection’.³⁹ ‘Emotion’, however, or more properly, ‘mimetic emotion [...] is due to the action of the imagination upon the nerve centres’ which, in turn, manifests itself in ‘expressive changes, muscular and vascular [...] and it must not be supposed that these minute changes do not contribute appreciably to the illusion’.⁴⁰ That actors could trick their nervous systems into an appropriate physiological response, would suggest that they could also become psychologically bound to and sympathetic with their characters’ ideologies. In other words, the spoken, bodily and intellectual performance of a character like Claudius may not necessarily be mimetic, but rather that ‘something else’ to which Archer was referring.

Directing attention back to Romeo and Juliet’s wooing and the Gravedigger’s debate on suicide alluded to earlier, the fundamental difference between their discourses and those of Angelo, Claudius and Henry, lies very simply in the matter of ambiguity. Not one of the casuistic characters is confident of his moral position, nor of any absolute means of judging his condition. If actors were adopting the personae of the lovers and talking of literal redemption occurring at the sites of saints, this fell into the category of mimesis, particularly given the distracting wooing that occurs simultaneously to this theological exchange. The assumption is that audience members could focus on the flirtation, accepting the discourse as a kind of by-product of their shared or common ground: Catholicism.

³⁸ William Archer, *Masks or Faces? A Study in the Psychology of Acting* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1888), p. 196.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 196.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 128.

On the other hand, actors appearing alone on a stage and debating the very nature of themselves, their actions and the potential judgement elicited from God, existed in Archer's realm of 'something else'. Here, the boundaries around theological performance were not so lucid. While it is dismissive to claim that 'cases of conscience' invariably spelled trouble, it is also inaccurate to suggest that, where the conscience was wavering and had the potential to draw others into a similar intellectual moral dilemma, it was better for performers not to enact such matters than to launch into theologically disputable concepts. Rather, theology was just as performable as the discussions of scripture in the contemporary sermons of Spurgeon, for instance; and as long as the 'cases of conscience' did not compromise the desired effect of the characters and plot, the very questions of what it means to be tempted, impenitent, and to have a 'pricked' conscience were readily delivered orally for the intellectual and moral entertainment of live audiences.

Part Two: External Persuasion

It is important now to examine patterns of performance practice pertaining to characters that employ religious rhetoric as a means of external persuasion. What happened to acting texts when there were no characterisations to be compromised save the speaker alone? And did it matter that, rather than grappling with the internal conscience, characters could seek to influence the consciences of their peers? In order to deal with these questions, this section examines the editing and performance of externalised persuasion in *Romeo and Juliet*, *King John* and *Measure for Measure*, noting how these episodes differed from the 'cases of conscience' discussed previously.

Friar Laurence, Cardinal Pandulph and *Measure for Measure*'s Claudio each appropriate religious arguments into their respective situations in order to cajole those around them into a state of moral acquiescence. Questioning how religious language was edited and performed within these plays throughout the century is an attempt to determine what actors and audiences thought was being achieved in each case of sophistry. This leads to speculations about whether, ultimately, any or all of the persuasive situations, within the realm of theatre, were, like *Jack Sheppard*, morally dangerous to impressionable minds.

Friar Laurence

Friar Laurence offers verbal justifications of deviant activities like murder and filial disobedience. Setting aside the peripheral, therefore dispensable, nature of Laurence's lines, his sophistry may have been an issue of concern for performers. Much of his dialogue was omitted in the texts of Phelps (1846), Mary Anderson (1884) and Forbes-Robertson (1895). When Laurence persuades Romeo to abandon his suicidal endeavours, he launches into a diatribe on the hero's ingratitude. Although his logic seems viable, when put into the context of Romeo's recent murder of Tybalt and illicit presence in Laurence's cell, the Friar's reasoning carries little theological credibility.

As with the treatment of Isabella and Katharine – whose 'good' characterisations made textual cuts necessary for performance – much of Laurence's own sophistry was removed in order to leave behind the unchallenging figure of a benevolent man that Macready saw was necessary to the plot. One important anomaly, however, was Irving's production (1882), in which a part of the Friar's casuistry was re-inserted into the performance text. While Forbes-Robertson, Anderson and Phelps all cut Laurence's attempt to point out the positive outcomes of Romeo's calamity, Irving left this intact:

[...] thy Juliet is alive,
For whose dear sake thou wast but lately dead.
There art thou happy. Tybalt would kill thee,
But thou slewest Tybalt. There art thou happy too.
The law, that threatened death, becomes thy friend
And turns it to exile. There art thou happy.
A pack of blessings light upon thy back;
Happiness courts thee in her best array (3.3.135-42).⁴¹

Murdering Tybalt and receiving lawful punishment for his crime, by Laurence's logic, were providential, divinely sanctioned events. It is feasible to assume that, having previously expostulated 'Affliction is enamoured of thy parts/ And thou art wedded to calamity' (3.3.2-3), in the productions of Phelps, Anderson and Forbes-Robertson,⁴² Laurence could not feasibly claim that 'happiness courts thee in her best array' (3.3.142). Irving, however, allowed the Friar to contradict himself in order to offer comfort to Romeo, and it was this position as comforter, rather than priest, that underpinned Irving's reading of the character. In other words, morally inconsistent sophistry was acceptable within the context of consolation.

However, even Irving's seemingly lenient view of sophistry did not allow for Laurence's disingenuous soteriological allusions. In fact, Irving claimed of Shakespeare in general that 'the omission of passages, the modification of certain words or phrases, and the transposition of some scenes are all absolutely necessary before they can be acted'.⁴³ In the case, for instance, of Forbes-Robertson's 1895 production, the entire episode of Juliet's wedding morning from the nurse's entrance into the bedchamber, to

⁴¹ Henry Irving, Promptbook for *Romeo and Juliet*. London, 1882. *Folger Promptbooks*. Prompt Rom. 12. Shattuck Catalogue, *Romeo and Juliet* 44, p. 419.

⁴² Samuel Phelps, Promptbook for *Romeo and Juliet*. London, 1846. *Folger Promptbooks*. Prompt Rom. 24. Shattuck Catalogue, *Romeo and Juliet* 27, p. 416; William Shakespeare, 'Romeo and Juliet as Performed by Miss Mary Anderson and Company', pp. 97-169; William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet as Arranged for the Stage by Forbes-Robertson* (London: The Nassau Press, 1895).

⁴³ Henry Irving quoted in Jeffrey Richards, *Henry Irving: Theatre, Culture and Society: Essays, Addresses and Lectures* (Keele: Ryburn Publishing, 1994), p. 283.

the bearing of the body to the church, was expurgated.⁴⁴ Forbes-Robertson's omission of Laurence's comforts such as 'dry up your tears' (4.5.79) presented the Friar as careless of the repercussions of his exploits on Juliet's family. Like most productions, Forbes-Robertson omitted the final act from the moment of Juliet's suicide. The absence of this post-catastrophe recapitulation of events and reconciliation of the feuding families must have amplified Laurence's moral ineptitudes, particularly given his retreat from the tomb to avoid detection. Nevertheless, in Shakespeare's text, when Laurence offers to comfort the grieving companions of Juliet, he introduces soteriological discourse that, next to the *undead* corpse, transgressed the parameters of religious decorum.

Returning to Irving's production and necessary 'transposition' of lines, it is telling that he omitted the following passage:

Peace, ho, for shame! Confusion's cure lives not
In these confusions [...]
And all the better is it for the maid.
Your part in her you could not keep from death,
But heaven keeps his part in eternal life.
The most you sought was her promotion;
For 'twas your heaven she should be advanced,
And weep ye now, seeing she is advanced
Above the clouds, as high as heaven itself?
O, in this love, you love your child so ill,
That you run mad, seeing that she is well.
She's not well married that lives married long;
But she's best married that dies married young (4.5.65-77).

First, the repetition of 'confusion' smacks of equivocation, with Laurence expounding on what is, effectively, circular reasoning. But more interestingly, he argues that earthly desires for success and elevation are equal to heavenly salvation. Laurence states that Juliet is *now* advanced, emphasising her immediate entrance to heaven without the

⁴⁴ William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet as Arranged for the Stage by Forbes-Robertson*, pp. 69-70.

necessary purgatorial intermediaries. It was not so much the direct references to heaven, as the conscious deception that appears to be going on in this scene that may have led to its omission by actors such as Forbes-Robertson.

In lieu of these verbal references to Juliet's salvation through short marriage and immediate ascension to heaven, Irving provided a visual suggestion of redemption through what Clement Scott described as a 'procession of fair bridesmaids filing into the presence of the corpse [...] in white, look[ing] like angels'.⁴⁵ In many ways, the virgin-white clad girls surrounding the death bed of Juliet were less subtle than Laurence's cryptic talk of heavenly advancement. However, it was clearly considered a viable piece of performance: more so than the spoken language of soteriology. Again, the 'symbiotic' nature of performance is foregrounded.

The very nature of Laurence's death-bed consolation as a piece of rhetoric designed to distract Juliet's parents from the fact of her clandestine marriage, made it a form of sophistry so overtly distasteful that it could not be given credibility by being spoken on stage. By Irving's logic, that a holy man could use the faith of his adherents to deceive them, was far less 'acceptable' than the arrival of angelic figures to signify spiritual transcendence. It was through this substitution of stage business for religious dialogue that offers an important way of understanding the significance of spoken theology in the theatre in the late nineteenth century. Irving's text indicates that persuasion, such as the self-consciously optimistic 'A pack of blessings light upon thy back' (3.3.141) was preferable to the explicit lie 'she is advanced/ Above the clouds, as high as heaven itself' (4.5.73-4). In other words, Laurence, certainly in Irving's version,

⁴⁵ Clement Scott, *From the Bells to King Arthur: A Critical Record of the First-Night Productions at the Lyceum Theatre from 1871 to 1895* (London: John Macqueen, 1897), p. 236.

was permitted his verbal persuasion with religious discourse so long as his sophistry was not outright deception.

Claudio

In *Measure for Measure*, Claudio's short episode of sophistry is an important demonstration of what it was about spoken theology, intended for persuasion, that made it so apparently un-performable. As discussed earlier, Laurence referring directly to immediate heavenly ascension, and Claudius to the efficacy of prayer and divine mercy were all theological discussions, whether meant as *internal* debates or *external* persuasions. But that each of these was invariably cut or entirely omitted on stage does not seem consistent with the retention of theology in the problem play.

Take, for instance, Isabella's persuasive discourse on soteriology, which was to Phelps (1846), Miss Alleyn (1830-60) and Oscar Asche (1906), permissible in the context of performance. Isabella's references to God with 'He that might the vantage best have took' and 'He which is the top of judgement' (2.2.73, 75) were retained, while speculations such as:

Shall we serve heaven
With less respect than we do minister
To our gross selves? (2.2.85-7)

were omitted from Phelps' version. It was in the gap between fiction and fact that an explanation can be found for the omissions and retentions of these passages. While Isabella's observations are, to all intents and purposes, about objective paradigms to which most Christian parties are in acquiescence, the pontificating of characters like Laurence is riddled with subjectivity and, in the case of Claudius, circumstantial moral ambiguity. Thus Isabella's less categorically acceptable doctrine 'more than our brother is our chastity' (2.4.184) was edited out, while the moral question 'Is it not a kind of

incest to take life/ From thine own sister's shame?' (3.1.139-40) was kept. Issues of expediency aside, it would seem that anything that had a *sound* moral and, sometimes, theological basis could be spared omission.

To reach this conclusion, however, is to overlook the ambiguous passages that were left in the performance texts. Since Claudio's ethically charged request that Isabella redeem him is integral to the shift in mood in the dialogue between the siblings, the passage was kept by Phelps (1846, 1850) and Alleyn (1830-60):

What sin you do to save a brother's life
Nature dispenses with the deed so far
That it becomes a virtue (3.1.135-7).

Aligning 'sin' with 'virtue', in this case, is theologically unfeasible because although Christian charity holds a sacrificial element at its core, it does not ratify the transgression of moral boundaries. Sex outside of wedlock, in the eyes of earthly and heavenly law, is prohibited; therefore Claudio's endeavour to justify sin with charity is for naught. However, from the perspective of a man condemned to death, Claudio's attempt to convince Isabella into a small sacrifice for a greater 'natural', therefore, earthly good, is entirely justified. It was only Asche (1906) – with Claudio played by Harcourt Williams – that removed this appeal on stage, leaving 'sweet sister, let me live'.⁴⁶ On the surface, this suggests that throughout the periods of anti-Catholic hysteria, anxiety about Broad Church or 'rational' biblical interpretation and increased secularism, Claudio's desperate search for mercy was somehow less offensive than in the early twentieth century. Of course, this is a broad assumption based on one example, but the centrality of Claudio's speech to the plot, and the fact that it was invariably

⁴⁶ Oscar Asche, Promptbook for *Measure for Measure*. London, 1906. *Shakespeare Centre Library Promptbooks*. 79.920 ASC. Shattuck Catalogue, *Measure for Measure* 15, p. 271.

retained in other productions, arguably rules out concerns about time and expedience, and lends credibility to the implication that the omission was made on moral grounds.

Given that Claudio's sophistry was generally spoken on stage throughout Victorian productions, it is important to be aware of audience responses to the episode. The *Era* claimed in 1876 – when Isabella was played by Adelaide Neilson and Claudio by Charles Warner – that 'the prison scene when the passionate and heartbroken outburst in which, with loathing and scorn, she [Isabella] denounces her brother's selfish weakness, fairly aroused the enthusiasm of the audience'.⁴⁷ In 1883, when Ellen Wallis and Frank Rodney played Isabella and Claudio respectively, the *Era* reported that the nun's 'denunciation of the wantonness which would have had her stoop to Angelo's proposal was given with such an outburst of feeling as to electrify the audience and to enforce a perfect storm of applause'.⁴⁸ On a very different note, after Williams' depiction of Claudio in Asche's production, *The Times* lamented:

We cannot entirely like [...] Claudio. It is not that we necessarily dislike him for clinging to life. [...] we think that he ought to have made out a far better case for a brother's life verses a sister's chastity than he actually does. He never pushes his point; he seems a mere drifter. Nor can we entirely like Isabella herself. We feel that she exaggerates the importance of chastity.⁴⁹

The clear shift of focus from Isabella as the undeniably good character to the breakdown of moral barriers, demonstrates the importance of sophistry within this scene. In reality, of course, the reason Claudio failed to convince both his sister and critic was that his speech was omitted from this production. Claudio's 'case of conscience', though expressed verbally and directed at a recipient, operates as a means of ethically justifying the preservation of life. Without this, as the nineteenth-century

⁴⁷ 'Miss Neilson in *Measure for Measure*', *The Era*, 24 September 1876. April 2011. <<http://galegroup.com>> [accessed April 2011].

⁴⁸ 'Miss Wallis on Tour', *The Era*, 22 September 1883 <<http://galegroup.com>> [accessed March 2010].

⁴⁹ 'Adelphi Theatre', *The Times*, 21 March 1906 <<http://galegroup.com>> [accessed June 2010].

performers seemed to understand, Isabella's heated and applauded outburst against him is not confuting anything specific, making her seem, to *The Times* reporter, 'exaggerated' and unlikable.

With the exception of Asche's production, Claudio's endeavour to persuade his sister of the merits of transgression was retained. While Phelps' mid-century production clearly had no qualms with Claudio's sophistry, it is important that, by comparison, his *King John* and *Henry VIII* seemed far more explicitly concerned with removing externalised, verbal religious logic. Claudio manipulates the concept of Christian charity and, by extension, sacrifice in order to justify an act of transgression against divine, and in this case earthly, law. Everything about Claudio's request is, fundamentally, theologically unsound due to his juxtaposition of self-sacrificial charity and virtue. So what was it about Claudio that made his sophistry acceptable? It is fair to suggest that without his call for Isabella's submission the nun's fierce expostulation 'I'll pray a thousand prayers for thy death' (3.1.146) becomes callous. However, it is significant that Claudio's rationalisation of 'sin' is commensurate with his position: he is a disproportionately condemned man who has a right to plead for his life.

It seems, then, that sophistry, when spoken aloud for the purpose of convincing or manipulating the reason and morality of others, was not strictly off limits on the stage; rather, depending on character consistency and circumstance, the theology was not, in its own right, an explicit problem. Unless there was a deliberate attempt to deceive others, as in the case of Laurence, delivering a religiously grounded argument, whether theologically justifiable or not, was something that clearly contributed to the

characterisation of individuals; particularly individuals struggling externally with those internal ‘cases of conscience’ that plagued characters like Hamlet and Henry.

Pandulph and Philip of France

These episodes of externalised persuasion seem distinctly one-sided, in so far as they revolve around the immediate priorities of Laurence, Henry and Claudio. In *King John*, however, sophistry is employed to actively cajole external parties into a state of mutual agreement. During the long and eventful encounter between France, England and Rome, the characters Pandulph and King Philip engage in a potentially equivocatory discussion about oaths.

Macready (1842), Kean (1852), and Tree (1899) all made significant omissions from the exchange between Philip and Pandulph in which both parties use religion and, specifically, the sanctity of vows as the fundamental root of their opposing arguments. Turning to Macready’s text, the exchange on stage went as follows:

PHILIP	This royal hand and mine are newly knit, And the conjunction of our inward souls Married in league, coupled and linked together With all religious strength of sacred vows; And shall these hands, so lately purged of blood, Unyoke this seizure and this kind regret? Unswear faith sworn, and on the marriage-bed Of smiling peace to march a bloody host, And make a riot on the gentle brow Of true sincerity? O, holy sir, My reverend father, let it not be so! [...]
PANDULPH	All form is formless, order orderless, Save what is opposite to England’s love. Therefore to arms! be champion of our Church, Or let the Church, our mother, breathe her curse, A mother’s curse, on her revolting son. France, thou mayst hold a serpent by the tongue, A fasting tiger safer by the tooth, Than keep in peace that hand which thou dost hold.

[...]
O, let thy vow
First made to heaven, first be to heaven performed,
That is, to be the champion of our Church!
But if not, then know
The peril of our curses light on thee
So heavy as thou shalt not shake them off,
But in despair die under their black weight (3.1.224-96).

Philip likened his oath to that of a marriage vow which is a ‘conjunction of our inward souls’, and this was not omitted. Pandulph cuts through this analogy, arguing that oaths rely upon the sanction of heaven, rather than the exchange of words between earthly, therefore, corrupted individuals.

Given that the mid-century performances of Macready and Kean seemed to temper their direct offences to the Roman Catholic Church through an emphasis on the villainy of John, it is no wonder that this speech from Pandulph was heavily edited. In addition to his attempts to impose laws onto the English monarch and his call for war against England, it could not have been politically wise to depict the Cardinal engaging in sophistry in order to force Philip of France into submission. Like Irving’s late-century replacement of verbal soteriology with visual signifiers of heavenly transcendence, the mid-century productions of *King John* used the crosiers, vestments and crosses of the Church to signify the deeper case of Catholic conscience underlying Pandulph’s pontificating on oaths.

Although the reduction of Philip and Pandulph’s exchange was commonplace in the mid-century, the concept of the performed oath became far more politically charged in the last quarter of the century, after the infamous Bradlaugh case. In 1880, the politician and head of the National Secular Society, Charles Bradlaugh, drew attention to the religious suppositions inherent in the act of swearing oaths. On several occasions

between the late 1850s and an infamous case in parliament in 1880, Bradlaugh refused to swear an oath that assumed the swearer's belief in a supreme deity.⁵⁰ When offering a verbal promise as a way of binding an individual to another, an institution or a particular act, the oath holds at its core the presupposition of fear of the consequences that would ensue should the vow be broken. Pandulph's equivocating upon oaths hinges around a similar argument to that of Bradlaugh: oaths presuppose the swearer's faith in God.

The question is, did Bradlaugh and the attention given to oaths have an effect on performances of the play? Certainly, connections were made between Bradlaugh's own declamatory persuasive methods and those found amongst Shakespeare's characters. A report from 1880 in the *York Herald* claimed that 'had the speaker [Bradlaugh] been an eminent actor declaiming the language of Shakespeare on the stage of a crowded theatre the effort, as a specimen of elocution, would have been applauded to the echo'.⁵¹ The *Herald's* analogy between oratory and the stage arguably fixes on an important point: the inherent theatricality of oath-making. But Bradlaugh's fundamental argument was that any kind of oath-taking in the sight or name of a supreme creator must be undertaken by a party holding a firm belief in that supremacy, and a full understanding of the spiritual consequences should the covenant be broken.

According to John Kerrigan, and for the purpose of clarifying this concept of oaths, the fundamental principles of pre- and post-Reformation England changed in the early-modern period so that the very nature of oath making had also evolved: 'counter-

⁵⁰ Adolphe S. Headingley, *The Biography of Charles Bradlaugh* (1883; repr. Montana: Kessinger Publishing, 2004), pp. 83-7.

⁵¹ 'The Bradlaugh Incident: The Scene in the House', *The York Herald*, 24 June 1880. September 2010. <<http://galegroup.com>> [accessed September 2010].

Reformation thinking about equivocation and the acceptability of breaking faith with heretics made Catholic promises susceptible to casuistry'.⁵² It was, therefore, not considered heresy or damnable, from a Catholic perspective, to break an oath with a non-Catholic party. This presupposes that moral and even spiritual superiority was inherent on the part of the Catholics because the very nature of an oath exists within the wider context of what Edward Vallance calls 'covenants'.⁵³ The language of oaths given value by faith, in this case Catholicism, becomes currency passed between individuals and even nations to form a kind of holy covenant that is broken on peril of divine punishment.

Thus the divine punishment visited upon John that Macready and Kean were so interested in depicting, would have been taken as a confirmation of the spiritually binding nature of religious oaths. By breaking faith with the Church and with France, John throws himself into both earthly perjury and spiritual purgatory. It was fundamentally his own folly – coupled with some spiritual ineptitude on the part of Pandulph – that led to his downfall.

The emphasis on punishment for breaking away from the Church was something taken up by Tree in his *fin de siècle*, post-Bradlaugh, production. The exchanging of promises was brought to the fore by the interpolated tableau of the signing of the Magna Charta. Importantly, this visual feast took place in the interim between the English barons discovering Arthur's body and swearing vengeance, and their traitorous affiliation with France's army. An image of the signing scene depicts crowds of barons and soldiers surrounding John who holds out his charta towards the legates and clergy

⁵² John Kerrigan, *Archipelagic English* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 184.

⁵³ Edward Vallance, *Revolutionary England and the National Covenant: State, Oaths, Protestantism and the Political Nation 1553-1682* (Suffolk: Woodbridge Press, 2005), p. 82.

bearing crosiers and religious garments.⁵⁴ Although, within the play itself, John had yet to reaffirm his faith in the Church, this grand declaration of fidelity to his people was made through the medium of the very same religion he denounced at the start of the previous act. Placing this exchange of contract between monarch and people in a religious context, and between scenes of disillusionment and treason, arguably tainted the sanctity of the oath or covenant with a human, fallible quality. The corrupted legate, together with the disillusioned knights rebelling against their king who, in turn, lacks moral credibility, makes the granting of the charta just as elusive and subject to disintegration as the vow of peace between France and England.

The tableau of the fight at Angiers, moreover, was vividly barbaric, with its hosts of armed soldiers clashing against one another with drawn swords, giving the scene a claustrophobic and inescapable sense of military futility.⁵⁵ Such seeming anarchy represented visually through the tableau was, to some extent, mirrored in the drawn-out and agitated death of John on his throne-like chair: a scene that is also preserved on film.⁵⁶ The overwhelming sense of the inefficacy of inter-human oath making was very clearly punishable through divinely ordained war, suffering and death. Keeping one's word was, then, in Tree's production, tantamount to retaining life, honour and salvation. Bradlaugh's plea for secular oaths to replace religious vows, by this logic, was not without reason.

While Pandulph's sophist philosophising on the nature of oaths was not fully spoken on stage, his reference to oath making, together with King Philip's plea to the Cardinal about the specific oath of allegiance made between himself and England, fell

⁵⁴ See Appendix N.

⁵⁵ See Appendix O.

⁵⁶ *King John*, dir. by Herbert Beerbohm Tree (1899), *Silent Shakespeare* (B. F. I. Video Titles, 2004).

under the category of persuasion. Equivocation aside, because of the genuine moral ambiguity of these arguments, it is no wonder that this episode was subject to verbal expurgation.

Conclusion

Judging from examples of external persuasion or language calculated to influence or bind another, it seems that theology, in its own right, was not really the issue within Shakespeare's drama; rather the *abuses* of it were a problem. Just as Irving's Friar Laurence employs presuppositions about salvation as a pretext for deceiving Juliet's parents, so too did Tree's King John hinge his credibility around shared assumptions about the spiritually binding nature of vows in his Magna Charta tableau. Whether it was Claudio manipulating morality to convince his sister to commit an act of sin, or Philip engaging in the rhetoric of marital vows to convince Pandolph of his holy union with England, the enactment of religious language within Shakespeare was never entirely unconscious, and the performance of sophistry and oath making was heavily charged with political as well as moral weight.

Chapter Conclusion

What the performance of conscience and sophistry throughout this period demonstrates is the significance of *spoken* language within the context of religion. When Angelo turns away from Isabella and declares 'she speaks [...] / Such sense that my sense breeds with it' (2.2.142-3), he makes important parallels between communication and copulation. Making spoken language analogous with breeding suggests that bodies, minds and souls are drawn together through verbal communication. But while spoken

religious rhetoric, in sermons for instance, was designed to ‘drive at men’s hearts’,⁵⁷ any pontificating or ‘driving’ that went on in the theatre was secondary to the chief purpose of drama: to entertain.

Therefore, many clerics were often wary of so-called ‘moral drama’, its ability to teach and, most importantly, its text. For instance, although Charles Kingsley was an author of drama, albeit never performed and probably never intended to be, he lamented:

When, instead of setting forth heroical [sic] deeds, ‘Christian’ tragedy teaches the audience new possibilities of crime and new excuses for those crimes; when, instead of purifying the affections by pity and terror, it confounds the moral sense [...] for the sake of excitement [...] then it is of the devil [...]. When, again, comedy, instead of stirring a divine scorn of baseness, or even a kindly and indulgent smile at the weaknesses and oddities of humanity, learns to make a mock of sin [...] then it is also of the devil.⁵⁸

By this prescription, drama should ‘purify’ emotions and make clear moral judgements. While characters like Claudius, Pandulph, Claudio, Angelo, Henry and Friar Laurence cannot be said to be ‘of the devil’, through their lack of definable and entirely demonstrable villainy they do fit Kingsley’s description of individuals that ‘confound the moral sense’.

This concern about dramatic moral obligations arguably comes back to the concept of performance. If conscience and the very nature of sin were intellectually debateable but sometimes un-performable, was the problem, as with biblical criticism, with the ignorance and corruptibility of the audience, or with the subject matter of the text? The public, made up of working and middle classes, were not to be trusted when

⁵⁷ Charles Haddon Spurgeon, *The Soul Winner*, p. 28.

⁵⁸ Charles Kingsley quoted in *What is Wrong with the Stage: Some Notes on the English Theatre*, ed. by William Poel, (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1920), p. 36.

exposed to convincing or theologically unsound reasoning. So Hamlet's references to 'country matters' (3.2.123) and King Henry's adultery were removed as a matter of course; but discussions about conscience, sin and mercy touched quite a different Victorian nerve. Every mind, in an age when rationalism and liberal religious values were the norm, was subject to the intellectual and moral vicissitudes to which it was exposed. The very act of hearing a revered performer like Macready, Irving, Barrett or Tree deliver a convincing speech about the ambiguity of temptation, the flexibility of 'virtue' and the secularisation of verbal oaths, subjected weak and vulnerable souls to a potentially irrevocable dependence upon misunderstood casuistry.

But circling back to Hartley's quantum mechanics analogy – whereby performance takes something of prodigious hermeneutical propensities and fixes it within a stable locus – theology, sophistry and casuistry, whatever their intrinsic ambiguity, can be performed in such a way as to give them specific meaning. Ellison's 'orality-literacy' paradigm within the context of Victorian sermons, then, can be applied to the performance of Shakespeare's depiction of religious discussion. While Victorian preachers could enact the meaning and spiritual weight of their sermons in 'performance' while retaining the contemplative quality of their texts in print, the potentially 'theological' content of plays like *Hamlet* and *Measure for Measure* was performed in such a way as to distract audience attention from that very same sense of provocative piety so admired in pontificators. Thus the Claudius of Barrett's production, despite speaking the entirety of his 'case of conscience', was depicted as a man tormented by a crime committed in the name of love; Irving's Laurence used sophistry to focus Romeo's attention on the positive; and Tree's Pandolph employed his religious rhetoric to highlight the inescapability of man's oath of faith to God. If audiences were

extracting false or unintended meaning from the performance of such persuasive theology, then they were indeed deviating from what Marshall called the ‘moral standard of the Decalogue’.⁵⁹ To determine how ‘meaning’ can be fixed, therefore, it is necessary to turn to the next chapter on the interpretation and performance of parable-like morals.

⁵⁹ Frank A. Marshall, ‘Introduction to *Richard III*’, p. 13.

Chapter Six: Interpretations and Parables

Introduction

If, as States suggests, there is a ‘symbiotic’ relationship between word and scene, then the final product of this symbiosis can be interpreted as a parable or story with a moral. J. H. Miller has suggested that religious parables are self-defined as ‘parabolic’ insofar as they are a ‘mode of figurative language which is the indirect indication [...] of something that cannot be described directly in literal language’.¹ This final chapter looks at how a parabolic or indirect meaning was presented to late-Victorian audiences through performances of Shakespeare’s plays and how, in turn, audiences interpreted the information being presented.

The primary concern here is why parables can be thought of as relevant to Shakespearean interpretation throughout the century. A way of dealing with this question is to look to the New Shakspeare Society and general activity around Shakespeare-related publication in the final quarter of the century. Details within texts that prove authorship, the credibility of characters, and the authenticity of lines and vocabulary, formed the basis of papers given by Richard Simpson and Furnivall, for instance. How Shakespearean – meaning likely to have been written by Shakespeare – and, therefore, performable is the Porter in *Macbeth*? Should Hamlet refer to a portrait of his father in the closet scene?² These kinds of questions pertain to details which, in turn, allow for a renegotiation of interpretation so as to arrive at a reading of each play that could be thought of as ‘accurate’ or authentic.

¹ J. Hillis Miller, *Tropes, Parables, Performatives: Essays on Twentieth-Century Literature* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990), p. 135.

² See *The New Shakspeare Society’s Transactions 1874*, 2 vols. (London: John Childs and Son, 1874).

Such was also the case with parables. Throughout the century, the works of Lisco, Jowett, MacDonald, and the High Anglicans of the Oxford Movement, all offered significant insight into how to read, interpret and engage with biblical parables. As Benjamin Jowett observed, there are ‘literal’ tales that provide clearly defined moral boundaries. ‘The persons in them [parables] [...] are the persons among whom we live and move [...] the truths symbolised by them come home to the hearts of all who have ever been impressed by religion’.³ According to MacDonald, ‘the form of the parable is the first in which truth will admit of being embodied [...] and to the parable will the teacher of truth ever return’.⁴ To teach ‘truth’ through ‘literal’ morality – fictional or otherwise – seems to be the chief interpretation of the parable in both Jowett’s and MacDonald’s understandings of the genre.

Several decades before Jowett, the Tractarian Isaac Williams used the parables to advance his theory that ‘in God’s dealings with mankind, [there is] a very remarkable holding back of sacred and important truths, as if the knowledge of them were injurious to persons unworthy of them’.⁵ Williams argued that Jesus’ utilisation of parables to instruct his audiences allowed for the delivery of divine ‘truth’ in a way that was calculated to appeal to those willing and able to comprehend its value. By this logic, an element of the cryptic is fundamental within parables in order to make them mystical and elite rather than literal and accessible. These ideas of, what might be called, a Catholic unveiling of divinity and the more Protestant ‘literal’ understanding of scripture, represent two contrasting interpretations of parables from the Victorian era.

³ Benjamin Jowett, *Statements of Christian Doctrine and Practice* (Oxford: J. H. and J. A. S. Parker, 1861), p. 64.

⁴ George MacDonald, *Unspoken Sermons*, p. 69.

⁵ Isaac Williams, ‘Tract 80: On Reserve in Communicating Religious Knowledge’, *Project Canterbury: Tracts for the Times* <<http://anglicanhistory.org/tracts/tract80.html>> [accessed November 2010].

Before circling back to Shakespeare, it is worth noting Bernard Shaw's claim that drama is 'the presentation in parable of the conflict between man's will and his environment, in a word of problem'.⁶ To 'present in parable' is, like a parable itself, subject to both literal and 'hidden' interpretations. In a broad context, Wilson Barrett suggested that the purpose of drama is to 'teach and lead'.⁷ Teaching and leading are fundamental to understanding late-Victorian mountings of Shakespeare. Once scenery and language 'fix' a performance, to use Hartley's terminology, the overall 'metaphor' or meaning is still subject to interpretation; so 'leading' an audience towards a particular conclusion cannot be taken as read. It is here that the parable is a useful conceptual tool through which to approach Victorian performances of Shakespeare, because like drama that was expected to 'teach and lead', parables were open to interpretation.

This chapter addresses Victorian parabolic depictions of Shakespeare from two perspectives: as pieces with hidden morals and stories with literal meanings. Using productions of Irving, Tree and Forbes-Robertson to explore the delivery of hidden messages or truths and the historical performance mode of William Poel to offer literal morals, this chapter focuses on the ways in which meaning was communicated, through Shakespeare, to late-Victorian audiences.

Part One: Hidden Morals

If parables cannot explain 'truth' directly, they must show it, and this is where the parallel with the theatre comes to the fore. Drama, as the philosophical theologian Patrick Sherry has noted, 'touches on what is most profound in human life [...] these

⁶ Bernard Shaw, 'Preface', in *Mrs Warren's Profession* (1902; repr. Maryland: Wildside Press, 2009), pp. 181-98 (p. 197).

⁷ Wilson Barrett quoted in 'Mr Wilson Barrett on the Mission of the Stage', *Birmingham Daily Post*, 5 August 1893 <<http://galegroup.com>> [accessed April 2011].

are things which need to be shown before they are explained'.⁸ Showing, rather than explaining, is arguably how late-century directors like Irving and Tree chose to depict Shakespeare on stage, meaning that any 'moral' is, effectively, 'hidden'. Earlier in the century, Charles Knight observed that Shakespeare teaches 'noble lessons *dramatically* [...] not according to the childish devices of those who would make the dramatist write a "*moral*" at the end of five acts, upon the approved plan of a fable in a spelling-book'.⁹ In other words, any 'morals' within Shakespeare's works were not superficial or even immediately accessible.

How, then, can 'morals' be extracted from the drama in performance? First of all, meaning has to be communicated to an audience in such a way as to *suggest* a moral without imposing an explicit message. However, these morals are subject to audience interpretation. Thus the ways in which contemporary events surrounding the spectators affected ways of reading specific productions reveal how meaning can be distorted within the interpretive process, particularly when the play's moral is 'hidden'.

Communicating Morals

In parables, the conclusions often resolve the conflict within the narrative, implying that the moral or overall 'meaning' can be found at the end. In many ways, this can also be true of drama. Restricting focus to the plays' endings, therefore, it is necessary to question how dramatic conclusions were used to deliver 'meaning'.

⁸ Patrick Sherry, 'The Arts of Redemption', *Faithful Performances: Enacting Christian Tradition*, ed. by Trevor A. Hart and Steven R. Guthrie (London: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2007), pp. 189-98 (p. 194).

⁹ Charles Knight, *Studies of Shakespeare*, p. 105.

Tree famously claimed that ‘illusion [...] is the first and last word of the stage; all that aids illusion is good, all that destroys illusion is bad’.¹⁰ To communicate to an audience through ‘illusion’ meant that the stage had to become its own reality. Legitimate theatre was, therefore, increasingly desirous of shedding its theatricality by moving towards an emotional and psychological, as well as visual, ‘illusion’ of reality. The eagerness to create the ‘illusion’ of a realistic world on stage can be seen in late-century productions of *Hamlet* and *Romeo and Juliet*, which had few interruptions by way of tableaux, song breaks or incidental burlesques.

However, since action and characters were ‘realistic’ the plays could not take unrealistic plot turns, like last-minute reclamations of transgressors. Throughout the Victorian period, both *Hamlet* and *Romeo and Juliet* were often performed without their original conclusions. Hamlets died on the stage to the descent of the curtain, meaning that the restorative entrance of Fortinbras and the prospect of a political future for Denmark were omitted. Similarly, *Romeo and Juliet* concluded with Juliet’s suicide, already a morally contested area, and often overlooked the positive reconciliation of the families. In order to determine what kinds of morals were presented at the conclusions, it is necessary to turn to examples of these plays’ endings in production.

Hamlet

Late-century Hamlets invariably died alongside some signal of transcendence. Because *Hamlet* concentrated on leading actors, the character of Fortinbras, with the rare exception of Forbes-Robertson’s production, never appeared on stage. Therefore, stage business was often introduced into productions in order to signify or ‘show’ audiences the meaning or purpose of the hero’s tortuous journey.

¹⁰ Herbert Beerbohm Tree, p. 57.

As discussed earlier, Wilson Barrett's *hero* (1884) enacted his demise in a filial, potentially Catholic, expression of fulfilment. This signalled the completion of his earthly task and beginning of heavenly ascent. Kissing his father's portrait, which was often mistaken for a crucifix, brings the revenge to a conclusion by having Hamlet acknowledge his duty to his father's sacrament-robbed soul. The effect was not lost upon one reviewer for *The Times*: 'in the death scene the filial note is retouched with excellent effect'. Nor did it escape the attention of *Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper* in which Barrett's Hamlet was described as 'a reverent son'.¹¹ So while the production was characterised by Scott as 'blunt and barbaric' in nature, and the final act was allegedly 'monotonous', it was the 'picturesque death' that tempered the gloom of the play.¹² If any 'meaning' was communicated in and extrapolated from Barrett's production, it pertained in chief to the powerful bond between father and son.

Like Barrett's visual, 'hidden' moralising on filial duty, Tree introduced an aural signification of fulfilment or 'meaning' into his *fin de siècle* production (1892). During Hamlet's demise, 'an angelic choir [was] heard to faintly echo Horatio's words' of parting with the prince.¹³ Despite the *Era*'s claim that 'tastes will differ as to the importance given [...] to the angel's chorus at the conclusion',¹⁴ Scott clearly perceived it as indicative of the play's message of spiritual fulfilment. Indeed, since, as noted in Chapter Four, Tree's Hamlet crossed himself, led his mother to the *prie-dieu* and prayed before a Marian shrine, it seems logical that his demise should have been accompanied by choral music to signify spiritual transcendence. Again, as with Barrett, the play's final message was one of accomplishment, except that Tree's Hamlet was carried

¹¹ 'Public Amusements', *Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper*, 19 October 1884 <<http://galegroup.com>> [accessed August 2011].

¹² Clement Scott, *Some Notable Hamlets*, pp. 114, 108.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 145.

¹⁴ 'Hamlet at the Haymarket', *The Era*, 23 January 1892 <<http://galegroup.com>> [accessed August 2011].

away by music suggestive of heavenly salvation, while Barrett's departed having fulfilled an earthly duty. Rather than including Fortinbras, then, Barrett and Tree introduced redemptive *signifiers* to communicate their parabolic messages.

While these gestures drew the 'presentation in parable' of revenge tragedy to a conclusion, Forbes-Robertson's *Hamlet* (1897) was infused with religious, filial and political resolution. Whereas the other *Hamlets* concluded with the prince's demise, Forbes-Robertson included the entrance of Fortinbras so that 'the stage is no longer left as a slaughter-house of corpses, but, as Shakespeare intended it, with the majesty of death asserting itself against a background of martial splendour'.¹⁵ According to Scott, Forbes-Robertson delivered his lines in a way which 'conveys what we call the religious undergrowth in the perplexed mind of Hamlet'.¹⁶ In fact, Forbes-Robertson had a spiritual appearance that lent itself to the depiction of Hamlet and what Scott called his 'religious fervour that evidently underlies the half-distracted mind'.¹⁷ Death, for Forbes-Robertson's Hamlet, was an unmistakably spiritual experience:

The finely chiselled face becomes rapt and inspired with a vision of the higher mystery. It is from the throne that Hamlet [...] gazing on the golden gates of eternity [...] whispers, still gazing on some unseen seraphic vision, "the rest is silence" [...]. The prince is dead upon the throne he never filled. Horatio places the crown upon his dead companion's knees [...].¹⁸

Every thematic conflict in the play seems to have been resolved in Forbes-Robertson's conclusion, in which Hamlet achieves earthly glory (the throne and crown), fulfilment (revenge), spiritual contentment ('gates of eternity'), and successfully passes over his sovereignty to a worthy successor in the form of Fortinbras.

¹⁵ Clement Scott, *Some Notable Hamlets*, p. 164.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 164.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 160.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 162.

While the *Hamlets* of Barrett and Tree omitted Forbes-Robertson's political resolution, the very fact that extra business was necessary in each production – in the form of actions or music – implies that there was an overall dissatisfaction with the text and acting versions of the play's final scene. In other words, *fin de siècle* tragedy had to be given some kind of resolution to tie up the conflict within the play's problematic reality, and to offer the audience a sense of transcendence or fulfilment within the 'hidden' parable. The 'problem' with *Hamlet*, by this logic, is that the moral is *too* 'hidden', calling for resolution in a distinctly conflicted world.

Romeo and Juliet

Like the tradition of omitting the conclusion of *Hamlet*, the tragedy of the lovers was also frequently curtailed. This means that any moralising had to take place through signification or 'showing' rather than 'explaining'.

Forbes-Robertson's evocation of spiritual transcendence and the entrance of Fortinbras in *Hamlet*, offer a contrast to his comparatively unresolved conclusion to *Romeo and Juliet* (1895). Not unlike other stage versions throughout the century, the Juliet, played by Mrs Patrick Campbell, exclaimed: 'O happy dagger! (*Snatching Romeo's dagger*) / This is thy sheath; (*stabs herself*) There rust, and let me die (5.3.169-70).¹⁹ Unlike *Hamlet*, there was no explicit sense of fulfilment in Forbes-Robertson's on-stage demise as Romeo.

Before examining the visual signifiers of 'meaning' in this conclusion, it is imperative to note the significance of Mrs Patrick Campbell. According to *Freeman's Journal*, Mrs Patrick Campbell 'has won and kept her laurels in a sphere so different' to

¹⁹ William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet as Arranged for the Stage by Forbes-Robertson*, p. 78.

the heroines of Shakespeare.²⁰ Indeed, the actress had carved out a repertoire with the fallen women of Pinero such as Paula Tanqueray and, in the same year as *Romeo and Juliet*, Agnes Ebbsmith. It is no wonder, then, that Shaw alluded to ‘the Pinero parts’ in his review of the production, and likened Mrs Patrick Campbell’s Juliet to ‘the daughter of Herodias’.²¹ But Shaw’s fascination with Pinero’s fallen women in his review of *Romeo and Juliet*, coupled with his allusion to Salome, means that Mrs Patrick Campbell’s previous roles impinged on her depiction of Juliet: in short, there was a degree of what Marvin Carlson has recently called ‘ghosting’ here.

According to Carlson, ‘repeating theatregoers [...] singly and collectively carry to each new theatre experience a substantial memory of previous experience’.²² There is something inherent in the condition of being an actor – with personal and previous acting connotations – that impedes or somehow informs the work within which he or she is performing. This was certainly the case with Mrs Patrick Campbell, because a common factor in reviews of her Juliet is the reference to Pinero’s female figures of transgressed or deviant virtue: ‘the creator of Paula Tanqueray and Agnes Ebbsmith makes the most childish looking Juliet that we remember to have seen’;²³ ‘Juliet’s sweetness, joyousness, romanticism, passionate love and gentle despair are qualities to be revered. Mrs Campbell sweeps them aside and creates a “new woman”’;²⁴ and finally, according to a review in the *Derby Mercury*:

Just as *The Second Mrs Tanqueray* was a woman with a past, so this, in the latest conception of Juliet, is a girl with a past. As a witty journalist

²⁰ ‘Mr Forbes Robertson’s Revival of *Romeo and Juliet*’, *Freeman’s Journal and Daily Commercial Advertiser*, 23 September 1895 <<http://galegroup.com>> [accessed December 2010].

²¹ George Bernard Shaw quoted in *Shaw on Shakespeare*, p. 172.

²² Marvin Carlson, *The Haunted Stage: The Theatre as Memory Machine* (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2003), p. 63.

²³ ‘Mr Forbes Robertson’s Revival of *Romeo and Juliet*’, *Freeman’s Journal and Daily Commercial Advertiser*, 23 September 1895 <<http://galegroup.com>> [accessed December 2010].

²⁴ ‘From our London Correspondent’, *The Liverpool Mercury*, 23 September 1895 <<http://galegroup.com>> [accessed November 2010].

remarked at the close of the performance, “the title of the piece ought to be changed to *The Second Mrs Montague*”.²⁵

Bearing these responses in mind, and considering what is now known about the phenomenon of ‘ghosting’, Forbes-Robertson’s production was inextricable from conceptions about the new woman and precocious sexuality. In other words, the Victorian ideal of the virtuous, portrait-worthy Juliet had been challenged, consciously or otherwise, by Mrs Patrick Campbell.

Therefore, it seems logical that this production’s moral was not about familial reconciliation; instead, it hinged around the dangers of youthful attraction and passion. Thus all moralising was communicated visually, rather than textually, through the pathos of the suicides in the tomb of the Capulets. Shaw suggested that the tomb was ‘quite like a new cathedral chapel’.²⁶ In fact, an image of the scene, designed by T. E. Ryan, depicts a gothic-style crypt with a large cross above the rear doors. Romeo’s body is prostrate beneath this cross in a position that evokes crucifixion. Juliet, still alive, crouches on her knees beside the body of her husband, wearing a long white robe and veil that appears halo-like around her head.²⁷ Craven’s depiction signifies the sense, by the close of the play, of martyrdom or, more pertinent to this production, self-mortification, experienced by the young lovers. This sense of martyrdom ostensibly emphasises the pathos of the catastrophe in the ‘realistic’ world where nothing is, ultimately, fulfilled or redeemed. However, it also communicates a powerful moral about the danger of youthful passion and, perhaps even the precocious sexuality signified by the ‘ghosts’ of Mrs Patrick Campbell. Rather than having the familial

²⁵ ‘Revival of *Romeo and Juliet*’, *The Derby Mercury*, 25 September 1895 <<http://galegroup.com>> [accessed November 2010].

²⁶ George Bernard Shaw quoted in *Shaw on Shakespeare*, p. 172.

²⁷ See Appendix P.

representatives chastened by the Prince as a way of moralising in a ‘literal’ fashion, a parabolic ‘hidden’ moral was clearly privileged here.

Frank Benson’s *Romeo and Juliet* three years later (1898) took a different approach to the concept of resolution. During Juliet’s soliloquy, a murmur begins which ‘rises to a crescendo at her death’, at which point the families and Prince enter.²⁸ The confession is made by the Friar; Capulet and Montague exchange their promises of peace, and the Prince delivers his epilogue.²⁹ But the production opened with an elaborate stage fight with ‘lights full’, and weapons like swords, bucklers and shields on display.³⁰ The bustle and violence of this opening could not feasibly call for an unresolved ending.

This, however, forms a contrast to Benson’s later 1903 production of the play in which he used techniques of reported action to amplify the pathos of the tragedy. Instead of opening with the spectacular fight of 1898, the action unfolded upon the shout ‘down with the Capulets!’ after which Montague began ‘Who set this ancient quarrel new abroad?’ (1.1.111).³¹ Just as the opening was significantly edited, so too was the conclusion omitted, meaning that the play closed upon the demise of Juliet. The action, in other words, was reduced, perhaps to the benefit of the ageing Romeo, but also so that the play centred on the lovers rather than the wider familial conflict. The *fin de siècle* journey towards a ‘presentation in parable’ without explicit resolution can be seen, therefore, in Benson’s editorial shift between 1898 and 1903.

²⁸ Frank Benson, Promptbook for *Romeo and Juliet*. Stratford-upon-Avon, 1898. *Shakespeare Centre Library Promptbooks*. 72.929 4296 ASC. Shattuck Catalogue, *Romeo and Juliet* 80, p. 426.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Frank Benson, Promptbook for *Romeo and Juliet*. Stratford-upon-Avon, 1903. *Shakespeare Centre Library Promptbooks*. 72.929 4172 ASC. Shattuck Catalogue, *Romeo and Juliet* 79, p. 426.

The sense of frustrated resolution seems to be present in Benson's later version of the tragedy, because unlike those of Forbes-Robertson (1895) and even Mary Anderson (1884), there was a slight textual amendment during Laurence's final speech. In Anderson's copy, which is a fair representative of the general acting versions, Laurence expostulates:

I hear some noise – lady, come from that nest
Of death, contagion, and unnatural sleep;
A greater power than we can contradict
Hath thwarted our intents; come, come away:
Thy husband in thy bosom there lies dead;
And Paris too; come, I'll dispose of thee
Among a sisterhood of holy nuns:
Stay not to question, for the watch is coming.
Come, go, good Juliet – I dare no longer stay (5.3.151-9).³²

Benson's text, however, added the following lines: 'My messenger was stayed in Mantua/ And could not bear my letters to thy lord'.³³ The inclusion of the two lines seems to be an expression of frustration with the lack of resolution, not necessarily within Shakespeare's text, but certainly in acting traditions of the play in which episodes had to be cut, and the final scene omitted.

Why, then, in an age when redemption was paramount, were dramatic conclusions so axiomatically un-redemptive? The answer pertains to the Victorian conception of cautionary tragedy. Ben Quash's recent essay on theology and theatricality holds at its core the idea that Christian drama – dealing with concepts like atonement, redemption and the earthly pursuit of salvation – is a dramatisation of man's progressive linear journey. 'Tragedy is not despair and [...] the emphasis on the momentousness and irreversibility of historical action [...] should certainly not issue in

³² William Shakespeare, 'Romeo and Juliet as Performed by Miss Mary Anderson and Company', p. 72.

³³ Frank Benson, Promptbook for *Romeo and Juliet*. Stratford-upon-Avon, 1903. *Shakespeare Centre Library Promptbooks*. 72.929 4172 ASC. Shattuck Catalogue, *Romeo and Juliet* 79, p. 426.

resignation, nor in a negative evaluation of our finitude'.³⁴ Steering clear of the 'negative evaluation', would mean consciously introducing redemptive features to the characterisation of the protagonists and, potentially, to the conclusions.

But to do this within a late-Victorian realistic framework meant that plays like *Romeo and Juliet* had to be imbued with stage 'business' and visual signifiers of meaning. Referring back to Sherry's conceptualisation of drama as a 'showing' rather than 'explaining' of human life, it seems that it was within this realm of 'showing' that the *Hamlets* of Barrett, Tree and Forbes-Robertson, and the late-century *Romeo and Juliet* productions of Benson and Forbes-Robertson seemed to fall. The sense of intrinsic reality to these productions made them 'illusions' through which the 'presentation in parable' could take place. Closing the action of these tragic parables, therefore, had to be a continuation of the 'realistic' mode, meaning that any unlikely or sudden resolutions would break the illusion and, by extension, the moral trajectory of the plots. In other words, to achieve 'realism' and the conflicts of reality, it was often necessary to sacrifice resolution and provide a 'hidden' or mystical conclusion from which a moral had to be de-coded.

Audience Interpretations

Following on from Sherry's claim that drama 'needs to be shown before it can be explained', it seems that 'presenting in parable' presupposes an audience's ability to engage with a play without any direct pontificating or moral narrative. The *shown* rather than explained 'illusion' relies, therefore, on an audience to invest belief in, and extract a moral from, its calculated evocation of the actual world.

³⁴ Ben Quash, 'Real Enactments: The Role of Drama in the Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar', in *Faithful Performances: Enacting Christian Tradition*, ed. by Trevor A. Hart and Steven R. Guthrie (Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing Group, 2007), pp. 13-32 (p. 19).

To return briefly to Isaac Williams, his claim that within biblical parables is a ‘holding back of sacred and important truths, as if the knowledge of them were injurious to persons unworthy of them’,³⁵ assumes two key things. First, Williams suggests that parables contain an unequivocal ‘truth’ meaning that the stories are not, therefore, open to *interpretation* so much as *understanding* or de-coding. Secondly, this objective ‘truth’ is accessible only to the ‘worthy’. Seeking to exhume an absolute truth from ‘hidden’ divine mystery that can only be understood by a select few, offers an elitist view of religion and morality, not to mention a narrow conception of ‘truth’. Extending Williams’ logic to the theatre, and assuming that a single ‘truth’ can be extracted from these productions – in which young lovers perish, priests run away, and a prince murders his way to salvation – the potential for interpretation around that truth is still not eliminated. ‘The audience’, as Forbes-Robertson observed, ‘is part and parcel, so to speak, of the play’.³⁶

Objective but obscured *truth* surrounded by subjective *interpretation* can be seen in the ways by which late-century ‘showings’ of Shakespeare’s plays evoked, consciously or not, contemporary events. This had previously occurred, for instance, in Macready’s *King John* (1846) which appealed directly to anti-Catholic sentiment during the Tractarian movement and the hysteria created by the re-instatement of the Catholic hierarchy. However, Macready’s anger, expressed in his diaries, about the reaction of his audiences, implies that his performance was intended to deliver a very different message to the one extracted by the applauders of the play’s anti-popery. By this logic, actors and directors of Shakespeare could never eliminate an audience’s propensity to derive subjective meaning from their performances, in much the same way that the

³⁵ Isaac Williams, ‘Tract 80: On Reserve in Communicating Religious Knowledge’, *Project Canterbury: Tracts for the Times* <<http://anglicanhistory.org/tracts/tract80.html>> [accessed November 2010].

³⁶ Johnston Forbes-Robertson, p. 201.

reading of scripture cannot be restricted to a specific hermeneutical focus. As Jowett observed, ‘what men have brought to the text they have also found there [...] its effect partly depends on the preparation in the mind [...] for the reception of it’.³⁷ After a similar fashion, spectators of Shakespearean performances throughout the nineteenth century brought presuppositions about the plays themselves, as well as a consciousness of the world around them, to the theatre.

Hamlet

Audience imposition of meaning onto performance was something that occurred in Tree’s production of *Hamlet*. A week before the play opened at the Haymarket, Queen Victoria’s eldest grandson Albert Victor, died. As Clement Scott noted:

By the most curious coincidence in the world the new Hamlet [...] “the expectancy and rose of the fair state”, came upon the stage at the very hour of great and national sorrow [...] dull indeed would have been an audience that did not instinctively [...] apply the words of Shakespeare’s text to the feeling that was then uppermost.³⁸

This idea of ‘uppermost’ feeling seems to conflict with Tree’s own performance agenda. According to his wife, ‘Herbert did not study *Hamlet* in the actor’s sense, but he made a profound study of the character of Hamlet: ever striving actually to get inside the mind of Shakespeare’.³⁹

Tree’s desire to probe the minds of his characters is demonstrated in his notes on performing *Hamlet*, in which the protagonist’s every move and thought seems to have been pre-meditated and choreographed by the actor to lend the entire piece a sense of psychological, visual and textual authenticity. Although the effort that went into the

³⁷ Benjamin Jowett, ‘On the Interpretation of Scripture’, in *Essays and Reviews* (London: John W. Parker and Son, 1860), pp. 330-433 (p. 359).

³⁸ Clement Scott, *Some Notable Hamlets*, p. 124.

³⁹ Maud Tree, ‘Herbert and I’, in *Herbert Beerbohm Tree: Some Memories of Him and of His Art Collected by Max Beerbohm* (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1920), pp. 1-170 (p. 64).

production was not lost on its audiences, the theme of mourning seemed to be ‘uppermost’ in reviews. As the *Graphic* observed, ‘the past week will long be remembered at our theatres as a period of unparalleled gloom and depression’.⁴⁰ Not only were the funeral preparations for Albert Victor under way, but an epidemic of influenza had, in a strange echo of the plague closures affecting Shakespeare during the seventeenth century, severely hit playhouse attendance.⁴¹ Profit and morale seem to have been suffering, and it was in this atmosphere of ‘gloom and depression’ that Tree’s *Hamlet* opened.

In fact, coincidence conspired once again with this theme of mourning. Whereas productions like those of Kean (1850) and even Barrett (1884) had set the graveyard scene in a gloomy evening atmosphere, Tree deliberately brought the episode out of the literal shadows and placed it in the daylight to draw the stark reality of death to the fore. ‘It is a May-day evening, the sweet-brier is in bloom, the birds are singing, the sheep-bells are tinkling – nature is rejoicing while man is mourning [...] an added emphasis is thus supplied by the heartlessness of nature’.⁴² The daylight, here, enforced the tragedy of the scene and it was fitting that Tree should have added the following business:

[...] the organ peals out a funeral march. Night is falling [...] but through the shadows, Hamlet’s returning form is seen gathering flowers. He is alone with his dead love, and on her he strews the flowers as he falls by her grave in a paroxysm of grief’.⁴³

The production, though successful, became irrevocably associated with mourning, meaning that the redemptive organ music at the end was overshadowed by images of death and sorrow. Again, external factors influenced interpretation in the very same way that Jowett argued was unhelpful in the reading of scripture. Despite Hartley’s quantum

⁴⁰ ‘Pastimes’, *The Graphic*, 23 January 1892 <<http://galegroup.com>> [accessed November 2010].

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² Herbert Beerbohm Tree, pp. 148-9.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 149.

mechanics theory, audience interpretation cannot be omitted from the process of ‘fixing’ hermeneutic potentials in performance.

King John

Like *Hamlet*, Tree’s *King John* (1899) had also fallen subject to contemporary events.

As Maud Tree recollected ‘while the mimic battles were waging without the walls of Angiers at Her Majesty’s, there fell upon England the mutterings of real war’.⁴⁴ The battle scenes of Tree’s production are commemorated in his souvenir programme which contains a tableau image that drives attention away from the human bodies towards the material, impaling machinery of war. Though parallels between mechanised warfare and the devaluing of human life are often associated with the First World War, Tree’s battle of Angiers seems to be evocative of the warfare taking place in South Africa.

However, Tree’s production was mounted in September, a month before the official outbreak of war in October. How, then, could the production have evoked or been a parable of the Boer War? Given the prominence of newspaper coverage and general consciousness of the war, which was simultaneous to the press relating to Tree’s *King John*, it is no wonder that the seemingly distinct notions of battle and theatre were directly compared. A short review in the penny weekly periodical *Fun* made the claim that:

The sumptuous and satisfying production [...] conveys sweetly the lesson that the world is much the same as ever it was, and raises speculation as to whether Philip of France was well advised to try and crush the Uitlanders [and] whether Pandulph favoured the use of incense and lights.⁴⁵

In reality, the production made no such direct allusions to South Africa or the Public Worship Regulations Act. While the actors may very well have invited parallels with

⁴⁴ Maud Tree, p. 112.

⁴⁵ ‘Waftings from the Wings’, *Fun*, 3 October 1899 <<http://galegroup.com>> [accessed December 2010].

the war through their individual performances, it is possible to argue that, as Jowett suggested in relation to scripture, connotations were brought to the text and performance of it due to the conditions surrounding the spectator.

An Irish newspaper reported that ‘in many respects the play is singularly topical [and] the revival was most enthusiastically received by a brilliant audience, including Mr Chamberlain, who was rather significantly demonstrative in his applause of the many jingo passages and declamatory vaunts about war and the might of England’.⁴⁶ The presence of Joseph Chamberlain – who as Secretary of State for the Colonies was a key figure in the British attack in South Africa – in the ‘grand tier box’⁴⁷ must have infused that particular performance with direct associations with the Boer War. This is suggested by the popularity of Falconbridge that night:

Mr Lewis Waller, perhaps scored the success of the evening, as Falconbridge. [...] in every scene in which he appeared Mr Waller commanded the applause of the house, and as the play went on his development of character was a triumph of histrionic art.⁴⁸

Clearly, the production, by its timing and expression of English military might, spoke directly to a nation embroiled in a politically troublesome war in an overseas territory. This means that whatever the intended moral of the production, actor awareness and audience presumptions, ideologies and circumstances were unavoidably imposed upon the piece.

Observations such as those of Scott and Maud Tree about *Hamlet* and *King John*, respectively, imply that the plays transcended their values as tales of historical or

⁴⁶ ‘King John at Her Majesty’s Theatre’, *Freeman’s Journal and Daily Commercial Advertiser*, 21 September 1899 <<http://galegroup.com>> [accessed November 2010].

⁴⁷ ‘Our London Correspondence’, *Glasgow Herald*, 21 September 1899 <<http://galegroup.com>> [accessed November 2010].

⁴⁸ Ibid.

fictional woes, and adopted a consolatory stance on reality. Like the parables which rely on metaphor and 'hidden' meaning, plays with no explicit moral voice and morally definitive conclusion were subject to the interpretive potential of their audiences, rather than the 'symbiosis' of set and language that 'fixes' or stabilises, by Hartley's logic, meaning. The plays can, therefore, be 'presentations in parable', but ones that present a reality or truth beyond the drama and its characters: a truth that is subject to the conditions surrounding the actors and audience, rather than the events within the play itself.

Conclusion

Far from deviating from the issue of Church and stage, these conflicts in 'parable' were present in the acts of reading and interpreting scripture. If, as Shaw claimed, drama is 'the presentation in parable' of life itself, then Shakespeare's plays were fed into this representative paradigm in order to induce audiences into a state of reflection, in much the same way as a parable presents situations to readers and invites them to make a moral judgement. Finding Williams' 'hidden' truth within divinely inspired texts through Jowett's concept of pre-existing ideologies, was not entirely different to observing a play and attaching values to plot, character and conclusion that are, ultimately, subjective. Being taught explicitly and extracting lessons independently are two different experiences, and it was precisely this experiential diversity in the act of observing and, by implication, interpreting drama that mirrors the polarised Victorian responses to the acts of reading and learning from parables.

These concerns pertain to an overall conflict about the role of theatre in relation to reality. During Tree's run of *King John* just after he announced that *A Midsummer*

Night's Dream was to be the next play of the season, the *Country Life Illustrated*, in its theatrical section, offered a curious and yet insightful remark:

Mr Tree will not make the mistake of neglecting the modern drama [...] he is too eclectic to retire in dudgeon to the classics. [...] Shakespeare, by all means, often and often, but not Shakespeare altogether. The throbbing life around us must also have irresistible charms to a great actor [...].⁴⁹

Echoing the conclusion drawn in Chapter One about early Victorian Shakespeare being 'above' reality, this suggests that the Victorian world was considered distinct from those within Shakespeare's plays. In other words, linking plays with contemporary events, unless otherwise specified, was a conscious appropriation on the audience's part. If this was the case, it seems self-defeating to perform pieces like *Romeo and Juliet*, *King John* and *Hamlet* in order to instruct audiences if they bear no relation to 'throbbing life'. Perhaps, for this reason, productions like Tree's *Hamlet* and Forbes-Robertson's *Romeo and Juliet* were self-contained pieces of drama without overly moralised conclusions, because without direct guidance, audiences were at liberty to extract relevant morals from the parabolic narrative or 'showing' of life within the theatre.

Part Two: Literal Morals

In this section, 'presentations in parable' are explored in relation to clear, unequivocal messages. Frameworks, didactic conclusions and morally polarised characters can be found in the late-century productions of William Poel's *Measure for Measure* (1893) and *Romeo and Juliet* (1905), Oscar Asche's *Measure for Measure* (1906), and even Tree's *King John* (1899). In each of these plays, virtuous or 'good' characters complete tasks in a more commendable manner than that in which the less admirable figures go about their business, meaning that morals can be delivered to audiences explicitly, rather than symbolically through 'illusion'.

⁴⁹ 'At the Theatre "Pot Pourri"', *Country Life Illustrated*, 22 July 1899 <<http://galegroup.com>> [accessed December 2010].

Like the mid-century muscular Christians who sought to win souls for Christ, the later liberal Christian ethos highlighted the importance of redemption in both earthly and heavenly contexts. The business of redemption fuelled the dramatic interest in reclamations of fallen women or wayward men in order to reintegrate them into respectable society.⁵⁰ By this logic, the reclamation of characters in parables, literature and on the stage, in the late century, was part of the wider Christian Socialist ethic of forgiveness that appealed to, rather than alienated, social and moral outcasts. According to the notes kept by Ellen Terry's niece, Kate Terry Gielgud, after having seen Pinero's *The Second Mrs Tanqueray* in 1893:

It may be a triumph of art to represent nature so faithfully, but in these days of depression it would surely be far higher art to lend imagination wings to show us what such men and women, with all their faults and frailties, might be, instead of insisting upon what they unfortunately are.⁵¹

While melodrama's focus on licentious men and women was 'faithful' for Gielgud, she suggests that admirable characters would instil fortitude in lieu of discomfort in theatre audiences. This idea of 'insisting' upon redemption comes back to the notion of an inherent literal or hidden message within a text. If Shakespeare's characters were to be redeemed, the plays had to become parabolic stories of transgression mended.

This redemptive model underpinned a new *fin de siècle* theatre that was to be founded by the actor-manager William Poel. In the 1880s Poel established the Elizabethan Stage Society to assert his claim that Shakespeare's plays should be performed, as near as possible, under the conditions in which they were originally produced. Rather than visual accuracy through 'illusion', Poel focused on the

⁵⁰ The late-century model of transgression mended was mocked by Oscar Wilde's Miss Prism in his farce *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895), in which the character exclaims, 'I am not in favour of this modern mania for turning bad people into good people at a moment's notice'. Oscar Wilde, 'The Importance of Being Earnest', in *Blitz Editions: The Works of Oscar Wilde* (Leicester: Bookmark Limited, 1990), pp. 321-69 (p. 338).

⁵¹ Kate Terry Gielgud, *A Victorian Playgoer* (London: Heinemann, 1980), p. 11.

significance of spoken language and storytelling.⁵² ‘Attention’ in the Elizabethan theatre, Poel argued,

[...] was concentrated on the actor [...]. The stage on which they played was [...] surrounded on all sides by spectators. Their action was thus [...] placed close before the eye [...] it acquired a special kind of realism [...]. This was the realism of an actual event, at which the audience assisted, not the realism of a scene to which the audience is transported by the painter’s skill.⁵³

The ‘actual event’, in other words, is the enactment of the play and unfolding of action without interruption. Once attention is shifted from the back into the foreground, drama, rather than being ‘realistic’ and unresolved, can provide a clear moral framework. Instead of bringing external matters, such as contemporary events, *into* Shakespeare’s plays, Poel invited audiences to take an internal moral *away* from the drama. The entire dramatic experience, within the Elizabethan Stage Society paradigm, was one similar to that within a church, where a congregation would be the recipients of an oral rather than, strictly speaking, visual performance.

It is worth deviating here to refer, once again, to Hall Caine’s *The Christian* (1897). As discussed in the previous chapter, church vocabulary (specifically, pews, congregation and vestry) was used to describe Glory’s experience of being in a theatre. Caine’s characterisation of the theatre as church, though postdating the establishment of the Elizabethan Stage Society, arguably carried similar connotations through its focus on audience interaction with the business of the stage. Poel’s revivalist agenda – whereby the practices of the Elizabethan stage replaced those of Victorian realistic drama – was underpinned by the fundamental *lack* of reality in his set of the *Fortune*

⁵² Unpublished response to William Archer quoted in Robert Speaight, *William Poel and the Elizabethan Revival* (London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1954), p. 106.

⁵³ William Poel, *Some Notes on Shakespeare’s Stage and Plays* (London: Bernard Quaritch, 1916), p. 11.

Theatre.⁵⁴ The act of observing such self-consciously fictitious drama, suggests that this kind of theatre served a very different purpose to that of Tree's 'illusion'. Poel lamented that spectacular productions 'mutilate the "fable" and interpolate pictorial effects where none are intended'.⁵⁵ Without the effort and pretence of evoking reality, the plots and characters can be explored within an allegedly 'accurate' theatrical structure, and the drama returns to its original purpose: that of storytelling.

This kind of instructive agenda within something ostensibly fictional, recalls attention to the biblical parables. Jowett, having argued that biblical interpretation operates through pre-existing assumptions about doctrine and morality, suggested that parables should be read as stories within which a literal truth can be found. This reduces the propensity for subjective ideologies to shape the ways in which stories, and scripture in general, are received and manipulated by readers. Parables, according to Jowett, are:

[...] esoteric in as far as the hardness or worldliness of men's hearts prevents their understanding or receiving them. There is a danger of [...] winning a false interest for them by applying them mystically or taking them as a thesis for dialectical or rhetorical exercise [...] there is nothing which we may not in this way superinduce [sic] on the plainest lessons of our saviour.⁵⁶

By this logic, the function of a 'plain' parable is to offer a valuable lesson with an implicit universality by providing 'easy' and 'literal' meanings without the kinds of gaps that invite 'mystical' interpretation.

In 1850, the Scottish theologian Patrick Fairbairn translated Friedrich Gustav Lisso's *The Parables of Jesus*, in which Lisso argued that the biblical tales employ the fable paradigm of storytelling as a vehicle through which divine, otherwise unknowable,

⁵⁴ Robert Speaight, p. 90.

⁵⁵ William Poel, *Shakespeare in the Theatre* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson Ltd., 1913), p. 60.

⁵⁶ Benjamin Jowett, *The Epistles of Saint Paul to the Thessalonians, Galatians and Romans*, p. 557.

truth can be communicated on earth. ‘The parable derives its matter from the territory of the possible and the true [...] the parable has to do with nothing but religious truths, while the fable has for its object experimental sayings and prudential lessons’.⁵⁷ Didacticism pertaining to God, salvation and spiritual health was, for Lisco and Jowett, the quintessential function of a fable-like, earthly parable.

Often this didacticism can be found in two possible ways of dealing with a situation: a right and a wrong.⁵⁸ The two good sons and the one prodigal; the two profitable users of God’s ‘talent’ and the one wasteful; the five ‘wise’ virgins and the five ‘foolish’; and the two callous Jews and one benevolent Samaritan, all divide human activity into ‘right’, ‘wrong’, ‘good’ and ‘bad’. In real terms, this can be seen in the structure of many of Jesus’ parables which revolve around framed narratives: the introduction of a situation and characters within it, the action itself, and a moral conclusion. Take, for instance, the *Parable of the Ten Virgins* which begins: ‘Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins [...] five of them were wise and five were foolish’ (Matt. 25:1-2). These characters undertake their journey, with the wise virgins ready to meet their bridegroom and the foolish who were unprepared. The conclusion offers a general moral: ‘watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming’ (Matt. 25:13). The second person and direct address of this soteriological statement force the reader to take away an objective lesson from the story, and emphasise the relevance of the parable to the lives of its readers.

⁵⁷ Friedrich Gustav Lisco, *The Parables of Jesus: Explained and Illustrated*, trans. by Patrick Fairbairn (Philadelphia: Daniels & Smith, 1850), p. 8.

⁵⁸ Benjamin Jowett, ‘On the Interpretation of Scripture’, p. 415.

Such is also the case in plays like *Romeo and Juliet* and *Henry VIII* which contain, uncharacteristically for Shakespeare, prologues and epilogues. Setting up situations, like feuding families and a history in which ‘mightiness meets misery’ (Prologue, 30) provides a parabolic framework, at the close of which a religious lesson can be learned. For instance, *Romeo and Juliet* teaches that ‘all are punished’ (5.3.295) on earth for futile antagonism and miscommunication, while *Henry VIII* concludes with the claim that redemption is ensured by ‘the merciful construction of good women’ (Epilogue, 10). But even without these framing narratives, the urge to impress salient moral points upon audiences was demonstrated in the ways that managers introduced frameworks into their adaptations of Shakespeare: it is to this moralising on stage that the following discussion will turn.

Romeo and Juliet

Various late-century productions of this tragedy, like the ones discussed in the first part of this chapter, tended to emphasise the combined moral supremacy of the lovers over the selfish feuding of their parents. This was generally made all the more patent by the omission of the final act from the point of Juliet’s death. The central figures, in other words, are the lovers, while their parents’ reconciliation is inferior to their collective demise. While Phelps (1846) and Benson (1898) had included Laurence’s confession and the Prince’s epilogue,⁵⁹ and even Irving (1882), as Ellen Terry recalled, closed his production with ‘the magnificent reconciliation of the two houses’,⁶⁰ the versions of

⁵⁹ Samuel Phelps, Promptbook for *Romeo and Juliet*. London, 1846. *Folger Promptbooks*. Prompt Rom. 24. Shattuck Catalogue, *Romeo and Juliet* 27, p. 416; Frank Benson, Promptbook for *Romeo and Juliet*. Stratford-upon-Avon, 1898. *Shakespeare Centre Library Promptbooks*. 72.929 4296 ASC. Shattuck Catalogue, *Romeo and Juliet* 80, p. 426.

⁶⁰ Ellen Terry quoted in Jeffrey Richards, ‘Irving and His Scenic Artists’, in *Henry Irving: A Re-Evaluation of a Pre-Eminent Victorian Actor-Manager*, ed. by Richard Foulkes (London: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2008), pp. 99-116 (p. 114).

Kean (1841) and Mary Anderson (1884), to name a few, made little effort to attach a moral to the conclusion, or form an *explicit* resolution.

In Irving's *Romeo and Juliet* at the Lyceum, there was a sense of parabolic frameworking in the presence of Chorus, played by Howard Russell, who delivered the introductory prologue that was invariably omitted from stage versions. There was, moreover, a concluding tableau scene which finalised the action:

The bloody steps are thronged even to the very mouth of the tomb, and eager faces, half hidden by the gloom, peer down to catch a glimpse of the lovers united in death. The whole scene is awful in the grandeur of its solemnity; the spectators look on with a silence that is almost painful.⁶¹

Ellen Terry's term 'magnificent reconciliation' seems, from this description, to be a misnomer. This tableau was just that: an image or picture without a distinct purpose or sense of continuity. Rather than having Laurence explain the situation and offer an apology, Irving had the Prince deliver the final couplet 'Never was there a story of more woe/ Than this of Juliet and her Romeo' (5.3.309-10). That Irving chose to include even a fleeting reference to the reconciliation of the houses, particularly given the inclusion of the prologue, suggests that a conscious attempt was being made to deliver a linear story with a moral purpose. Offering a visual as well as narrative conclusion, then, was a way of frameworking an otherwise equivocal, 'hidden' text.

But, by Fairbairn's logic, this creates a 'fable' *not* a 'parable'. In order to extrapolate a religious message from the drama, Patrick Sherry's argument about 'showing' rather than 'explaining' has to be reversed.⁶² While 'realistic' performances showed action within life-like settings with plausible, not ideal, conclusions, Poel

⁶¹ 'Romeo and Juliet at the Lyceum', *The Era*, 11 March 1882 <<http://galegroup.com>> [accessed September 2010].

⁶² Patrick Sherry, 'The Arts of Redemption', p. 194.

offered to explain drama through representation. Indeed, representation lies at the heart of Poel's manifesto for the production of early modern drama. The journalist C. E. Montague described a typical production of the Elizabethan Stage Society: 'the stage set up was a copy of that of the Fortune Theatre built by Henslowe and Alleyn'.⁶³ Poel recreated the sense of depth with the 'theatre in the round' and, as Montague observed, 'the essence of the Elizabethan theatre was the fusion of interpenetration of stage and auditorium, and the essence of the modern theatre is their separation by the proscenium arch'.⁶⁴ The drawing together of spectator and performer, then, offers to direct the play at the audience. Montague discussed the 'Elizabethan sensation of having an actor come forward to the edge of a platform in the midst of ourselves and deliver speeches from a position almost like that of a speaker from a pulpit'.⁶⁵ The analogy with sermonising appears yet again.

If Poel's desire to return to an Elizabethan model was to be consistent, the performance of Renaissance drama had to possess 'no incentive to naturalism [...] with energy and beauty of declamation, giving performance the special qualities of fine recitation, distinct from those of realistic acting'.⁶⁶ If, like a sermon, Elizabethan drama was declamatory and focused on 'recitation', it follows that it can also be calculated to fix audience attention and excite emotions such as guilt and admiration. Much like Jesus' parables, then, Poel's unrealistic Shakespeare offered a way of explaining plays and their morals to the audience, rather than showing microcosmic realities to which spectators must bring their own interpretations.

⁶³ C. E. Montague, 'The Art of Mr Poel', in *Victorian Dramatic Criticism*, ed. by George Rowell (London: Methuen & Co., 1971), pp. 146-54 (p. 152).

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 153.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 153.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 154.

Returning to *Romeo and Juliet*, it seems logical that the prologue; Laurence's confession of his part in the proceedings; the parental contrition; reformation, and the Prince's final judgement were included by Poel (1905). Without the confession of Laurence and the familial reconciliation, the death of the lovers, as Poel was keen to assert, loses its pathos. Poel referred to the scenes that form the framework: the opening fight, the pronouncement of banishment and the closing reconciliation:

No stage version of *Romeo and Juliet* is consistent with Shakespeare's intentions which does not give prominence to the hatred of the two houses and retain intact the three "crowd scenes" – the one at the opening of the play, the second in the middle, and the third at the end'.⁶⁷

The sense of 'crowding' and bodily presence in these episodes creates a visual signal that draws the audience's collective eye in the same way that a parabolic narrative must lure a reader through a story with a beginning, a middle, and a morally logical conclusion.

In Poel's interpretation of *Romeo and Juliet* the lovers were not the centre of the plot. Rather, it was the houses and their representative parental figures that were being warned, trialled, judged and punished. While Irving sought a 'realistic' and accurate vision of Renaissance Italy, Poel's production of the early twentieth century operated within a plain, didactic setting, so that the play was no longer about the tragedy of two youthful lovers, as it was with Forbes-Robertson. Rather, it was about the collective linear trajectory of characters irrevocably bound to misunderstanding and antagonism. This stage, in other words, had taken on the role of the pulpit, and the auditorium was comparable to pews.

⁶⁷ William Poel, *Shakespeare in the Theatre*, p. 156.

Measure for Measure

Given that Poel sought to oppose the traditional naturalistic mode of theatre so common to the era, it seems natural for him to have chosen a play that was invariably avoided by both elitist and populist managers: *Measure for Measure*. Just as *Romeo and Juliet* was appropriated into Poel's mode of story-telling for the edification of spectators, so too was *Measure for Measure* transformed into a tale of trial and judgement. Like the parables, the play has transgressors, right doers, lesson-givers and recipients of those lessons.

As observed in relation to Phelps' *Measure for Measure* (1846), to distract attention from plot and character flaws, Victorian productions of the play – with the exception of Poel's – placed a distinct emphasis on the saintliness of Isabella. To achieve this, successful, attractive actresses like Isabel Glyn, Miss Alleyn, Ellen Wallis, and Adelaide Neilson were employed to play the nun between the 1840s and the 1880s. Performances hinged around the sanctity of Isabella and her role as the soothing, moralising force within the drama.

Reading the play as a parable, therefore, meant that the other characters had to be measured or set against the example of the virtuous Isabella, much like the 'foolish' and 'wise' virgins. But it is rash to overlook the lack of unequivocal praise for Isabella in performance. She may have been virtuous and saintly, but Isabella was Roman Catholic with a potentially abnormal aversion to marriage and its conjugal implications. A parable or literal truth could not be expressed through a character in which few placed unrestrained sympathy. In order to break away from the heroine-centred readings of Phelps, Alleyn, Neilson and Wallis, both William Poel (1893) and Oscar Asche (1906) made Duke Vincentio the focus and moral epicentre of the play. Moreover, returning to

the construct of the framed narrative, particularly patent in parables, these two productions seemed to lend themselves, albeit in different ways, to the paradigm of late-century *representation*.

Poel's *Measure for Measure* was the first in a series of productions of Shakespeare to be undertaken within the replica set of the Fortune Theatre. Coupled with the ostentatious display of theatricality, Poel had men in Elizabethan dress sit on either side of the stage to produce the effect, to the Victorian spectator, of observing how Shakespeare's play would, in turn, have been seen by its original audiences. Rather than drawing on the example of virtue in *Isabella*, Poel employed the Duke as his central moraliser and wielder of justice.⁶⁸ Having Vincentio observe and manoeuvre his subjects in the parameters of the Fortune replica while under the scrutiny of the 'Elizabethan' spectators, provided a literal as well as moral framework for Poel's production.

Like the figure of the rich lord in the *Parable of the Talents* who sets and judges a trial of initiative for three slaves, Poel's Vincentio was the representation of Christian judgement, safeguarding the innocent and reprimanding the transgressors. According to Poel, Vincentio is:

Hardly ever off stage, but the part needs an actor of flexibility [...] he must be the life and soul of the play. He should be able to show the Duke delighting in freedom from irksome duties. He should impersonate him as a man about forty [...] adored by all for his easy-going and kindly ways [...]. In the spectator, the tears of Mariana, and the fears of Claudio, do not arouse painful emotions since the Duke watches over them [...].⁶⁹

Poel's focus on the images of representation in vocabulary such as 'impersonation' and 'showing' fuses with his reference to the receiving spectator, suggesting that the

⁶⁸ William Poel, *Monthly Letters*, arr. by A. M. T. (London: T. Werner Laurie Ltd., 1929), p. 90.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 90.

quintessential purpose of the Duke is to lull audiences and characters into a sense of security. It is precisely because Vincentio is *impersonated* that he elicits audience sympathy and trust within the staged parameters of theatrical moral storytelling.

As well as being the ‘life and soul of the play’, the Duke had to act as a guide to those around him. It follows, then, that Isabella had to be demoted from the earlier status of virginal saint, to that of a lesser figure than her redeemer. By way of comparison, it is necessary to turn to other Isabellas of the century. Of Miss Neilson’s performance in Birmingham (1876) for instance, it was noted that ‘she never looked more becoming or better adorned than in the plain white novice’s dress’.⁷⁰ According to the *Birmingham Daily Mail*, ‘she had no aids of dress or coiffure in her task; she wore throughout the five acts the conventual garb of a novice, her head swathed in bandages, and her loose flowing white robe hiding the perfection of her graceful figure’.⁷¹ Such responses, however, never overlook the physical beauty of the actress and suggest that efforts were made to hide the sexuality of Isabella, rather than deny it completely.

Poel, whether reacting against such depictions or otherwise, chose to dress Isabella as an ordinary citizen and not in a nun’s habit. This removed allusions to the Catholic Church and the deviant female asceticism discussed in Chapter One.

According to Poel, Isabella

[...] is still secular, and still wears the costume of a lady of rank [...]. The audience should realise that the Duke could not, and would not, have asked her to be his wife if to consent meant breaking a religious vow. Nor would Angelo have dared to tempt a woman already set apart to the service of God.⁷²

⁷⁰ ‘Miss Neilson in *Measure for Measure*’, *The Era*, 24 September 1876 <<http://galegroup.com>> [accessed December 2010].

⁷¹ *Birmingham Daily Mail* quoted in ‘Miss Neilson in “Measure for Measure”’, *The Era*, 24 September 1876 <<http://galegroup.com>> [accessed December 2009].

⁷² William Poel, *Monthly Letters*, p. 89.

Freeing Isabella from the charged nature of her burdensome robes made the Duke's proposal far more credible for both the audience and character. Just as Vincentio stood at the centre of the action, his presence at the beginning and end of the play, like the prologue and epilogue in *Romeo and Juliet*, provided a stable, moralising framework. Within this, individuals could transgress, receive forgiveness, mend and, in Isabella's case, be rewarded with a noble husband.

A more patent framework was created by Oscar Asche who prepared and performed in an adaptation of *Measure for Measure* at the Adelphi (1906). The emphasis in this version seems to have been on the journey from transgression to redemption through the medium of trial. As with the earlier versions of Neilson and Wallis, Asche placed emphasis on the 'happy' conclusion, hinging the moral of the play around the necessity of forgiveness and redemption in all acts of mercy. However, as well as culminating the action in a parable-like judgement, which will be explored shortly, Asche opened the play with Vincentio's conversation with the Friar: 'No holy father, throw away that thought' and the introduction of his plan for 'secret harbour' (1.3.1, 4).⁷³ By starting the action with a plot of disguise under the supervision of a holy man – in anticipation of G. Wilson Knight's reading of the Duke as Jesus⁷⁴ – Asche turned Vincentio into a moral authority with, potentially, divine sanction to impose trials and challenges upon his subjects.

It is worth deviating briefly to expand on this business of Vincentio as a moral judge. According to the twentieth-century Swiss theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar,

⁷³ Oscar Asche, Promptbook for *Measure for Measure*. London, 1906. *Shakespeare Centre Library Promptbooks*. 79.920 ASC. Shattuck Catalogue, *Measure for Measure* 15, p. 271.

⁷⁴ George Wilson Knight, *The Wheel of Fire: Interpretations of Shakespearean Tragedy* (1930; repr. London: Routledge, 2001), p. 91.

who coined the term ‘theo-drama’, life is a ‘drama which God has already “staged” with the world and with man, in which we find ourselves players’.⁷⁵ But in terms of theatre, ‘theo-drama [...] is only possible [...] when some accredited representative of God steps onto the stage of life’s play as “a person” in the action [...]’.⁷⁶ Balthasaar argued that characters like Duke Vincentio enact what he calls ‘the tragedy of the cross’, becoming representatives or parallels of Christ within the dramatic world.⁷⁷ In terms of Victorian drama, while it is unlikely that a direct analogy was being made between Vincentio and Christ, it is feasible to suggest that Poel’s and Asche’s interpretations of the character as a moral judge pertain, in some degree, to the figure of the fictional lesson-giver who frequently appears in Jesus’ parables.

Asche’s manipulation of the text suggests that the Duke’s machinations were a deliberate attempt to test Angelo, particularly given his statement ‘hence we shall see/ If power change purpose’ (1.4.62-3). Angelo, played by Asche, was called to the presence of Vincentio and the Friar – played by Walter Hampden and G. K. Super respectively – in order to receive his promotion, after which Vincentio continued with his discussion about justice and Angelo’s role as enforcer of it. Rather than offering the illusion of time passing between Angelo’s assumption of power and the Duke’s plotting, the line ‘I have on Angelo imposed the office’ (1.3.40) occurs in the very first scene, turning the performance into a tale of a deliberate trial of Angelo’s virtue, much like the conscious trialling of the servants from the outset of the action in the *Parable of the Talents*.

In fact, Birch made a direct comparison between this parable and *Measure for Measure*, arguing that Angelo is offered a ‘talent’ in the form of power over justice,

⁷⁵ Hans Urs von Balthasaar, *Theo Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory*, II, p. 9.

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 189.

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 189.

fails his test and is subjected to moral re-education at the play's conclusion.⁷⁸ Returning to the production, Asche himself played the part of Angelo, adopting the role of lesson recipient, rather than the chief central role of moraliser. Drawing attention to the transgressor, not to punish, but to instruct and mend him seems to be the ultimate Victorian liberal Christian response to any parable about incorrect or misjudged action.

The close of Asche's production, therefore, was presented as an overall moral about the necessity of lawful and spiritual mercy and, most strikingly, marriage. Once the characters were assembled on stage and all was revealed, the promptbook indicates that the Duke became the moral instructor, bestowing upon his subjects the Christ-like wisdom delivered out in the parables:

She, Claudio, that you wrong'd, look you restore.	(Exit Claudio)
Joy to you, Mariana! Love her, Angelo:	
I have confess'd her and I know her virtue.	(Exit Angelo and Mariana)
Thanks, good friend Escalus, for thy much goodness:	
There's more behind that is more 'gratulate.	(Exit Escalus)
Thanks, Provost, for thy care and secrecy:	
We shall employ thee in a worthier place.	(Exit Provost) ⁷⁹

The departure of each forgiven party at a specific moment lent an air of closure to the story of the characters, each of whom have passed or failed their tests and received just rewards.

Poel placed his moralising Duke within the literal framework of the mock Elizabethan stage surrounded by spectators in order to focus attention on the play's linear, redemptive trajectory. On the other hand, Asche presented Vincentio in a *narrative* framework that evoked a parable's setting up of a task, the performing of it, and the final judgement. Redeeming the transgressors and offering them a place

⁷⁸ William John Birch, p. 354.

⁷⁹ Oscar Asche, Promptbook for *Measure for Measure*. London, 1906. *Shakespeare Centre Library Promptbooks*. 79.920 ASC. Shattuck Catalogue, *Measure for Measure* 15, p. 271.

alongside their more admirable counterparts, provides a parabolic conclusion with a tidy moral about earthly mercy in preparation for the inevitable divine judgement. It was this kind of textual rearrangement, mode of presentation and, in Asche's case, stage directions in the conclusion that suggest an increasing desire to turn Shakespeare into something self-consciously moral and didactic.

King John

If productions that drew attention to their own performance and that possessed a moralising framework can be interpreted as parabolic, it follows that the most ostentatious of Tree's Shakespearean revivals – with their grand 'illusions' and historical accuracies – also indicate a deliberate move towards a visually escapist but ultimately didactic theatre. Tree claimed of his *King John* that 'the play is intended not only to interest the middle-aged people, but also to instruct the young folks generally'.⁸⁰ Instructing 'generally' was precisely the way in which these late-century frameworks operated. Despite inviting external parallels to the Boer War, Tree's *King John*, by its very nature as a series of images, was calculated to *explain* and not *show* reality. Everything from the tableaux, action and delivery seemed to have the air of an explanatory lesson. Not only did John hew the heads from nearby daisies while instructing Hubert to murder Arthur, but his 'panther-like' movements made him seem elusive and yet insecure as a king and man.⁸¹ In other words, stage business was exaggerated to *explain* a character in action, rather than demonstrating conduct that merely *shows* that individual.

⁸⁰ Herbert Beerbohm Tree quoted in 'King John at Her Majesty's', *The Pall Mall Gazette*, 19 September 1899 <<http://galebroup.com>> [accessed November 2010].

⁸¹ Hesketh Pearson, *Beerbohm Tree His Life and Laughter* (Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1971), p. 127.

Further to the notion of representation, one reviewer claimed that ‘Tree gives a week’s thought to a line, but the result is not that he says it with conviction [...] his reflection makes him unable to say it without two or three interruptions filled in with pantomime’.⁸² The exaggeration seems much like Poel’s mode of theatre which focused on ‘impersonation’ and ‘depicting’. As well as creating the ‘pantomime’ effect so lamented here, Tree drew attention to the performance in much the same way that the tableaux must have done. Paradoxically, it seems, Tree’s ‘illusion’ of reality was forced to such a degree that it failed to be realistic.

To emphasise the significance of Tree’s style in *King John*, it is important to refer back to Macready’s mid-century mounting. Geraldine Cousin has characterised the salient points of both productions in her casebook on the play:

Macready’s visual recreation of a medieval world had been interpreted as an illustrative chorus which embodied the play’s meaning. In place of Macready’s connected stage pictures which arguably informed and clarified audience responses to the play, Tree would appear to have offered a sequence of images, spectacular in themselves but essentially discrete and separable.⁸³

Mounting a series of images, which Tree did through his three shortened but visually arresting acts punctuated by spectacular tableaux, seems to have anticipated Shaw’s concept of drama as the ‘presentation in parable’ of man’s struggle with the world. Tree’s was the theatre of depiction and evocation, rather like Brecht’s twentieth-century concept of ‘epic theatre’. An article in the *Daily News* lamented the inclusion of the Magna Charta tableau, complaining that ‘Shakespeare has, in defiance of history, made the pivot of the story not the struggle of the barons and people for constitutional

⁸² ‘Her Majesty’s Theatre’, *The Morning Post*, 21 September 1899 <<http://galegroup.com>> [accessed December 2010].

⁸³ Geraldine Cousin, *Shakespeare in Performance: King John* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), p. 47.

liberties, but the supposed claims of Prince Arthur to the English throne'.⁸⁴ The tableau was, therefore, 'not only unjustified but inimical to the design and spirit of the play'.⁸⁵ But Tree's design in offering stage images was not necessarily to continue the story; rather to provide historical instruction and, therefore, to draw attention to the nature of the production as an *explanation*, rather than simple *showing* or 'illusion', of medieval life.

Though Tree sought to evoke historical reality, his disconnected images succeeded in inviting audience contemplation about the transgressions of John, oath-making, the inefficacy of the Church, and the flawed but admirable patriotism of Falconbridge. Offering images and representations of characters within the fictionalised surroundings of the stage was a way of delivering a message to the audience in a parable-like fashion: the spectator is *shown* varying comportments and approaches to situations, and *given* a moral explanation at the conclusion so as to make logical and spiritual sense of the preceding action.

Tree's production also seemed to mimic Poel's redemptive framework agenda. First, just as Poel had the parents reconcile at the close of *Romeo and Juliet*, and Vincentio deliver moral judgement upon his subjects before accepting his 'virginal' prize in *Measure for Measure*, so too did Tree's John die a tortuous and repentant death, while a redemptive sunrise as a signal of new beginnings rose at the back of the stage.⁸⁶ Moreover, like Poel's conclusions which were often spoken to the audience, as from a pulpit to a congregation, Falconbridge's closing lines, spoken with 'patriotic fervour'

⁸⁴ 'King John at Her Majesty's Theatre', *Daily News*, 21 September 1899 <<http://galegroup.com>> [accessed November 2010].

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Herbert Beerbohm Tree, *King John Souvenir* (London: British Mutoscope and Biograph Company Limited, 1899), fv3.

became a kind of declamatory sermon.⁸⁷ According to the *Morning Post*, ‘the rhetorical eight lines with which the play ends [...] were taken clean out of the play and delivered as an address to the gallery’.⁸⁸ The performance of the play’s moral, ‘nought shall make us rue/ If England to itself do rest but true’ (5.7.117-8) at the audience must have given the play a didactic air, with a clear, unequivocal epilogue-like conclusion, mirroring Poel’s parabolic framework.

Conclusion

‘Illusion’ on the stage occupied a different visual territory to the revivalist agenda of Poel in which the spoken word outshone the spectacle. But it does not follow that didacticism was present only in one style of theatre. While Tree’s eagerness to reproduce reality, in plays like *Hamlet* for instance, paradoxically drew the theatrical nature of the stage and production to the fore, Poel’s ethos seemed calculated to draw attention to the false nature of the world of drama. As Marion O’ Connor has recently noted, ‘a dramatic revival on the stage of a theatrical reconstruction is a play-within-a-play. The outer dramatic fiction is the one afforded by the reconstruction itself’.⁸⁹ Everything about Poel’s theatre was, therefore, self-conscious: it explained itself in every way from the plot and characters to its very nature as a performance.

But the self-consciousness of the Elizabethan revivals seems to have been a cause of discontent for the critic William Archer: ‘I think the Elizabethan Stage Society would do well to regard itself frankly as an academic rather than a theatrical institution. It may supplement and stimulate the regular stage; it cannot possibly rival or supersede

⁸⁷ ‘*King John* at Her Majesty’s’, *The Pall Mall Gazette*, 21 September 1899 <<http://galegroup.com>> [accessed November 2010].

⁸⁸ ‘Her Majesty’s Theatre’, *The Morning Post*, 21 September 1899 <<http://galegroup.com>> [accessed November 2010].

⁸⁹ Marion O’Connor, “‘Useful in the year 1999’: William Poel and Shakespeare’s “Build of Stage””, *Shakespeare Survey*, 52 (1999), 17-32 (p. 31).

it'.⁹⁰ Archer's concern about academic, pedagogical theatre implies that Poel's was an experimental endeavour rather than a genuine plunge into the work being performed. Archer also argued that the Elizabethan Stage Society should 'leave to the theatre the plays which are the theatre's – which are not of an age but for all time – and devote itself to plays which, belonging essentially to their own age, are best illustrated in accordance with its message'.⁹¹ In other words, the universally appropriate plays of Shakespeare, for instance, are better presented in the 'realistic' spectacular style that celebrates architectural, sartorial and religious history, than in a paradigm that privileges *performance* history.

However, by performing within the set-piece of an Elizabethan theatre, Poel was drawing attention to the individual characters and their interactions with one another as well as their circumstances, rather than their relationship with a scenic, visual world. By abandoning spectacle and 'accurate' scenery and replacing them with actors – usually amateur – Poel seemed to have created the ultimate Protestant drama. Pomp and claims to literal historical reproduction were set aside with the presentation of individuals in a comparatively simple performance space offering literal morals to audiences. Of the earliest performance by the Society in 1881, which was the First Quarto version of *Hamlet*, Poel observed that 'with undivided attention being given to the play and to the acting, a fuller appreciation and keener enjoyment of Shakespeare's tragedy became possible'.⁹² Shakespeare, Poel argued, 'wrote his plays in episodes, not in scenes, and they were acted without a break even if the characters were supposed to have changed their locality'.⁹³ Shifting scenes and backgrounds 'take away from the reality of the

⁹⁰ William Archer, *The Theatrical World 1893-1897* (London: Walter Scott, 1897), p. 206.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 206.

⁹² William Poel, *Shakespeare in the Theatre*, p. 204.

⁹³ William Poel, *Monthly Letters*, p. 44.

performance’,⁹⁴ and it is this combination of the seemingly conflicting concepts of ‘reality’ and ‘performance’ that characterise what I will call the Protestant theatre where the word, rather than spectacle and ceremony, is paramount.

Chapter Conclusion

By focusing on the details of action and character, Victorian actors drove attention towards the facts in the plays rather than the plot holes and ambiguities, in much the same way that biblical criticism of parables tended to hone in on the quintessential moral of a story that can be gathered through the presentation of information in the framing narratives. The importance of an extractable moral within a text – scripture or otherwise – is paramount here.

If audiences observing Tree’s *King John* could associate the play with the Boer War, then they were creating, not without some help from the actors, readings of the performance that made it relevant to reality. On the other hand, the disconnected scenes and sunrise at the end offered audiences a visual historical story with a redemptive conclusion and a literal, extractable moral. Theatrical experience, despite Hartley’s conception of ‘fixing’, cannot always be controlled by the performer; whether or not a piece of drama is didactic depends, to some extent, on the expectations of the observer.

But as with the biblical parables, bringing existing expectations to Shakespeare is bound to influence interpretation. For this reason, Poel’s ‘experimental’ Protestant Shakespeare was a less ambiguous way of dealing with ostensibly enigmatical characters and situations. Amateur actors on a mock stage within a Victorian

⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 45.

proscenium arch, enacting moralisers, transgressors and didactic conclusions, broke away from the ‘illusion’ of the stage and provided a kind of drama that was clearly unreal. But through its lack of reality, this theatre succeeded in doing precisely what was expected of a parable: telling a linear story with a moral. Rather than elitist plays that claimed to be ‘realistic’ with ‘conflict’ in their conclusions – like Williams’ similarly elitist Catholic understanding of parables – Poel offered his audiences a new kind of liberal Christian Shakespeare that was accessible, entertaining and, above all, morally instructive.

The point of performing Shakespeare, particularly towards the end of the century, pertains to the notion of instructive, parabolic ‘truth’. Whether the moral of a play was hidden and conflicted in ‘realistic’ productions, or literal in Poel’s framework paradigm, it seems that a priority of late-century Shakespearean performance was instructiveness. Through the ‘symbiosis’ of scene and language, late-century directors like Irving, Tree and Poel turned what States would come to define a century later as a ‘word/ scene ratio’ into an overall metaphor or moral. Whether shown or explained, this, in turn, made Shakespeare relevant to *fin de siècle* audiences troubled by war, disease and ‘gloom’.

Part Two: Performance

Conclusion

The previous three chapters have demonstrated how and why activities such as prayer and ceremony, and themes like casuistry and judgement were foregrounded in productions of Shakespeare's drama. Between Macready's crucifix on stage in the tent scene, Tree praying before a Marian shrine, Phelps' Angelo attempting to negotiate sin, and Asche's Duke Vincentio testing his subjects, there was a willingness to engage with Church issues within the realm of theatre. Whether or not audiences preferred the pomp and spectacle of 'realistic' theatre, comparable to Catholic ritual, or Poel's less 'popular' Protestant, revivalist storytelling ethos, it seems that the theatre had become a didactic tool. This tool was complete with a preaching space facing an auditory willing and expecting to be enlightened by the sights and sounds on stage.

But if Victorian analogies, like Caine's, between a church and theatre seem tenuous to twenty-first century sensibilities, it is worth quoting the Christian Socialist Stewart Headlam:

It is not only on Sundays [...] that we are to serve God, but on all days: not only in worship, but in work: not only in prayer, but in politics: not only in the church, but in the theatre [...] we are doing a wrong to Him [...] if we draw lines between what is secular and sacred.¹

Though this offers an interesting way of reading performances of worship, prayer and ceremony on stage, Headlam's fundamental argument asserts the moral duty of drama to instruct its audiences, and the simultaneous auditory responsibility to appropriate the lessons of Christianity into the playhouse and what Balthasaar has called 'the stage of life's play'.²

¹ Stewart Headlam, *The Laws of Eternal Life Being Studies in the Church Catechism* (1897; repr. Montana: Kessinger Publishing, 2005), p. 48.

² Hans Urs von Balthasaar, *Theo Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory*, II, p. 9.

However, if all activity is potentially pious, or at least moral, why was it possible to engage with religion within plays like *Hamlet*, but not in Jones' *Michael and His Lost Angel*? Notwithstanding the Victorian idolisation of Shakespeare, his plays were never subject to the same censorship routine as contemporary drama. This means that questions about forgiveness, judgement, prayer and oath making could be explored without falling victim to the criticism levelled at plays like that of Jones, where similar themes were being explored outside of what *Hearth and Home* called 'a quasi-historical context'.³ The theologian Ben Quash, has noted that this is because in Shakespeare's drama:

Characters [...] make decisions of momentous significance; decisions [...] on which loves hang; decisions on which they will be judged. There is a fierce fullness to be reckoned with in these tragic universes [...]. If we look at the drama of the nineteenth century [...] people yawn, are bored, are afraid of their own dullness and obscurity, fear most of all that they are non-entities [...]. To take up discipleship of Christ – to agree to be led by God – is [...] to know oneself summoned to a sort of destiny [...] there stands the urgency of the divine call which addresses the whole of a person [...] and asks that person to make something of his or her life.⁴

Quash's notion of the 'bored' Victorian character to a great extent articulates the frustration felt by spectators like Kate Gielgud, whose lament about 'faithful' representation was noted in Chapter Six. It was precisely in the inescapability of existential and social monotony so readily enacted in plays like *The Second Mrs Tanqueray* that the progressive, soteriological agenda of Christianity was lost.

Whether productions of Shakespeare's drama were calculated to 'teach and lead'⁵ or to be a 'refuge'⁶ – even with their accurate, 'naturalistic', didactic agendas –

³ 'At the Play', *Hearth and Home*, 23 January 1896 <<http://galegroup.com>> [accessed July 2010].

⁴ Ben Quash, 'Real Enactments: The Role of Drama in the Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar', pp. 13-32 (p. 20).

⁵ Wilson Barrett quoted in 'Mr Wilson Barrett on the Mission of the Stage', *Birmingham Daily Post*, 5 August 1893 <<http://galegroup.com>> [accessed April 2011].

they were never far away from the ‘moralism’ integral to the Victorian ethos. Using crosses, the language of faith, and sophistry to communicate a parabolic tale in which morals could be hidden or literal, allowed for Shakespeare to be visually entertaining, whilst intellectually and morally instructive. ‘As the theatre was invading the schoolroom and the Church’, Foulkes has noted, ‘so too was religion making its way onto the stage’.⁷ Yet, as Henry Irving had come to realise in the final decade of the century ‘every art should help the preacher, but the preacher’s proper place is the pulpit [...] there are more roads than one to Rome’.⁸

⁶ The poet and Catholic convert Alice Meynell, questioned: ‘is not Shakespeare [...] our refuge? Fortunately unreal is his world [...] and there we may laugh with open heart [...] without misgiving, without remorse, without reluctance’. Alice Meynell, ‘Pathos’, in *Essays* (London: Chiswick Press, 1914), pp. 35-7 (p. 36).

⁷ Richard Foulkes, *Church and Stage in Victorian England*, p. 239.

⁸ Henry Irving quoted in Jeffrey Richards, *Sir Henry Irving Theatre, Culture and Society*, p. 203.

Shakespeare, the Church and the Victorians

Conclusion

*'To show our simple skill,
That is the true beginning of our end'*
A Midsummer Night's Dream (5.1.110-11)

The discussions in both sections of this study constitute a journey from theologians to theatre critics, and from Shakespeare the 'prophet' to Shakespeare the spectacle. What, then, can be extrapolated from this 'journey' by way of conclusion? At the outset of this thesis, three questions were asked: first, what is the relationship between religion and Shakespeare in the Victorian period? Secondly, what can the Victorian 'Church' reveal about contemporary interpretations of Shakespeare? Finally, if Shakespeare's plays were read and performed in ways that foregrounded religious themes, why is this relevant now?

First, to combine the concepts of religion and Shakespeare within Victorian Studies is not, strictly speaking, to limit oneself to the question of Shakespeare's faith. Of course, religious sects in the middle of the century engaged in a tug-of-war bid to claim rights to the person of Shakespeare through the medium of his works. Wordsworth, Trench, Wilberforce and Dowden, for instance, argued that rejection of papal authority in *Henry VIII* and *King John* was too profound to have come from a Catholic. However, Richard Simpson argued that in spite of condemning the papal hierarchy, Shakespeare never mocked Catholic 'sacred mysteries' or 'divine dogmas'.¹ Later in the century, according to Marshall, it was probable that Shakespeare 'was in no strict sense of the word, a strong Protestant'.² He also observed that 'it may be doubted whether, in the case of a poet who shows such very wide human sympathies, it is a

¹ Richard Simpson, 'Was Shakespeare a Catholic?', p. 24.

² Frank A. Marshall, 'Introduction to *King John*', III, 153-9 (p. 159).

profitable occupation of one's time to argue this question at all'.³ Profitable or not, this question still engrosses scholars and, most recently, the Archbishop of Canterbury in the twenty-first century.⁴ However, by the end of the Victorian era, whether or not Shakespeare was a Roman Catholic – a peripheral question – was less stimulating a problem than the motivations, psychologies and even ideologies of his characters.

The five plays provide a broad but significant indication of the ways in which religion was read into Shakespeare's drama. *Measure for Measure* was interpreted as a tale about corrupt judges and the importance of domesticity as a respectable, Protestant institution. The play had become part of the touring repertoires of actresses like Ellen Wallis and Miss Alleyn, and was taken up by Poel in his experimental storytelling vehicle of the Elizabethan Stage Society. Furthermore, it had gone from being 'painful', as Coleridge famously termed it earlier in the century,⁵ to one of the few Shakespearean pieces praised by Shaw and one that was directly compared with scripture by Birch and Morley.⁶

In contrast to *Measure for Measure*, *Henry VIII* was a history performed by the likes of Kean and Irving. It was, moreover, an important piece for a period supposedly struggling with the Church of Rome. 'Shakespeare wrote', according to Knight, 'for an audience; and an audience is a thing of impulses; it sympathises with the oppressed, and hates the oppressor'.⁷ Indeed, audiences and readers, including Anna Jameson, though

³ Ibid., p. 159.

⁴ 'Hay Festival 2011: Shakespeare was Probably a Catholic', *The Telegraph*, 29 May 2011 <<http://telegraph.co.uk/culture/hay-festival/8544849/Hay-Festival-2011-William-Shakespeare-was-probably-a-Catholic.html>> [accessed August 2011].

⁵ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, p. 122.

⁶ See pp. 127, 276-7.

⁷ Charles Knight, *Studies of Shakespeare*, p. 399.

not 'hating' Wolsey, were inclined to sympathise with Queen Katharine, particularly in an era increasingly desirous of ideal female Shakespearean representatives.

While *Henry VIII* was identified by its battle between Cardinal and Queen, *King John* was read, discussed and performed in the period for its antagonising of Rome and England. Not only was the play popularised amongst anti-Catholics, but its battles, patriotism and depiction of loyalty were admirable and even enviable to a Victorian England lacking in religious uniformity and challenged as a credible imperial ruler.

Moving towards tragedy, *Romeo and Juliet* was a much discussed and performed piece during the Victorian period. The play's protagonists were tragic in nature albeit, as Wordsworth observed, morally questionable; but the story of futile antagonism and ecclesiastical intervention formed the basis of critical discussions by Dowden, amongst others, as well as the foundation of Poel's early twentieth-century 'frameworked' production.

Finally, and most 'popular' amongst critics and performers, *Hamlet* was unavoidable on a broad cultural level, being subject to critical debates, editing, lectures and even satire. The religion of the characters, as well as contributing visually to performances, provided Dowden, MacDonald and Walters, to name only a few, with a route of access into their psychologies and motivations. Shakespeare may have been a 'Protestant', but Hamlet, as Wordsworth himself had to acknowledge, was certainly not.⁸ While neither *Romeo and Juliet* or *Hamlet* can be said to have waned in historical critical attention, they, along with the two histories and one problem play, became part

⁸ Charles Wordsworth, p. 222.

of a Victorian Shakespearean canon, each engaged with, on some level, through contemporary religious concerns.

Secondly, the 'Church' in England was diverse and increasingly confuted by scholars, clerics – conformists and nonconformists alike – agnostics and, of course, atheists. All of this was only possible because of the ideological and intellectual progress made in areas such as biblical criticism and natural science, as well as a growing preference for universal morality over ecclesiology. If this conception of the 'Church' can reveal anything about Shakespeare in the Victorian era, it is that the religious concerns of the period provided an accessible critical framework within which to explore Shakespearean drama. As is apparent throughout this study, the plays and characters were constantly being interpreted and performed through readily available discourses. What happens when faith itself is a sin? What does it mean to be disillusioned? How can individuals be redeemed of their earthly transgressions? How can faith even be communicated to a live audience? Each chapter throughout this thesis demonstrates that these were all poignant questions that critics and performers asked themselves about the drama.

Through the discourse of religion, texts could be probed in a way that was otherwise radical and, to all intents and purposes, intellectually stimulating. As Rev. Bell observed at the end of the century, the exploration and juxtaposing of seemingly disparate texts is a source of intellectual pleasure and, consequently, a mode of scholarship. By comparing biblical figures like Eli with Hamlet, for instance, the unofficial boundaries restricting critical readings of plays to commentaries on plot and

character development – as laid down by Furnivall in the New Shakspeare Society – were being contested. Bell questioned:

Why should we not at least bring them [disparate texts] together, and reconsider them in the light of a new conception, in order to see whether there are not some points of resemblance between them, as well as many clear points of difference?⁹

Bell's attention to comparison and contrast within fictional and biblical characters is an early indication of the emergence of literary as well as Shakespeare Studies. The task of juxtaposing the trials of Eli with those of Hamlet, 'however far it may fall short of the perfect truth' is an activity that keeps the student 'inwardly alive, awake, alert; open to the nobler influences and wiser lessons of time'.¹⁰ What is important here is that this literary exploration for the purpose of mental exercise was born out of the universality and accessibility of the Bible and Christianity at large.

The Church, in this way, paved the route into a critical revolution without necessarily being aware of it. Doctrine, theology and liturgy were so much a part of Victorian life and discourse that they inevitably found their way into readings and even performances of plays that came from a text considered on a cultural par with the Bible itself.¹¹ If plays like *Measure for Measure* could be read, enjoyed and understood as intellectually challenging, they could be just as fascinating and stimulating in performance; and this is the lesson that audiences, readers, scholars and critics had come to learn by the end of the century. It took changes in society itself, the way in which people viewed religion as something objectively scholarly as well as

⁹ Rev. J. T. Bell, p. 36.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 37.

¹¹ See Charles LaPorte 'The Bard, the Bible and the Victorian Shakespeare Question', *ELH*, 74 (2007), 609-28.

inherently valuable, and the new-found intellectual curiosity of studying literature for its own sake, to usher in the twentieth-century critical revolution in Shakespeare Studies attributed to the work of A. C. Bradley.

The final question that must be answered pertains to relevance. ‘Shakespeare, the Church and the Victorians’ is a vast topic that bridges a gap between current work on religion in Shakespeare’s drama as well as theatre and theology, and reception history. If Shakespeare Studies requires an examination of the links between the plays and Victorian gender, class and politics, for instance, it follows that historical religious ideologies must also be explored in relation to Shakespeare reception.

One crucial point that seems to have emerged from this study is the difference between Victorian and current approaches to the plays and characters. While messages of hope, trial and redemption were invariably at the core of representative Victorian interpretations, modern trends in criticism tend to focus on issues like trauma and despair: in short, on what Shaw defined as ‘problem’.¹² In real terms, this is identifiable in performance. A recent production of *Henry VIII* at the Globe Theatre (2010), encapsulated the twenty-first century propensity to extract psychologically uncanny features from Shakespeare’s drama. Katharine’s pre-death vision, therefore, was a disturbing parade of the dead with the figures of Wolsey, a puppet signifying her unborn male heir, and Buckingham who places a crown upon her head. The crown was then discourteously pulled away by the child, and Katharine awoke with tears and laments.¹³ The focus on earthly sorrows, ambition and failure, here, could not be further from the Victorian emphasis on spiritual transcendence and reward, signified by Kean’s

¹² Bernard Shaw, ‘Preface’, in *Mrs Warren’s Profession*, p. 197.

¹³ William Shakespeare, *Henry VIII*, dir. by Mark Rosenblatt. Globe Theatre, London, 2010. 30 July 2010.

suspended angels.¹⁴ It is no coincidence, however, that the accentuation of the positive within Victorian productions and readings of Shakespeare's plays pertained, invariably, to religion.

Since this study has been an examination in reception history, as well as theatre and religion, there is a great deal to be said in favour of a historicist argument for a 'Victorian Shakespeare'. As Gail Marshall has recently argued, 'Shakespeare is too potentially explosive – and useful – an author to be left unedited, unmediated, unexplained'.¹⁵ Indeed, Shakespeare's 'explosive' texts were being edited, mediated and explained so that they became part of the Victorian world. To quote Chapter One and a reference to *King John*, 'endorsement of the anti-papal segment of the play [...] should not necessarily be taken as an indication of *interpretation*, but rather one of *appropriation*'.¹⁶ Just as John's speech was used to fuel anti-Catholicism in the 1850s, so too was Falconbridge's patriotism a source of hope at the end of the century during the Boer War; Isabella's pontificating was taken up by Trench as a standard of judgement, and Hamlet's 'I must be cruel only to be kind' was a maxim that returned frequently in the muscular sermonising of the century.

Far from concluding, with Gibson, that interpretation was absent in criticism, when characters were made appropriate for their readers and audiences, it was often acknowledged that a deviant or contrived reading was taking place. So despite praise for *King John*'s anti-Catholicism, *Romeo and Juliet*'s martyrdom and *Vincentio*'s Christ-like judgement, Marshall was aware that John was unconscionable, Wordsworth questioned the acceptability of the lovers' suicides and Lloyd was concerned about the

¹⁴ See p. 34.

¹⁵ Gail Marshall, p. 21.

¹⁶ See p. 29.

motives of Duke Vincentio. If Shakespeare's characters, plots and themes were not being 'interpreted', they could not have been subject to appropriation, criticism or even intellectual engagement.

This thesis has shown that Shakespeare's drama was read within a historical discourse that allows reception historians to trace critical interpretations and productions to events such as the papal aggression, the emergence of natural science, debates about religious rationalism, baptism and oath-swearing, and the Public Worship Regulations Act. Since Shakespeare was never 'unmediated', to echo Marshall, and his texts were discussed with the 'moralistic' approach that Altholz has claimed was endemic in the period, it is no wonder that the 'Church' in England provided fertile territory upon which to cultivate a critical Shakespearean discourse.

To refer to the opening quotation from Andrew Gibson in the introduction, 'with the distinguished exception of the remarkable A. C. Bradley [...] the Shakespeare criticism of the period did not provide interpretation, analysis, or philosophical investigation',¹⁷ I hope to have proved quite the opposite throughout this thesis. Gibson's dismissal of nineteenth-century Shakespeare criticism falls into what Matthew Sweet famously called the twenty-first century 'invention' of the Victorians.¹⁸ If Shakespeare could be read according to the English anti-Catholicism discussed in Chapter One; debates about baptismal regeneration alluded to in Chapter Four; and even the Boer War as demonstrated in the final chapter, then his drama was relevant to the nineteenth century in much the same way that it was made pertinent to the twentieth century through gender and Marxist theories, for instance. Everything from play

¹⁷ Andrew Gibson, p. 71.

¹⁸ Matthew Sweet, *Inventing the Victorians* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2001), p. 230.

categories to individual character psychology – all the things that interest modern scholars – were cultivated by the Victorians who interpreted, analysed, investigated and appropriated Shakespeare into their world of morality, progress and redemption; in short, religion, both within and outside of the plays, was an inescapable influence over ‘the hearts and lives of all’.¹⁹

¹⁹ Rev. Thomas Ray Eaton, p. 13.

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