

Article

Hamlet's Religions

Peter Iver Kaufman

Jepson School, University of Richmond, Room 245, Jepson Hall, 28 Westhampton Way, Richmond, VA 23173, USA; E-Mail: pkaufman@richmond.edu

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Abstract: Pastoral challenges prompted pietists among Elizabethan Catholics and Calvinists to commend what historians now call an inward turn whereby the faithful, in a sense, become their own confessors. This article suggests that spiritual exercises or soliloquies Shakespeare scripted for his Hamlet (and, less so, for Angelo in Measure for Measure) compare favorably with the devotional literature that underscored the importance of self-analysis, intra-psychic conflict, and contrition. The argument here is not that the playwright's piety resembled his Hamlet's but that the latter reflected efforts to structure desire in the religions of the time struggling for survival and recognition. References to passages in Shakespeare plays (act, scene) appear parenthetically in the text. Unless otherwise indicated in the bibliography appended to this article, all early printed material is accessible at the Early English Books database, <http://eebo.chadwyck.com/home>, verified June 1, 2011.

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Introduction

David Bevington's Shakespeare and Biography recently and usefully sifted the various efforts of the playwright's / poet's admirers to tease their subject's confessional commitments from his plays [1]. Bevington waded through preposterous as well as prudent claims about Shakespeare's Catholicism, Calvinism, or religious indifference, avoiding partisanship. Nonetheless, one can learn about the religion around Shakespeare from the Catholics, Calvinists, clowns, stoics, and skeptics he placed onstage without supposing that one discovers thereby the religion of Shakespeare. Hamlet's piety was not Shakespeare's, although the latter created it by compressing exhortations and consolations

playgoers heard from London's pulpits and encountered in the devotional literature their pastors and priests composed and commended. What follows documents just that to contextualize Hamlet's soliloquies and self-questioning.

“Christian Clearing”

Stephen Egerton preached at Blackfriars before Shakespeare came to London and was still there in 1596 to oppose James Burbage's plans to transform the great hall into a theater. Egerton was preaching at Blackfriars when Shakespeare succeeded, in 1608, where Burbage had failed. During his long tenure, Egerton's sermons consistently sized up the realm's reformed churches and found them wanting. In 1589, he berated Queen Elizabeth's religiously reformed counselors for failing to advocate aggressively further changes in liturgy and polity. But his timing was terrible, for conformists then held the advantage and hoped to silence talk of greater change. Egerton accused his conformist critics of pandering; they hoped to perpetuate their privileged positions by flattering powerful patrons, he said, by making out “the sins of great ones to be little ones.” But while lecturing determined conformists, on their sins, cowardice and corruption, Egerton took what some historians of late Tudor sonnets, drama, and devotional literature called an “inward turn” [2,3]. He commended a regimen of self-lacerating introspection, which he described as “Christian clearing” ([4], sig. A4v).

In the 1560s and 1570s, the “clearing” (or purification) that mattered most to reformists, assiduous Calvinists later called puritans by their critics, was more liturgical than psychological. They longed to have what they called the “inventions of men,” which they associated with Catholicism, banned and to have the established church explicitly proscribe gaudy clerical apparel that attracted attention and affection away from God's Word and its elaboration in their sermons. Candles, surplices (liturgical tunics), saints' images, kneeling before altars, and the altars themselves were “idolatries,” which, Egerton insisted, exhibited England's ingratitude for all that the earliest Tudor reformers had done. Those “idolatries” might appear petty to some--adiaphora or excesses that could be tolerated without great consequence. To others, however, they were serious crimes. Egerton was emphatically among those “others” ([5], p.105).

But the criminal within every Christian was a substantial concern as well for Egerton and his friends. Even the avidly reformed in their parishes invariably forgot that they “oftentimes trip[ped] in particulars” because “nothing standeth betweene us and the actual committing of sin, but onely the want of occasion.” The remedy was to remember to “make reckoning” of the sin within, Egerton explained, and to fortify one's resolve to resist its bidding ([5], pp. 169-70). Alternatively, Christians could overlook the rot and pretend to be righteous; they could always point to someone whose shortfall seemed more dreadful or whose behavior more deplorable. The villains in biblical texts were useful in that kind of reckoning. Who dared deny that “the most deere and faithfull [Jacobethan] servants of God . . . persuaded in the general grounds of their faith” were far more likely than the pharaohs of Egypt to receive eternal rewards? Egerton did. “We are farther from God than pharaoh,” he complained, “though we seeme to be never so neere unto him.” One had only to probe deeply to acknowledge that distance. What was most important, however, was that uttering that acknowledgment amounted to the first steps toward rehabilitation ([4], sig. B3r).

Excuses had to be evicted. Remorse took their place, developing into a “godly sorrow,” which, in Laurence Tomson’s version of Theodore Beza’s biblical commentary, was roughly the equivalent of a revenge that was prompted by love rather than hatred and fear ([6], fol. 308v). Ordinary sorrow was a fear-driven admission that one “trip[ped] in particulars” and came to regret the stumble. Fear at its start, fear of celestial punishments, prohibited a more vengeful inward turn and scolding indictment of one’s wickedness. Admissions born of fear were little better than evasive tactics, exonerations disguised as inculpations that had been formulated to appease an angry God. Godly sorrow was very different. It was born of the realization that one persistently sinned against God’s mercy, and it matured as a repentance that developed into a style of life (rather than an act or resolve that ended when reparations were made), a life-style characterized by a never-ending, disorienting, comprehensively self-incriminating, and soterially effective “Christian clearing” ([4], sigs. B5r-B6v).

Long-time preacher at Dry Drayton near Cambridge, Richard Greenham explained that ordinary sorrow insufficient. It might fit easily into Christians’ to-do lists and, therefore, be more palatable and practical. To encourage tepid regrets, however, was a mistake, Greenham said, illustrating his point with the story of a heretic, who asked from the scaffold how he might be spared the torments of hell that allegedly awaited him. Told that repentance, then and there, could save him, he replied to his would-be consolers that, if their “Christ [is] so easily intreated . . . I defie him.” If the authorities had “dealt more bitterly” with the heretic, Greenham speculated, if they had required him to scrub his sins and “clear” his conscience, he might have complied. ([7], p. 110).

The third act of Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* (3.3) has an excellent specimen of insufficient and ineffective “clearing.” There King Claudius professes his “strong entent” to repent the “foul murder” of his brother and erstwhile sovereign, Hamlet senior, whose wife and crown he then possessed. Claudius, the ostensibly penitent usurper pulls up well shy of a sincere, self-scorching remorse for his inordinate ambition and lust. Too fond of the fruits of his crime, power and intimacy, he was unable to take stock of his offenses, unable, that is, to set aside doubts (“may one be pardon’d?”), and be assured that God forgave the faithful.

That kind of assurance was at the center of the fideism taught at Wittenberg, where--Shakespeare informs playgoers--the younger Hamlet had been studying at the time of his father’s assassination. Whatever--if anything in particular--the playwright would have had his protagonist learn at Luther’s university, usurper Claudius learns, to his disadvantage, what the patrons at the play who frequented London sermons already understood, specifically, that the stage penitent’s attempts to atone were lame:

My words fly up, my thoughts remain below
Words without thoughts never to heaven goe.

Claudius is, as Bevington says, “a textbook case of the unregenerate sinner, incapable of extricating himself from his damnable predicament despite his knowing precisely what he would have to do to save his soul” ([1], p. 110). Claudius only feigns repentance, but--onstage--Hamlet shows signs of struggles puritan preachers associated with the “clearing” Egerton commended. Perhaps to playgoers--and to the protagonist--his extended premeditation looked like indecision. He seemed to be on permanent pause or caught in a calisthenics of self-questioning, punctuated by self-loathing that gained no ground. Gifford, however, expected just that from genuinely sorrowful sinners and called it “true

fortitude.” He may have lived long enough to attend the first performance of Hamlet in 1600, but there is no evidence to suggest that he did. Previously, he conceded he had tinkered with the term. “Fortitude” was conventionally defined as courage in the pursuit of honor and celebrity; the ancients, he explained, had expected revenge if one’s honor was offended or if one’s family was wronged. How else could victimized noblemen prove their nobility? Gifford nonetheless made some changes and proposed that “true fortitude” endeavored to “subdue” the desires for glory or notoriety. Revenge was never in season, he alleged, adding that a “manhood that uttereth it selfe in private quarrel and bloody” vengeance dishonored religion, prolonged feuds--was never noble. “True fortitude” overcame “affections” that fueled revenge, and such overcoming required an inward turn--precisely the maneuver reformists urged on parishioners to get them to engage in “Christian clearing.” “The strongest holds and the highest walls for . . . fortitude to scale and win are in a man’s own minde,” Gifford declared, sounding as if he were commenting on Hamlet’s bouts of self-analysis. But, more likely, Gifford’s recipes for the religious personality--the drama he thought essential for restructuring Christians’ desires got embedded somehow in Shakespeare’s play ([8], sigs. D2v-D4v).

Or did playgoers see Hamlet’s persistent assaults on his own irresolution as an elaborate dramatization of the introspection exhibited in Michel de Montaigne’s Essays? As James Shapiro notices, there was just then “a rush to translate Montaigne.” The essay as a literary form had “captured a mind at work as never before.” And self-analysis took off, especially after William Cornwallis, “the first Englishman to follow in Montaigne’s footsteps,” instantly acquired a formidable reputation in 1600; his essays sold remarkably well because “conditions were ripe” for self-exploration, conditions, from which Shapiro fashions a “new sensibility” that supposedly disposed Shakespeare to experiment with a set of soliloquies onstage and to emphasize Hamlet’s “loss of bearings” ([9], pp. 292-302, [10], pp. 387-389, 410-411, 423-425).

Arguably, Shapiro’s masterful reconstruction of a single year in the playwright’s life--the year before Hamlet was first performed--packs too many critical disclosures and departures into 1599. But his argument that Shakespeare took his cue from Montaigne is relatively uncontroversial--some might even say it is impeccably orthodox. The idea that consciousness was “unfixed and unstable” is supposed to have crossed the Channel with Montaigne’s memoranda ([11], pp. 26-29). Perhaps so, but literary historians oddly and often overlook late Tudor devotional literature which introduces a similar discovery, the realization that interiority was terribly disorderly, loaded with contradictions, seasoned with self-accusation and intimidation. Many scholars who now mine for the sources for the Jacobethan journeys inward forget that many puritan moralists and expatriate Jesuits prescribed strategies to assist faithful Christians to probe their motives, to develop “true” and “noble” fortitude, and to rest assured that their faith and fortitude pleased God. The missionary priests and reformed preachers encouraged English Christians to lose their bearings to find their blessings, that is, to find that God cared enough to counter complacency with confusion and with spasms of self-loathing [12].

But auditors and readers would also learn that God was the source of their sorrows and that their sorrows were symptoms of reconciliation--and therefore were blessings. For example, central to the Jesuits’ evangelical ethos were Ignatius Loyola’s Spiritual Exercises and other efforts at counseling that aimed to inspire self-analysis and personal reorientation. But disorientation was the first step toward reorientation. Pietists among religiously reformed and unreformed--among Calvinists and Catholics--circulated sermons, devotional literature, and epistolary counsel and consolation that

recommended self-doubt as part of a salutary self-exploration that structured desires and determined the intensity of repentance [13]. The reformists thought it was usually cheerless, occasionally “violent,” yet always “necessarie work.” Richard Rogers, a popular preacher in the Stour valley, referred to it as an inventory of sorts, an “order taking with ourselves,” and he instructed readers to reserve time from the ordinary business of their day for “soliloquies,” which gave the self an unobstructed view of its “strayings and infirmities” ([14], p. 416). Literary historian Anne Ferry claims such self-sifting (“clearing”) created a “generalized self” that seemed patterned and inauthentic when measured against the individuated protagonists Jacobethan poets and playwrights conjured into existence [2]. But, conceivably, Jacobethan playgoers were as impressed by the similarities between what they saw on stage and what they read on the pages of their devotional manuals or heard from their pulpits, because so much of it advocated, inspired, and ennobled prodigal souls’ self-searching soliloquies in the religion around William Shakespeare [3].

“The True Feeling of Religion”

Reformists maintained that it was incumbent on faithful Christians to shape a distinctive presence in this world. The faithful, preoccupied with their “strayings and infirmities,” were called to be miserable. If ever they should start to believe that their goodwill and good deeds carried favor in the celestial court and that they had earned God’s grace, they should immediately “clear” that conceit, which--in the end--would count against them. According to the prolific Suffolk preacher Nicholas Bownde, King David discovered precisely that, and the misery and repentance his discovery occasioned were useful precedents for Elizabethan Calvinists struggling to come to terms with their impiety. On Bownde’s pages, plagues and other afflictions in Elizabethan England were connected with David’s temptations to renounce God’s righteousness. For David, however, his humiliation turned into humility, not self-pity. Humility led to frank assessments of his transgressions and to self-accusations. Hence, he showed religiously reformed Christians in Bownde’s time and place how to judge themselves “so thorowly that the Lord in his good time might cease judging of us” ([15], pp. 77-78, 280-281).

Yet that formula is misleading. God was not the end of creatures’ self-analysis and repentance, as “in his good time” would suggest. God “hath the greatest stroke in these distresses of the mind,” in every Christian’s dis-ease, which, as William Perkins explained, attests genuine contrition and “Christian clearing.” God, the choreographer, dances along with his terrestrial company [16]. The reason (or necessity) for such celestial accompaniment was not hard to fathom; humans were “frayle” and flailingly ineffective without “the earnest” of God’s spirit “in [their] hearts.” They were wholly incapable of “the true feeling of religion,” Anthony Cade, lecturer in Leicester, alleged, adding that “meere naturall and civill man” was powerless without “contrary grace,” which battled with human nature’s propensity to justify rather than to condemn its part in the dramas of salvation ([17], pp. 16-19). So Christians did not become prodigals until, with God’s “stroke,” they became ashamed and came eventually to “feelee their sinnes more than other men” ([18], sig. C2v).

The development of a “true feeling of religion” (and the “Christian clearing” required to make a place for it in one’s conscience) was steady, but seldom smooth; indeed, one’s route from indifference and insensibility swerved, doubled back, and swerved again before reaching an assurance of election. Richard Greenham, Bownde’s father-in-law and reformist expert on consolation, called it “an

interchangeable course of sorrow and comfort, of faith and feare.” The distance to one’s destination--“quietnesse of minde”--at any given time, was uncertain, although what was certain was that both the beginnings and ends belonged to God [19]. “Meere naturall and civill man” could do nothing to “stirreth up” sincere self-analysis and “godly sorrow.” Yet add an unnatural impulse--the grace contrary to nature--and the healing would start, if only because comfort came with the understanding that the first stirrings of profound remorse could hardly come from “frayle” nature. So God cared enough to send the very worst, jarring “distresses of the minde” that saved the elect from complacency ([15], pp.294-295). God arranged that the curse be a part of the cure, which seemed sadistic to literary historian John Stachniewski, whose study of the Jacobethan “literature of religious despair” has puritanism’s “forward wits” dragging auditors and readers “toward a rendezvous with [a] persecuting deity” ([20], p. 331). Stachniewski conceded that those wits were not fiends but were victims (as well as purveyors) of a Calvinism. At the center of their religion was “the imperative nature of assurance”--assurance of their election--an assurance that could only be won after an exhaustive, “insatiable” search for sources of sin within. Their searches were “insatiable” insofar as they were tainted by Calvinism’s idea that pervasive, irrepressible hypocrisy complicated every well-intentioned effort to take stock of one’s status. English Calvinists, therefore, were Stachniewski’s culprits and were responsible for religiously reformed countrymen endlessly, agonizingly excavating for truths about themselves. Predictably, such mining was complicated and compromised by the emphasis on self-loathing in the Calvinists’ “literature of religious despair,” which, with reformists’ sermons, turned God into a persecutor and “impaled” the faithful on an assurance of election that could only be purchased with profound discomfort ([20], pp. 92-94).

But reformists were consoled by their discomfort. “We feele not corruption by corruption,” Arthur Dent explained while he cut a “pathe-way” to heaven for ordinary Christians; “we feele corruption by grace. And the more grace we have, the more quick we are in the feeling of corruption.” As for the “doubting and wavering,” which typically plagued faith and threatened to overturn the faithful’s assurances of election, Dent noted that they were hardly cause for despair--no more than “the barking and bawling of a few little currs and whippets.” No bother at all; “doubtings,” he went on, “do no whit impeach the certainty of salvation but rather argue a perfect soundness and health of [our] soules” ([21], pp. 242-243). Thomas Wilcox took a slightly different tack. In the 1580s, he had been at the center of London’s reformist network and wrote a “discourse” on doubting, according to which doubt was natural and logical inasmuch as humans were imperfect. Faith’s performances would always be flawed, despite God’s “owne grace in us.” But “the doctrine of doubt” comforts because it contains the promise that “waverings” of faithful Christians would not prejudice God’s pardon [22].

Ministering comfort from the pulpit was no easy matter. Former playwright and reformist pamphleteer Stephen Gosson declared that “the hardest profession in the world [is] to be a preacher.” In theory, the reformed Christians’ “wavering” or dialectic between doubt and faith enriched religious experience, yet, in practice, those Christians seemed to experience the dialectic as a duel, “a combat of contraries” ([23], sigs. F5v-F8r). Yet the reformist preacher John Phillips relished the challenges of making sense of that apparent duel and of reassuring the elect that they were never left “to grope as graceless.” “When they fal into the lapse of sinne,” as they must, grace spurs remorse. Then, “touched with the finger of God’s grace, they, like prodigall sons [who] wandered from the sheepe folds [will] crie out and return to their father again.” They were understandably bewildered and anxious, yet their

vexation was a critical part of “the true feeling of religion.” The faithful “crie out,” whereas seemingly sturdier sorts, precociously proud, boasting of their virtues, look to be more righteous--and less tormented. Appearances do deceive, Phillips summed up; the seemingly sturdy were hardly “heartelie sorie for their sinnes”--thus far from “the fruitful faith” and “earnest repentance” that gave commoners an assurance that, in God’s sight, they were, indeed, Christians, “members of the true church of Christ [who] continuallie travel under the crosse” ([24], sigs. D3v-D4v).

Stephen Egerton was heard to call it “a heavenly journey,” notwithstanding its “manie trials [and] fears.” The religiously reformed, repentant, and self-analytical were “sorrowfull pilgrim[s,]” but never “comfortless” ([25], 2877, fols. 30v-31r). The spasms of despair they experienced were unavoidable. Nothing could completely prevent them, yet Edward Topsell, curate of St. Botolph, Aldgate, was as determined as other London reformist impresarios around Shakespeare to see that the spasms did not debilitate. And, to that end, Topsell prescribed “preservative[s] against desperation” ([26], pp. 26-28), preservatives that Catholics as well as Calvinists considered invaluable.

The “preservative” prescribed most often was self-accusation, which consoled because, as we learned here, it was a sign of the presence of “contrary grace.” Norfolk rector and chaplain to King James I, Anthony Maxey, typical of Calvinism’s would-be consolers, insisted that only grace tugged sinners to “feelee their corruption” ([27], sig. H1v). The Bible was the second “preservative against desperation.” From its stories, Jacobethan Christians could see that they were not the first to “feelee a greate deale of infirmitie in [them]selves.” The faithful in Rome, Corinth, and Galatia, learned from correspondence and commerce with the apostle Paul that they could count on divine grace and pardon. Referring to those first Christians, preacher at St. Paul’s cathedral in London, Edward Dering inquired whether “they [were] not, as wee, fraile and weake”? Dering docked his “wee” alongside his “they” to suggest that God saw more good not only in scripture’s “saintes and holy ones” but in ordinary Christians in early modern England--saw more good in both sets “than [they] themselves could feelee” at first ([28], sig. C8v).

And, because desperation still dispirited those ordinary Christians, their pastors and preachers reminded them that sacraments were given “for the taking awaye of doubt and distruste.” Ideally, therefore, their confidence was “underpropped and confirmed” by sacraments as well as by scriptures and self-incrimination, and they could be assured “of the grace and favor of God touching the forgiveness of [their] sinnes.” That was the line taken by Thomas Wilcox, Dering’s friend who collaborated with John Field and perhaps Thomas Cartwright to formulate the puritans’ 1572 Admonition to Parliament. Fully expecting Catholic theologians to peg it as unorthodox, Wilcox included his response; Catholics, he said, misread the promise of pardon “sealed” by the sacraments. “The Romish synagoue” undermined the confidence of its faithful and cultivated “doubt and distruste” rather than faith to make it easier for popes and prelates to extort funds from Christians queuing for forgiveness ([22], pp. 227-228).

Wilcox was alluding to the conditions priests reportedly placed on absolution, specifically, to the stipulation that the absolved pay for pardons. Priests held back the good news that forgiveness was free, so that the Catholic clerical establishment might profit by intensifying the laity’s uncertainties and then by charging for temporary relief. Unsurprisingly, from the Catholics’ missionary literature, one retrieves a very different image of the unreformed--English Catholic priests, Jesuits, other expatriate “seminarie men,” and the Jacobethan Catholic laity they all served. For instance, layman

George Gilbert stressed the heroism of the clerical itinerants who crossed from the Continent during the early 1580s and who risked their lives to rekindle “a true feeling of religion” among “frosty” Catholics (Cattolici freddi), who seldom attended Mass and who filled their bellies (riempo la pancia) when they ought to have fasted ([29], p. 331).

“Papistry” had been forced underground by that time. Pastoral counseling was not readily available, so Jesuit Robert Persons composed and circulated something of a self-help manual to explain to laymen how to undertake the “weghtye busines” of their salvation: “a Christian may judge of him selfe whether he performe [and] do the thinge for whiche he was sente into this worlde.” From Christ--without clerical mediation--the faithful received not only detailed instructions on how to please God but “also force and habilitie, by his grace, whereby we are made able” to “fly evil” and “doe good.” Fleeing evil and doing good began with self-arraignment. Persons told his readers to start by unequivocally acknowledging and repenting their “infirmities” ([30], pp. 26-27).

Repentance was disorienting, he conceded; how distressing to face the fact that--and to figure out why--God was “styrred up” against the way one lived! Recusants (Catholics who refused to attend the reformed church and were fined for their absences) as well as church papists, who grudgingly appeared at the established churches to avoid penalties, justifiably experienced “servile feare.” They had to hide their faith or to practice it privately and irregularly. They learned from historians that God had expected heroism and martyrdom from Catholics who confronted difficult circumstances in the past. Hence, they likely suspected that their compromises and cowardice--despite the political problems they faced--as well as other shortcomings might prompt God to punish them. The aim of Persons’s “exercises” was to change their suspicion, “everye daye, into love.” Among the English Catholics trembling “in feare onlie for dreade of punishment,” he circulated a Directory urging them to tremble only at the thought that they offended a God who so loved the world that he sent his only son to atone for its sins, for their sins. Had God been a tyrant, the Catholics, who had turned tepid and had grown indifferent to the fate of their church might be tempted to bury their guilt beneath flurries of excuses. But when they realized their indifference offended a loving, forgiving father, they would cease prevaricating and would expose their sinful selves to “the very eye of [their] soule[s].” Persons called such self-assessment “consideration,” and he compared penitents to prudent travelers en route from London to Constantinople, measuring their progress daily, calculating the distance to their destination and monitoring their resolve and their readiness to reach it. En route from earth to heaven, he continued, the faithful might likewise consider their preparation and progress. They could gauge both by their willingness to trade “servile feare” for frank appraisals of their offenses and, finally, for an assurance that God would reward their “consideration” and celebrate their resolve to repent. The alternative would be to assume that a merciful God “will perdone easile,” but that assumption, Persons warned, prohibited Catholics from developing “a true feeling of religion,” which started with a sense that God was “styrred up” and then stirred up godly sorrow or remorse among sinners ([30], pp. 277-279).

For Persons, “consideration” led to a penitent’s resolve to accept “the austeritie of a vertuous life.” That had been the great accomplishment of martyrs and monks. For the latter, convents were incubators where contemplation developed--as “consideration”--and issued in the determination to confront the struggles with sin that God choreographed for them. Edmund Bunny, one of Archbishop Grindal’s chaplains and a canon of Carlisle Cathedral, who abridged Calvin’s Institutes for publication

in 1579, adapted Persons' Directory for religiously reformed readers. But Bunny hastened to point out that, in the Catholics' convents, "laden with looseness and superstition," irreverence ruled ([31], p. 214). In England, however, the point was moot; aside from a few chapels on recusants' estates, locations for undistracted "consideration" were hard to find and harder to keep secret. Persons urged his collaborators to improvise. Gardens, parks, and remote rural settings: missionaries were to locate places where Cattolici freddi could reflect single-mindedly and relatively safely on their sins and salvation [29].

Persons was aware that he and other expatriate missionaries returning to England were working in a world turned upside-down, a world in which the Catholic laity ordered around--and the reformed laity chased around--devout priests. Perhaps what disturbed the clerics who had come from abroad more than their dependence on the resident, recusant laity was that laity's independence and intractability. It appeared to Persons that many church papists needed throttling rather than coaching and counseling. They seemed as resistant to Jesuit counselors, he remarked, as Hebrews had been inhospitable to their prophets. Stiff-necked Hebrews and stubborn Catholics exhibited "so . . . perverse an alienation" from God. Jacobethan Catholics had much to learn from the Old Testament prophets' shrill indictments (from their "kynde of speche"), which, Persons explained applied personally to sixteenth-century Christians who "refusest [God's] good motions and other meanes sent from hym." As for those "other meanes," Persons was explicit, asking "how many Christians be there . . . which abhorre to here good counsayle? feare and tremble to reade good bookes? fly and detest the frequentation of godlie companie lest perhappes by suche occasions they might be touched in conscience, converted, and saved" [30], p. 317)?

Avoiding godly company and counsel, too many Catholics, on Persons' count, also avoided confronting their "infirmite" and ingratitude. "Obduration and hardnes of hart" kept them from experiencing godly sorrow. Prelates assembled at the Council of Trent in 1551 had ordered that confessionals become tribunals to shame the doggedly indifferent. The Jesuits' spiritual exercises served similarly--as remedies for "a most dangerous and desperate disease"--"almost a remedyles disease"--this "obduration." Person's "exercise" was therapy, assisting Catholics to accuse themselves, moving faithful yet somewhat indolent readers to exhibit, in Persons's terms, "a kind hart," which, in turn, results in contrition and "amendment of lyfe" ([30], pp. 321-324).

Bunny valued Persons's words and was persuaded that, scrubbed of Catholic sentiment, the Jesuit's Directory could usefully nudge religiously reformed readers to personal and spiritual renewal. Bunny believed Persons's work might shape religious personality in a manner compatible with English Calvinists' recommendations for the tidying up of the prodigal soul. Of course, none of what Bunny called Persons's "idols" would be spared. What there was of purgatory, satisfaction, merits, "munkerie, forced virginite, [and] wilfull poverty" had to go. But what was left in the Directory would assist Christians of all stripes to overcome their resistance to self-accusation. Persons, predictably, despised the pirated, purged edition of his work and argued that Bunny's effort to prop up reformed spirituality with Jesuit exercises was doomed from the start, because Calvinism in England was a spiritually bankrupt civil religion. Bunny replied that England's faith and established church were robust. "Temporal commoditie," he maintained--meaning political convenience--played no part in his relam's embrace of Calvinist causes and theology. "We know (as wel as you) that al erthly prosperitie is subject to mutabilitie," and that reformed religion in England is securely established because it pleases

God, not because it pleases a queen. Persons and the unreformed preferred to please popes, Bunny concluded, by balancing their doctrine and sets of decretals precariously on a “rock” they called Rome ([32], pp. 127-128, 1159-160).

Bunny joined the chorus of English reformists who complained that popes “meddled with civill causes.” Complainants read Tudor history as an indictment of Catholic prelates. In the late 1520s, Pope Clement VII was an obstacle to King Henry VIII’s pursuit of the divorce that, he predicted, would supply him (and his realm), on remarriage, with a male heir. Fewer than fifty years later, Pope Pius V injudiciously, reformists argued, had excommunicated Queen Elizabeth. There seemed to be no end to papal meddling, and, by the early 1580s, Catholicism’s English critics identified Jesuits as executors of Rome’s most egregious and invidious policies. Bunny compared Jesuits’ strategy to that of Thomas Becket. Jesuits--much as that “arrogant” twelfth-century archbishop--were intent on forcing English Catholics to choose between “a foreign priest” and their queen ([32], pp. 102-104).

The expatriate “Jesuits, seminarie priests, and all the[ir] company of unnaturall impes” made their choice when they first left England, Bunny said, and, their return to force that choice on others was unpardonable and more than sufficient, he continued, to condemn their spokesman, Persons. But that was no reason to disregard (and to discard) Persons’s contributions to the development of religious self-awareness ([31], p. 308). To say that publication and circulation of Bunny’s adaptations of the Jesuit’s creditable and soterially useful contributions constituted ecumenical gestures, however, would be quite misguided [33]. Resourceful reformed Christian pastors were meant to extract exercises and ideas that could help them stop their “worldly minded,” “tepid” parishioners from “utter[ly] extinguishing” and “great[ly] hindering” the “good motions of the spirit of God” ([30], p. 246).

Reformed and unreformed agreed, then, that the spirit’s “good motions” kept pious Christians “continual[ly] exercising.” Bunny even admitted, discretely--for the Calvinists’ fideism often precluded what was called “works righteousness”--that such “exercising” included obligatory charitable activities, although he accused Catholics of turning “to superstitious and very il uses” legacies and endowments given for charitable ends ([31], pp. 29-31). He almost certainly had in mind Catholics’ chantries, which had reinforced belief in purgatory and in the effectiveness of one’s goodwill upon another’s salvation. Persons consistently referred to charitable endowments as “monuments” to the “good motions” of the spirit. The prominence of such monuments suggested to Catholics the presence and solidarity of a community in which their prayers--prayers of the living--assisted the dead, and in which the dead were somehow present to, and influential among, the living. Emphasis on that kind of mystical, mutual aid and on exercises earned Jesuits a reputation as neopelagians ([34], 96, fol. 120v). The Jesuits, that is, were said to inflate the importance of good intentions, much as fifth-century Pelagians had, and to think that constant dependence on God’s grace was unseemly. Yet Persons seemed skeptical about humanity’s best efforts to affect divine judgment. He adroitly coupled divine grace with human will so that hardly any weight fell on the latter. “Christ, that is, his grace” was, Persons said, the “great oxe” stationed “at one end and our endeavor at the other.” The oxe “onelie requireth that we should goe on with hym comfortable and not refuse to enter unto the yoke with hym” ([30], p. 149).

Because Persons’ take on the collaboration between divine grace and human will was close--yet not close enough--to the religiously reformed consensus, Bunny clarified: Persons kept grace, the “great oxe,” apart from “our endeavor at the other end,” whereas, in the rival, reformed scheme, “regenerate

[Christians] have an indevor framed in them by grace, but otherwise the natural children of Adam have noe such of themselves, but only to evil” ([31, pp. 174-175). Persons, in other words, ought to be congratulated; “in respect of the faith that in grosse [he] holde[s].” He should be, in some sense, counted among Christians (“to be of the church”). Still, Bunny continued, addressing Persons, “as you holde it,” Christianity comes to look like a “fowle and great apostacie.” What Bunny valued was Persons’ plan for restructuring religious personality. Implementing that plan, as far as Bunny could tell, Persons was a charlatan, trying to revive Rome’s magic and Catholicism’s “munkerie” ([32], p. 121).

Bunny was less hostile toward Luis de Granada, a Dominican friar, whose work also appealed to Persons. For De Granada, pious Christians were perpetually perplexed. How else could they react to the clods of envy, ambition, and corruption that obstructed their every effort to pass from the miseries of this world to the rewards of the next? Still, de Granada, much as the Jesuits, was sure that absolution was on offer in the sacrament of Penance and that “wrangling puritane calvenist[s]” were motivated by “great malice and folie.” Nonetheless, reformists saw to the English translation of de Granada’s texts, inasmuch as that literature--as Persons’ Directory--echoed what Jacobethan Protestants were preaching about “the true feeling of religion,” about the self-accusation, vexation, and sorrow, that seemed “very merciful and medicinable” ([35], pp. 221-225, 546-547).

Weeping signaled that the medicine was working. De Granada tried his hand at child psychology to elaborate: “loth-some to behold,” infants come from the womb with ambitions that they cannot articulate and will find utterly impossible to satisfy. All they can do at the start of life--without instruction--and at the end of life--with frustration--is weep. Tears, however, cleanse and heal. ([36], pp. 60-62). Persons and De Granada had stressed the effectiveness of a good cry, but the English Catholic mission’s unrivalled master of tears was Robert Southwell, who had left Norfolk to study at the Catholics’ seminary at Douai in Flanders in 1576. From there, he went to Rome and eventually asked to take the Jesuits’ month-long Exercise which had been devised by Ignatius Loyola, the order’s founder. The first week’s meditations left a lasting impression; Southwell was encouraged to “feel the interior knowledge” of his sins and drew inspiration from the Exercise’s confessional program into poetry he wrote to inspire contrition and self-interrogation. Back in England, his poems were, in large part, an exceptionally effective response to the daunting pastoral challenges he and colleagues encountered. Missionaries had to console and counsel Catholics who stayed in England and attended the established, reformed churches. They decided to do so to preserve their positions in society and, of course, to retain their properties. Would sorrow prompt them to weep even as strategies for survival required them to control their emotions? Difficult to imagine that such a question did not occur to Southwell as he contemplated returning from the Continent [37]; [38]!

Robert Persons began asking for Southwell in autumn, 1584. Jesuit colleagues who landed with the first wave had been captured. But the Order’s General in Rome, Aquaviva, was not yet reconciled to having Southwell exposed to danger in England when that expatriate’s impressive intellectual gifts might be put to excellent use and safely so, elsewhere ([39], p. 2440. But Persons persisted, and Aquaviva acquiesced. Southwell left for England in late May, 1586. In June, 1592, he was arrested by the English authorities, often interrogated, and executed in 1595. But by then he had repeatedly, memorably given voice to sinful souls sorrowfully confronting their imperfections. Hamlet would have

been a fine model, had Shakespeare created previously, but Southwell was not without help. He turned to the Old Testament.

“My tears, my drink,” he has King David confide in “David’s Peccavi,” a confession that displays how--and explains why--the penitent’s “wayling minde,” gradually was “taught to know the worth of vertue’s joyes,” “did hate it selfe for [frequently] loving fancie’s toyes” ([40], pp. 35-36). Fancy is a villain in Southwell’s poem, “Man’s Civill Warre,” a villain who “overrule[s]” will and wit. Hence, “Civill Warre” finishes rather ominously with the warning: “sell not thy soule for brittle joy” ([40], pp. 49-50). True, “David’s Peccavi” is more hopeful, yet Southwell’s subjects generally had as much difficulty struggling with irresolution as did Hamlet. “Shun delaies, they breed remorse,” says one of the poet’s would-be confessors, although, ostensibly, “long demurres” and “many stayes” characterize the poem he inhabits; Southwell suggests that “demurres,” “stayes,” and “delaies” let remorse ripen as repentance ([40], pp. 58-59).

In Southwell’s “Prodigall Child’s Soule Wracke,” the narrator, “grown rich in vice, in vertue poore,” becomes aware of his predicament as “waves of wo” wash over him or her. “Soule Wracke” draws out the metaphor:

The wrestling winds with raging blasts
Still hold me in cruell chace.
They broke my anchors, sailes, and masts,
Permitting no reposing place.

The boistrous seas with swelling flouds,
On every side did work their spight,
Heaven overcast with stormie clouds,
Denide the Planets guiding light.

The hellish furies lay in wait,
To winne my soule into their power,
To make me bite at every bait,
Wherein my bane I might devoure.

Thus heaven and hell, thus sea and land,
Thus stormes and tempests did conspire,
With just revenge of scourging hand,
To witnes God’s deserved ire

([40], pp. 43-45).

The criticism that the poet had been “unable to paint sin in other than dark colors” ([41], p. 277) misses the point at which he started. Readers pick up the prodigal after the threshold of self-accusation was crossed. By then, the prodigal’s “Will [was] taught by Wit” or, as “Soule Wracke” clarifies, “taught [“by darkenes”] to know my light.” The prodigal’s “enforced tears” accompanied self-knowledge, which was self-evidently tragic, “till mercy raisde me from [him] fall, and grace [his] ruines did repaire” at Wracke’s end. Sin has to be darkly colored. Light or self-knowledge and religious intelligence as well as profound religious feeling developed from the darkness. The

“mercilessly exposed psychologies,” which Anne Sweeney identifies as Southwell’s specialty, were, from start to finish, forged from sinners’ sorrows ([38], p. 157), and martyrs’ suffering and “salvational confidence” ([42], pp. 149-150) served Southwell similarly.

The martyrs’ ordeals seemed to him superior to psycho-spiritual struggles in reformed circles, which, he believed, hardly qualified as pseudo-martyrdoms. Yet the religiously reformed continued to commend what could be learned from the “darkenes” they experienced as a kind of death, insofar as their arrogance and complacency had died. Had they not turned inward, confronting the “darkenes” there, and had they not reflected on “God’s deserved ire,” they would not have come to construe their “repaire” as biblical and redemptive, and to “feel” it as something both intimate and transcendent. “Deserved ire” played the same large part in reformists’ remarks on “repaire”; “you shalbe damned,” non-conformist preacher Arthur Dent prophesied, “except ye have this cleering of your selves.” From the early 1580s, long before he cut his Plaine Man’s Path-way to, and through, repentance--and while tussling with the diocesan authorities in Essex--Dent connected God’s irritability with the prospect of damnation. He related both to sinners’ development of a saving “indignation.” He spent his entire career campaigning for mercy for conscientious nonconformist clergy but advised them not to “presume upon God’s mercy.” The scrupulous would know not to dwell on their merits and rewards but, instead, to contemplate God’s wrath and justice ([21], sig. B8v).

And they should also ponder what, within themselves, so displeased God! Without knowing what to confess and what to “clear,” the reformed faithful could hardly experience a “true feeling of religion,” originating in one’s sorrowful self-awareness and developing--with contrition--into something akin to the prodigal’s “soule wracke.” Dent, though, was asked by some parishioners to help them avoid the “strong purgations” that his sermons urged on them. He replied with a question--“would you have plaisters before you have wounds”--then explained that there were no shortcuts, no quick ways to acquire assurances of election and, with it, “the true feeling of religion.” Marrowless or mild self-deprecation would gain nothing; Dent could and would comfort them only when he saw their “faces blubbered with weeping and [their] heartes mollified and sorrowing with care.” His mention of weeping and of “mournfull lessons” about human “infirmities” ([21], sigs. C1v-C2r) recalls Robert Southwell’s tears. Dent might have imagined his pastoral challenges well met, if he had heard from his parishioners what Southwell scripted for one of his narrators (and, in effect, what Shakespeare scripted for his Hamlet): “thou hast made me to my selfe a hell” ([40], p. 96).

Southwell’s narrator, in this instance, was St. Peter. Medieval and Jacobethan Catholic polemicists frequently drew that apostle into their vindications of popes’ claims to authority over all Christian churches. Said to have been the first bishop of Rome and to have deposited his powers with his successors there--notably, his power to bind and loose any sinner--sinful princes as well as sinful prelates--St. Peter was central to the Catholics’ replies to antipapal rhetoric. They could say, after all, that Peter’s place in church history and his power to absolve had been explicitly attested in the Gospel of Matthew (6:18-19), “on this rock.” Jesuits were known for opposing alternative readings of that controversial passage as part of what Michael Questier now describes as their “aggressive” initiative to enforce papal supremacy ([13], pp. 271-272, yet Southwell’s St. Peter is less a paladin of papal authority and more an Everyman of sorts, emblematically sorrowful and self-incriminating.

Southwell’s “Complaynt of St. Peter” was a translation of Luigi Tansillo’s “Lagrima di San Pietro,” but the translator liberally tinkered with his source, purging what Pierre Janelle calls the Tansillo’s

“good natured garrulity.” Southwell, in effect, transformed Tansillo’s text into a Petrarchan rapture--into his own “great lyric of remorse” [41]. The “Complaynt” starts with his source’s collage of images, which develops into an investigation of betrayal, watered with apostle’s “stintless teares.” Southwell refers to the weeping as “howrely rent,” and readers would know that his poetry paid it out every few verses as Tansillo’s “Lagrima” grew into a sensational specimen of Jacobethan self-analysis [40].

Other critics think otherwise. Louis Martz claimed that he had to squint to see “hints of intense self-awareness” in the “Complaynt” ([43], pp. 204-207). And Nancy Brown believes that the poem “subordinated” “subjective elements” to “the tribune of penance,” safeguarding that sacrament’s central role in unreformed religion [44]. True, Catholics’ rituals--and ways of thinking about regeneration--influenced the Southwell’s presentations of the saint’s shame and “complaynt.” Indeed, the sacrament of Penance makes an appearance in his adaptation of “Lagrima,” as St. Peter, nursing self-contempt, imagines his funeral: “my teares, my dole . . . Penance, my tomb . . . doleful sighes, the knill.” Yet that sacrament comes to resemble outpatient surgery; St. Peter heals because he is so often dissolved in “deep sighes” and “thicke sobs.” Constant contrition has him alternatively trusting that his “teares appease” and mistrusting his trust ([40], pp. 98-99). The dialectic saves him.

One could argue that Southwell dropped his--and Tansillo’s--St. Peter on the reformist’s (and on Hamlet’s) “interchangeable course.” The apostle’s appeals to Mary unmistakably marked his “Complaynt” as Catholic, although its shifts from faith to fear and back clearly are confessionally bipartisan and symptomatic of what Thomas Wilcox, Richard Greenham, Arthur Dent, and other ardent reformists often described as puritans, diagnosed as ultimately, soterially hygienic “distresses of the minde.” Southwell’s Peter knows his “inner feeling” of remorse is unfeigned, but he is not sure that Mary will “the sorrow with the sinner see.” And even if she does, “can mother like what did the sonne abjure, or hart deflowred a virgin’s love redeeme” ([40], p. 93)? Doubts surface yet again, very nearly capsizing the penitent’s contrition and confidence.

If Pierre Janelle is correct, Southwell did not learn “to distrust and disregard himself” at Douai. Instead, he acquired his eagerness for self-effacement in England and brought to the Society of Jesus and to Catholic friends across the Channel what was said about the religious personality in the religion around Shakespeare ([41], p. 16). There, in England, reformers were sanitizing St. Peter in the 1580s. They conveniently forgot that the apostle had a reputation as the champion of papal supremacy. They remembered him rather as a proto-Protestant “negotiating the penitential process.” They read Peter as “the mappes of human frailtie,” as the “anatomie of a repentant sinner,” whose “inward greefe” they considered exemplary [45]. One could say that St. Peter hit his stride on Greenham’s “interchangeable course of sorrow and comfort” and showed English Calvinists how they might manage the dialectic of faith and doubt ([46], pp. 87-94, 178-181).

We will never know how closely Shakespeare observed evangelical impulses that marked the religion around him and that he shuffled into Hamlet’s religions. But we now know that “inward greefe” and contrition rivetingly described and countenanced on both sides of the confessional divide were difficult to miss. Some of Southwell’s phrases did resurface at the Globe, Shakespeare’s theater in Southwark, words and sentiments which tempt historian Peter Milward to dub that Jesuit’s poetry a “storehouse of Shakespearean phrases.” He was particularly impressed by “the large number of parallels with Hamlet,” and, the protagonist’s orgy of self-doubt does look like the prodigal’s “soul wrack”--as do the puritan idealizations of the prodigal ([47], pp. 58-59). One could say that, in every

age, onstage, Shakespeare's Danish prince seems a relic of the cultural practices favored by both Jacobethan Calvinists and expatriate Catholic pietists, all of whom came close to consecrating inconstancy and to equating "the true feeling of religion" with an intensely inward, disorienting search for consolations--among Jesuits--and for assurances of election--among puritans [48].

But the problem with docking Hamlet alongside the puritan prodigal is that Shakespeare took "pleasure in teasing" puritanical Calvinists, as Jonathan Bate says, suggesting the playwright's ridicule was repayment for their opposition to theatrical entertainment ([10], p. 23). Malvolio in *Twelfth Night* and blustery Falstaff play their puritanisms for laughs, but Angelo in *Measure for Measure* looks to be a more direct attack on puritan piety and pretension. Onstage, he turns out to be a terrible tyrant when he is deputized by Duke Vincentio "to enforce or qualify the laws." The duke, disguised as a friar, watches while Angelo dusts off an old statute passed against extramarital sex and enforces it mercilessly--and, as playgoers discover, hypocritically. Angelo boasts of "the austereness of [his] life" (2.4), while promising to abrogate the old law's effects for sexual favors. Specifically, he vows to spare Isabella's brother Claudio, who was caught in bed with his intended, if only Isabella, who was just about to enter the convent as the play began, will sleep with him.

Angelo is usually taken as evidence of Shakespeare's demonization of the realm's puritans. Debora Shuger's study of Jacobethan "political theologies" tellingly makes that argument, starting with what she configures as the "fundamental opposition between the penitential models," which encourage virtue, and a "puritan disciplinary" model, which punishes vice. John Whitgift and conformist bishops, Shuger alleges, implemented the former as part of a program she describes as "inclusive churchmanship." The latter, she continues, had been reupholstered in "the modern puritanisms of the religious Right" in the United States, which, during the last decade of the twentieth century and early in the twenty-first, took great pains to legislate morality. Shuger's late Tudor puritans have no patience for prodigals, and no pardons. Indeed, a "blanket repudiation of penitential in favor of penal justice characterizes the puritan reformation of manners" ([49], pp. 118-119, 130-133).

But Angelo seems to me--and may have seemed to playgoers--more caricature than characterization. Much the same may be said about the "coldly legalistic" Isabella, whom he tried to seduce ([50], p. 255). She is often unfeeling. To Lucio, dispatched to pluck her from the convent to become Claudio's advocate, Isabella's Catholicism looks to be low on compassion (2.2). She fetishized chastity, and, doing so, presumably, she struck Protestant playgoers as an excellent example of what their preachers told them about monks and nuns putting too much stock in vows and virtues. And the preachers echoed the criticism of convents in both confessional camps--wherever righteousness referred to a struggle rather than to an achievement that miraculously made cloisters collections of saints and made each saint an impregnable fortress against temptation. ([51], p. 195). Angelo and Isabella were caricatures cut from the same cloth, putting constraints on intimacy that, in the play, were unrealistic. In the end, Isabella resigns herself to marry Duke Vincentio who unmask himself and orders deputy Angelo to marry the lover he had abandoned when her dowry was lost (5.1).

Caricatures normally contain some truth, which polemicists have expertly stretched to make a point. The conformists depicted puritans as fanatics for discipline who wanted the promiscuous put to death and who would have had disobedient children on scaffolds as well. But evidence suggests that puritans favored excommunication not extermination when their neighbors were guilty of such "enormous crymes as incest . . . adultery, and such lyke" ([52], 7042, pp. 85-86; [53], 38492, fol. 74v). Hence,

Angelo's endorsement and application of the law making premarital intercourse a capital offense exaggerates "the puritan impulse," Peter Lake notes, suggesting that Shakespeare's Measure for Measure took aim at more widespread sensitivities, especially the Jacobethan obsession with concupiscence ([54], pp. 626-636).

There is no denying that reformist and conformist moralists alike frowned on bridal pregnancies and that puritan disciplinary strategies tended to polarize communities, as social historians Keith Wrightson and David Levine conclude in their study of a single Kent village where highly placed puritans "aggressive[ly]" pursued delinquent, destitute locals [55]. Yet the generalizations about reformists' intolerance of impiety and poverty, which are based on a few local studies, occasionally come under fire [56], although, for our purposes, it is enough to speculate that, whatever polarization William Shakespeare might have witnessed and attributed to the puritans' "fantasies of order," he would have become familiar, on his visits to the Midlands, with the godly elites of Warwickshire where the puritans urged propertied coreligionists to show "a charitable devocon" to impoverished tenants ([57], CR 136B/22).

But the puritans' reputation for aggressive, confrontational, meddling persisted, largely because the circulation of accusations to that effect served the conformist critics' self-interest. Matthew Sutcliffe, for one, insisted that the puritans only pretended to be pious and they passed off their plans to rule their parishes as a grand, selfless project to purify the realm ([58], fol. 22v). Angelo, of course, fits Sutcliffe's bill of complaint, but he is a better facsimile of the puritans around Shakespeare when gusts of self-doubt blow him off course, much as they played havoc with Hamlet's resolve. Measure for Measure has Angelo sift his motives and accuse himself of "false seeming." Playgoers might have compared him to Claudius in Hamlet; both tried on a "girdle" of sanctity and found that it fit badly. But quite unlike King Claudius and like his stepson, Shakespeare's protagonist, Hamlet, Angelo took his predicament seriously--soliloquaciously. Probing his piety, he discovers duplicity.

When I would pray and think, I think and pray
 To several subjects. Heaven hath my empty words,
 Whilst my invention, hearing not my tongue,
 Anchors on Isabel. Heaven in my mouth,
 As if I only did but chew his name,
 And in my heart the strong and swelling evil
 Of my conception. The state, whereon I studied,
 Is like a good thing, being often read,
 Grown seared and tedious; yea my gravity,
 Wherein, let no man hear me, I take pride,
 Could I, with boot, change for an idle plume
 Which the air beats for vain. O place, O form,
 How often dost thou with thy case, thy habit,
 Wrench awe from fools, and tie the wiser souls
 To thy false seeming (2.4)!

Angelo shrinks from the sin that “the most just law” forbids--and for which Isabella’s brother must pay with his life--yet he is drawn to commit it and to compromise the law, himself, and the object of his affection.

He was attracted first by her virtue. His soliloquies say so, in part, to exculpate him. “Dost thou desire her foully for those things that make her good?” Has the devil, “to catch a saint,” impeccable Angelo, “bait[ed the] hook” with a saint (2.2)? Possibly Shakespeare here was having some fun with the puritans’ and convents’ notoriety for sanctity? Certainly, he knew that much-flawed humans were bound to fall short of their loftiest expectations. Vocations, for the more fervent Calvinists and Catholics, imposed burdens beneath which the sturdiest Christians were bound to buckle. Still, it would be fair to ask whether a typical puritan reformist was as catastrophically unself-conscious about just that or was sometimes worried, as Angelo is, that “when once our grace we have forgot, nothing goes right” (4.4).

To be sure, many reformists on the fringe became convinced that they could not lose or “forget” the grace they had. Onstage, Angelo, before he was overwhelmed with desire for Isabella, was of that kind, yet his sense of righteousness dissolved, as did the self-confidence of puritan and Jesuit pietists, whom we have found weeping or worrying about the acceptability of their remorse. Nonetheless, a number of puritans who pushed off from the established church were as cocksure, impatient, and exclusivist as many of their contemporary critics claimed and, we learned, as not a few historians say. Among the former--the Jacobethan critics--one comes across moderate reformists who fiercely disliked their exclusivist or separatist colleagues. William Crashaw said that they had been infected with a “horrible and hellish pride” ([59], p. 29). George Gifford compared the “proud obstinacie” of Elizabethan radicals-turned-separatists with the arrogance and intolerance of schismatic Christians in fourth- and fifth-century North Africa, who were famously pilloried by Augustine, bishop of Hippo, widely respected long afterward as orthodoxy’s best defense [60,61].

Moderate reformists, unlike Angelo and Hamlet, submitted briefs for patience. They appreciated the need for toleration, inasmuch as “right excellent men [sometimes] come short in some things about the ordering of God’s church” ([62], pp.9-10). Literary historian Huston Diehl suspects that Measure for Measure signals the dramatist’s desire to court those moderates. Plausibly, although less confessionally charged interests could have been in play. In any event, Diehl seems to have gotten Angelo right. If Shakespeare had something specific in mind when he scripted the deputy’s insensitivity and setbacks, the place to look for that “something” is among Calvinist extremists and not among the moderates ([63], pp. 396-397).

Patches from the religions around Shakespeare that went into the making of the punitive parts of Hamlet’s character and that fueled his self-analysis onstage--Hamlet’s religions, that is--look to have been quite different, and, on this count, the playwright’s protagonist would seem to have most in common with prodigals in Southwell’s poetry and with the moderate, prolific puritan, Arthur Dent, who summoned parishioners to repentance with a string of censures: “cursed I was always, cursed I am, and cursed I shall be,” he preached, assuming that Christian “clearing” was inconceivable without Christians cursing. His reason should now be clear to us; the “lets and hindrances unto repentance” could not be overcome if one trusted that pardons were possible without a sinner’s excruciating self-interrogation and self-incrimination. Dent’s mission was to ensure that the faithful were sufficiently introspective [64].

Literary historian Stephen Greenblatt would probably add that Dent's challenge was to keep the reformed Christians in a state of "salutary anxiety" ([65], pp. 121-123), although we have noticed that Catholic connoisseurs of the prodigal's "soule wracke" performed similarly for their constituents' spiritual advantage. What Peter Lake calls "the puritan style of subjectivity" ([54], pp. 699-700), arguably, therefore, was not exclusively puritan, and we are justified in deploying the plural when we refer to Hamlet's piety.

But caution is advisable. In Hamlet's religions, anxiety promoted self-analysis, which, in turn, encouraged humility and consolation. Yet anxieties were also known to stir contention. The infamous Hacket episode demonstrated how self-analysis driven by dis-ease and dissent might erupt to the disadvantage of all concerned. During his tenure in London, from arrival to execution, William Hacket quickly went from cursing himself to cursing authorities. He became a spectacle. During the spring and summer of 1591, his shrill and nearly incoherent, "most fearfull imprecations" were acclaimed as "a matter of rare zeal" ([66], pp. 26-27; [67], sigs. D5r-D7r), but Job Throckmorton, a Warwickshire reformist in Parliament, whom Hacket's accomplices lured to what he later let on was a preposterous performance, described the "ferventnesse" "less favorably as "enterlarded with bitter" indictments of government and church officials ([68], sigs. A2r-A3r).

Conformists, always suspicious of reformists' anxieties, self-analyses, and enthusiasms, justifiably why moderates had not recognized, early on--and immediately repudiated--"the qualytye and enormyte of [Hacket's] offenses" ([69], 2008, fol. 29r). His curses and the conduct of those few who fell under his spell seemed to critics to be the early stages of a radical Calvinist coup, and historians have subsequently found the records of Hacket's prior bad acts, which included vandalism, obsessive profanity, and sedition, and which appear to corroborate conformists' opinion that their more forward colleagues were insufficiently attentive to the dangerous blend of self-deprecation and desperation they encountered [70].

But a case could be made that "authoritarian conformists" were overly concerned and overreacted. A few years after Shakespeare arrived in London, they hounded leading Calvinist extremists. They executed outspoken John Penry, who had managed to keep pamphlets pouring from the radical reformists' secret presses in the late 1580s, and they scavenged for notes that London's notorious reformist networker, John Field--allegedly, "upon his death bed"-- ordered burned ([52], p. 19). The hunt for purportedly, politically subversive reformists was on; Richard Cosin referred to them as "the godly affected." To Cosin, who sedulously defended the jurisdiction of the established church's courts and commissions, and who wrote at great length about Hacket's "conspiracie" to ensure that it would be remembered as treacherous rather than trivial, the reformists were wrong to mix zeal with frailty and to trust that the result was politically harmless, spiritually advantageous, and admirably self-effacing [66].

Hamlet's anxieties and outpourings, onstage, proved politically dangerous, but one would be foolish to dock them alongside Hacket's. We have, however, encountered Calvinist and Catholic pietists whose passions for structuring desire expressed themselves much as Shakespeare's Hamlet does, with the often unabated "zeal and fervency" that the conformists and some moderate reformists found embarrassing and hoped to "cool" ([71], pp. 389-390). The soliloquies are stuffed with self-questioning animated by what the historians of late Tudor religious culture now recognize as anxieties that their subjects perceived as salutary. To point that out is simply sense the shape of Hamlet's

religions and perhaps Angelo's as well, but not to capsize Jonathan Bate's conclusion that their creator, Shakespeare, was "cautious"--"suspicious of change," zeal, and affectation--offstage ([10], p. 73). Onstage, however, Hamlet's and Angelo's "soule wracke" and anxieties give us a good glimpse of what many reformists and Jesuits recommended, specifically, the "Christian clearing" that frightened many authoritarian conformists, because it could spread from the religions around Shakespeare and prove politically subversive. Presumably, the playwright found the intense introspection, "clearing," of Calvinism, and Catholicism interesting enough to dramatize, but evidence that he incorporated what he did to convey secrets about his confessional commitment is insubstantial. Nonetheless, historians of Jacobethan religious culture and literary historians would be irresponsible to overlook the correlations between what the playwright staged and what devotional literature advocated. Elements of the former proved timeless, yet Shakespeare's observations of late sixteenth-century and early seventeenth-century England were indeed timely.

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