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"My Words Fly Up, My Thoughts Remain Below": Community and Penance in Early Modern English Drama

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“MY WORDS FLY UP, MY THOUGHTS REMAIN BELOW”: COMMUNITY
AND PENANCE IN EARLY MODERN ENGLISH DRAMA

By

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the vexed relationship between Christian doctrine, practice, and community in English Renaissance drama due to the abandonment of the sacrament of auricular confession during the Protestant Reformation. I argue that many English Renaissance dramatists were sensitive to the vast ramifications of the Reformers' theological understanding of penance, particularly in its emphasis upon a sinner's ability to accomplish unmediated contrition, and to be psychologically and emotionally satisfied thereby. By desacramentalizing and interiorizing penitential practices, the Protestant understanding of penance fundamentally changed the ways in which communities dealt with sins. As this dissertation demonstrates, many of the plays from this period stage moments of penance that are problematic both for the repentant sinner and for the community in which the offender lives. Penitential practices are variously feigned, manipulated, perverted, or controlled by the state in many of these plays, often leading to the death of the penitent and the destruction of the community. The kneeling figure of the penitential Claudius in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* exemplifies these representations of the struggle to accomplish repentance, and my dissertation proceeds to examine similar manifestations of these problems in the works of Campion, Marlowe, Beaumont and Fletcher, Middleton, Marston, Massinger, Webster, and Ford. The abruptness of the change in the religion of England would have inevitably caused great disruption in the people's imaginative understanding of the sacred, and how an individual relates to the divine. I suggest that this disruption, particularly in the life of the community, was keenly felt by early modern English playwrights, and that they explore the problems relating to penance and the community in a wide variety of their plays.

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I have not world enough nor time to thank my wife Lisa adequately. I could not have finished this, nor really even begun it, without her conversation, encouragement, and patience. It was her hard work that allowed me to finish this dissertation, and it was she who always shared and fostered my delight in the works discussed here. I am more grateful than I can say.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract.....	iii
Acknowledgements.....	iv
Table of Contents.....	vi
Introduction.....	1
Chapter I: Penance Evolved: Medieval Plays, <i>Ambrosia</i> , and <i>Doctor Faustus</i>	9
Chapter II: Forms of Repentance in Early Modern Europe.....	41
Chapter III: Penance and Community in <i>Hamlet</i> and <i>The Renegado</i>	74
Chapter IV: Corrupt Community and Corrupt Penitent in <i>The Jew of Malta</i> , <i>The Revenger's Tragedy</i> , and <i>The White Devil</i>	99
Chapter V: The True Penitent in the Corrupt Community: <i>The Maid's Tragedy</i> , <i>Women Beware Women</i> , and <i>'Tis Pity She's a Whore</i>	133
Chapter VI: Private Conscience and Public Reform in <i>The Malcontent</i> and <i>Measure for Measure</i>	166
Epilogue.....	194
Bibliography.....	199
Curriculum Vitae.....	211

Introduction

When Martin Luther posted the Ninety-Five Theses in Wittenburg in 1517, he began his argument with theses about penance: “1. When our Lord and Master, Jesus Christ, said ‘Repent,’ He called for the entire life of believers to be one of penitence. 2. The word cannot be properly understood as referring to the sacrament of penance, i.e. confession and satisfaction, as administered by the clergy.”¹ While Luther’s theological positions were to mature over time, he introduced a topic that remained central to Reformation debates. Indeed, at the beginning of the document from the Fourteenth Session (1551) of the Council of Trent, the Council declared that though it had already addressed many of the issues related to repentance in its decree on justification, “yet so great is in our days the number of errors relative to this sacrament [of penance], that it will be of no little general benefit to give to it a more exact and complete definition.”² This preamble identifies the necessary theological connection between debates about justification and about penance. The various conceptions of penance that were enunciated by Luther, Calvin, the Catholic Church, and the Church of England proved to be pivotal and highly contentious points in early modern religious debates.

¹ Martin Luther, *Selections from His Writings*, 490.

² *Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*, 88.

Surveying the debates among theological thinkers of varied ecclesiastical affiliations is one important element in gaining an understanding of the religious upheaval that occurred in England during the Protestant Reformation, but the literature of the period, and particularly the popular dramas, serve as a similarly valuable point of study if one seeks to move beyond the strictly theological, and gain insight into the literary and popular imagination. How did such debates affect the imaginative understanding of penance at the time? How conversant with the differing theological conceptions of penance were late-Elizabethan and Jacobean playwrights, and how were such understandings manifested on the popular stage? Theologies of justification, numbers and types of sacraments, and understandings of the efficacy of prayer are not changed without a wrenching of the imagination; “bare ruined choirs,”³ though only recently ruined, might have profound effects upon young children who clambered over the erstwhile monastic abbeys that dotted the countryside.

The purpose of this dissertation, then, is not to add additional proofs that one or another Elizabethan or Jacobean playwright was a Catholic or Protestant, or that each particular dramatist had exact theological sympathies. The purpose is to examine many scenes of repentance by various playwrights in order to reveal and elucidate important themes, questions, problems, and convictions pertaining to repentance that reappear with remarkable similarity in distinct works by different authors. In part, this study will provide a taxonomy of the forms of repentance that appear in early modern English drama, and it will examine the imaginative reaction of early modern people and playwrights to sin, contrition, and the human urge to repent. My purpose is to provide

³ William Shakespeare, “Sonnet 73,” in *The Norton Shakespeare*, line 4.

insight into the particular problems associated with repentance, problems that are especially apparent, and that resonate deeply, in typical themes of early modern English drama. In exploring the intersection between theologically contested matters of penance and the popular drama of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, we can gain a fuller and more nuanced understanding of the imaginative and confessional culture of early modern England.

Penance was understood to be an essential element of the spiritual life of Christians by all of the major religious movements during the Reformation. However, to varying degrees, penance was also regarded by the Christian sects as an essential element of the communal life of Christians. Sin marred or sundered an individual's relationship with God, and penance was the proper means of rectifying that relationship. Yet because all human actions take place within the context of a person's community, sin was also understood to have deleterious effects upon society. Indeed, even a hermit separated from direct human contact still prayed, fasted, and sinned as a member of the general Christian community, the "Church militant" that was united in the mystical body of Christ. Penance, then, played a role in both a person's spiritual life and the life of his community. Some sins have obvious social repercussions; for example, theft not only violates divine law, and thus harms the thief's soul, but also inflicts harm upon the community. In this case, the thief's penance must correct the wrong done in both spiritual and material respects; he must pray for forgiveness, reform his life, and make restitution for the stolen goods. In early modern England, all sins were regarded as having such a negative impact upon the community, including those sins which occur only in thought, since the growth of vice in any individual necessarily inhibits the growth of charity and

virtue in that person's community. Conversely, a community can also be instrumental in assisting a person's efforts to resist sin, and, if sin occurs, in aiding the sinner in his course of repentance.

Penance was, consequently, deeply connected with both private spiritual matters and the public life of the community. Given this context, the extended debates during the Reformation about the nature of penance and the dramatic changes in penitential practices that occurred over the course of the sixteenth century had significant impact upon individuals' relationships with their communities. Central to the argument of this dissertation, then, is that the changes in the understanding and practice of penance are broadly apparent in the works of Elizabethan and Jacobean playwrights, and that these poets were particularly interested in penance as it relates to both private spiritual disciplines and public action within a community. Claudius's private efforts to repent in *Hamlet* had major repercussions for all of Elsinore; Evadne's repentance in *The Maid's Tragedy* led to regicide and a crisis in the political order; and Abigail's repentance in *The Jew of Malta* directly led to her murder and the slaughter of the religious community that she had entered. In the drama of this period, penance is regularly presented as a spiritual exercise that is fraught with problems but is still of paramount importance, and these problems of penance are consistently related to problems in the community.

In chapter 1, I introduce the relationship between penance and community by turning to the tradition of medieval English drama. This tradition of religious plays in England prior to the Reformation included a consistent focus upon penance, and the impact that sin and penance have upon the community. I argue that the theological changes during the Reformation did not direct dramatic attention away from this theme of

penance and community, but that it shifted the ways in which penance and community were depicted. Edmund Campion's *Ambrosia* presents a successful repentance, while Christopher Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* illustrates a profound failure in penitential efforts, but in both cases, the relationship between penance and community is similar to that which we find in medieval works such as *Everyman* and *Mundus et Infans*. Because of their Catholic associations, the morality plays were discouraged and eventually outlawed under Elizabeth—at the relatively late date of 1575—but nevertheless, themes of penance remained frequent and popular in the overtly secular drama of the later sixteenth century.

The second chapter turns to the theological debates surrounding penance, outlining the positions held by the Catholic Church, Martin Luther, John Calvin, and the Church of England. This chapter provides the historical background for my later analysis of moments of penance in Renaissance drama, and includes a discussion of the rise in popularity of cases of conscience during the seventeenth century. In particular, I discuss the impact of the general Protestant position that penance was not a sacrament and did not necessarily include auricular confession. These changes were important for the shift in the relationship between penance and community, because penance in England after the Reformation became a private affair that did not require external guidance or spiritual counseling, and consequently made reconciliation with one's community a more dubious affair.

Chapter 3 follows this historical and theological context to trace the relationship between penance and community in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and Massinger's *The Renegado*. In both of these works, men who are deeply attached to habitual vices attempt

to repent, but with dramatically different outcomes. Claudius' attempt at repentance in *Hamlet* fails, I suggest, because he tries to repent without seeking external aid that might free him from his attachments to sin, and because he is unwilling to make restitution to the community that he has injured through his sins. Claudius' failed repentance results in the destruction of his community. In contrast, Grimaldi in *The Renegado* performs sincere penance, guided by a disguised priest, and his relationship with his community is rectified through the satisfaction that he makes for his sins. Both Shakespeare and Massinger are particularly attentive to the relationship between penance and community, and in their depictions of these penitential efforts, they address some of the difficulties engendered by the Reformation.

The following two chapters examine penance within the context of deeply corrupt societies. Using Milton's presentation of Satan's dedication to sin in *Paradise Lost* as a backdrop, I discuss the problems that confront penitential efforts when the general society is devoted to sinful pursuits. Chapter 4 contrasts the traditional understanding of penance and its relationship with community in the vicious and deadly worlds of Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta*, Middleton's *The Revenger's Tragedy*, and Webster's *The White Devil*. The corrupt societies in each of these plays inhibit repentance, and instead of facilitating a sinner's reconciliation, the communities abuse penance and penitential forms, perverting them for sinful ends. In contrast with the encouragement and guidance that Grimaldi receives in *The Renegado*, these works demonstrate that penance is vulnerable to manipulation, feigning, and dishonesty in communities that are driven by vice. While penance is frequently discussed in these plays, their unifying feature is the deeply *impenitent* nature of the central figures. Chapter 5 follows a similar theme,

discussing penance in the context of the three corrupt communities in Beaumont and Fletcher's *The Maid's Tragedy*, Middleton's *Women Beware Women*, and Ford's *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*. In these tragedies sincere repentance does occur, but without leading to a rectified community; instead, the vicious tendencies within the societies lead to the destruction of the penitent sinners. Virtuous action and sincere repentance are not tolerated, and result in general destruction within the sinful community.

The final chapter presents a contrast with the preceding two; in Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure* and Marston's *The Malcontent*, corrupt societies are led to virtue by disguised rulers who seek the reformation not only of the general body politic, but of each individual within the society as well. Demonstrating the deep connection between penance and community, the rulers reform their communities by encouraging sincere, spiritual penance in their subjects. In *Measure for Measure* particularly, the apocalyptic revelation of Duke Vincetio in the final act combines in one person the public and private, the political and the spiritual. While raising serious questions about the intrusion of political authority into the realm of private conscience, Shakespeare nevertheless emphasizes the interrelatedness of private and public virtue, and the importance of penance in facilitating both.

The centrality of penance in the theological disagreements of the Reformation had many ramifications, including an extensive shift in the ways in which problems within communities were solved. This shift, I argue, is apparent in the presentation of penance and community on the early modern stage. The fact that these playwrights found such debates about penance to be stimulating and the stuff of good drama is hardly surprising—though little enough noted—but the consistency with which penance is

depicted in association with both its spiritual and communal roles in Elizabethan and Jacobean drama is striking. The fact that the Church of England relegated penance to a secondary, non-sacramental role in the life of the church only raised further difficult questions about the impact of sin on the community, and the ways in which sin might be cleansed and social ills rectified. And as I will demonstrate, these difficult questions were openly and repeatedly presented in the drama of the period.

Chapter 1: Penance Evolved: Medieval Plays, *Ambrosia*, and *Doctor Faustus*

The capture, trial, and execution of the famous Jesuit Edmund Campion, in 1581, was a *cause célèbre* that captured England's imagination. Campion was himself largely responsible for this attention, as he had been, from his youth, a celebrated figure. At the age of seventeen, Campion was so academically accomplished as to be made a Fellow of St. John's, Oxford, and when in 1566 Queen Elizabeth made a royal visitation to the university, Campion twice delivered speeches before her, the second time at the Queen's behest for an extempore debate. Indeed, his speeches were so impressive that he was variously promised patronage by both Lord Cecil and Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester.⁴ Campion's return to England in 1580 as a missionary priest was well known throughout the land, and the publication of "Campion's Brag" added additional fuel to the Elizabethan government's desire to apprehend him. In addition to disavowing any political or treasonous purpose in his trip to England, the "Brag" challenged the English divines to a theological disputation:

Yet have I such a courage in avouching the Majesty of Jhesus my King,
and such affianc in his gracious favour, and such assurance in my quarrel,
and my evidence so impregnable, and because I know perfectly that no
one Protestant, nor all the Protestants living, nor any sect of our

⁴ Evelyn Waugh, *Edmund Campion*, 12-13.

adversaries (howsoever they face men down in pulpits, and overrule us in their kingdom of grammarians and unlearned ears) can maintain their doctrine in disputation. I am to sue most humbly and instantly for the combat with all and every of them, and the most principal that may be found. (237)

Highly unwelcome from a person so well regarded by Elizabeth fourteen years before, Campion's challenge provoked a manhunt that finally resulted in his capture and eventual execution. Campion's influence, however, lingered, and particularly with respect to the debate that the government held while he was a prisoner.⁵ In 1582, for instance, the widely read churchman and polemicist George Gifford wrote a fictional debate titled *A Dialogue between a Papist and a Protestant, Applied to the Capacity of the Unlearned*. The dialogue was intended to assist faithful Anglicans in apologetics when they encountered Catholics in their communities. The fictitious dialogue begins with the Protestant meeting the Papist in the streets:

Papist: I pray yee, what newes? Were yee at London lately? What is become of the Catholiks? I hear there hath bin great disputation in the Tower.

Protestant: There hath beene disputation in deede, by reason of a proude challenge which was made.

Papist: Yee might terme it a proude challenge if hee had not beene able to make his part good. But I heare he behaved himself very learnedly, and with great victories against all which were set upon him.

⁵ For a fascinating discussion of the Catholic recusant community's preservation and transcription of Edmund Campion's writings and accounts of his trial and death, see "Chapter 3: 'Paper, ynke and pen': a Literary *Memoria*" in Gerard Kilroy's *Edmund Campion*, 59-88.

Protestant: Yee have heard moe lies then that, but I perceive yee are a
Papist, or at the least a favorer of Papistes, for they bragge that hee
did excellently, although in very deede, hee was there shewed to be
an obstinate caviller.⁶

Campion is not even named in this dialogue, evidence that, a year after his execution, the situation of his trial and final disputation was common knowledge. A person's identity as a Catholic or Protestant, at least in this fictitious setting, was apparent in whether Campion was thought to have won or lost the debate.

The theatrics surrounding Campion's trial, including false confessions and conflicting reports about the debates, were more than enough to generate considerable interest in the events leading to his death.⁷ In the year following Campion's execution, for example, the playwright and propagandist Anthony Munday—who, oddly enough, was to later write the play *Sir Thomas More*, with contributions from Shakespeare—wrote a polemic titled “*A discoverie of Edmund Campion, and his confederates, their most horrible and traitorous practises, against her Maiesties most royall person and the realme Wherein may be seene, how thorowe the whole course of their arraignment: they were notably conuicted of euery cause.*” Munday, one can surmise, would vigorously disagree with Gifford's papist. In recounting the crimes and treacheries of Edmund Campion, Munday makes a particular point of describing what he viewed as a hypocrisy of the Catholic religion, writing about the fugitive life of the missionaries: “and for want of some other Priest to absolue him, he writes downe all such sinnes as he dayly committeth, till he may attaine vnto confession. But neuerthelesse, himselfe hath

⁶ George Gifford, *A dialogue*, 1-2.

⁷ For a compelling narrative of the events surrounding Campion's trial, see “Chapter IV: The Martyr,” in Evelyn Waugh's *Edmund Campion*, 179-232.

authoritie to reconcile, confesse and absolue, so many of her Maiesties Subiects as he can win from their obedience.”⁸ The nefarious influence of the priest is partially carried out through confessing and absolving erstwhile loyal Englishmen.

The year following Campion’s execution also saw the publication of *A Sermon of Repentance* by Arthur Dent, a widely read and popular author of religious works and fictitious dialogues. Christopher Haigh observes that “eight of [Dent’s] works were best-sellers or steady sellers. His first published work was *A Sermon of Repentance*, which had been preached in the nearby parish of Leigh in 1582—it had been reprinted fifteen times by 1601.”⁹ Delivered twenty-four years after Elizabeth ascended the throne, the *Sermon of Repentance* demonstrates the degree to which debates and conflicts about penance were still current. Dent writes that “most people in these daies are grosly deceived in repentaunce, both concernyng what it is, what it meaneth, what it woorketh, what be the qualities, and conditions of it, which be the causes, and which be the lettes and hinderances, and also why, whe[n], and wherefore we should repent.”¹⁰ This is itself an interesting claim, since according to the law, the Elizabethan homilies had been read repeatedly from the pulpits throughout England, including the homily concerning repentance.¹¹ If, as Dent asserts, confusion or deception about all of these aspects of repentance still persisted in 1582, it indicates the difficulty that the Elizabethan government encountered in changing the people’s conceptual understanding of sin, confession, and the assurance of forgiveness. When Dent offers his definition of repentance, he echoes both the Elizabethan homily and Luther’s and Calvin’s writings:

⁸ Anthony Munday, *Discoverie of Edmund Campion*, np.

⁹ Christopher Haigh, *Plain Man’s Pathways*, 1.

¹⁰ Arthur Dent, *A sermon of repentance*, np.

¹¹ See chapter 2 for a discussion of this homily.

“Repentaunce is an inward sorrowyng, and continuall mournyng of the hearte and conscience for sinne joyned with faithe, and both inwarde and outwarde amendment.”

Dent goes on to emphasize that repentance is not temporal, or consisting of good works, or merely a matter of outward sorrow. Rather, it is, as the Reformers generally asserted, a continual state of life, a continual returning to God.

What, though, of the particular method of repentance? Here too, Dent is clear, asserting that repentance takes place in the individual alone, examining his conscience, and speaking to God in private prayer. After offering an example of such private prayer, Dent writes, “Thus I say, if every man would speake in his conscience to God & thus narrowly or more narrowly examine himself, undoubtedly he were in y waie to repentaunce.” Throughout the sermon, Dent does not discuss confession of sins to other men, departing from Luther’s approval of confession to any other believer. Similarly, Dent does not address the allowances for auricular confession that are included in the Book of Common Prayer. Dent’s understanding of repentance is entirely one of unmediated contrition and prayer to God, and follows what became the general Anglican understanding of repentance. He insists that the result of repentance is a changed life of good works, but that such a conversion comes about not as an imposed penance, but as the result of the faith that gave rise to repentance in the first place.

Arthur Dent’s emphasis upon unmediated, private repentance for sins is not unique, and this understanding of repentance is apparent in several of the major dramatic works of Reformation England, including *Doctor Faustus*, discussed below, and *Hamlet*, discussed in chapter 3 of this work. However, as Dent acknowledges at the beginning of *A Sermon of Repentance*, there was a wide variety of opinions about repentance, and

these were also presented in stage plays. Notably, repentance was an important feature of one of Edmund Campion's neo-Latin dramas that were written in Prague before he was sent to England as a missionary. *Ambrosia*, performed in Prague in 1578,¹² was written in Latin and "fits perfectly with the style of the Latin playwrights of the day."¹³ It recounts events from the life of Saint Ambrose, including his conflict with the Empress Justina, the conversion of St. Augustine, and Ambrose's excommunication and eventual absolution of the Emperor Theodosius. *Ambrosia* is, from beginning to end, a Catholic play; it depicts an exorcism, a miracle in which a blind man regains his sight due to prayers before the relics of saints Protasius and Gervasius, and the power of the clergy to bind and loose.¹⁴ Additionally, throughout the play there are repeated conflicts between the Church and the state in which the rulers Justina and Theodosius are made to submit to Ambrose's authority—a particularly topical theme given the political thrust of the Protestant Reformation.

Repentance occurs in three distinct ways in *Ambrosia*. In the first act, Ambrose exorcises the possessed character Energumen, who enters the stage struggling, screaming, and denying "the homoosian doctrine"—an indication of his Arian heresy in the denial of Christ's divinity. Ambrose, demonstrating the power of the Church even over demons, declares, "Begone, bloody beast, and flee far away, through the power of God, whose strength causes hell to tremble and roar with fear... Begone, bloody beast, and flee far away" (17). Instantly changed, Energumen responds,

¹² Edmund Campion, *Ambrosia*, pp. ix.

¹³ *Ibid*, xii.

¹⁴ See chapter 2 for a discussion of the Church's understanding of its authority to bind and loose, based upon Matthew 16:19.

Sweet Redeemer, who healest my wounds, Thou hast mitigated the punishment that I deserved because of my crimes. Make vigorous what Thou hast begun, strengthen my faith, pardon me who want to do penance, guide my body, consider what my soul used to be, cleanse me from my guilt, and receive back thy servant, who hath devoted himself to thy name.

(17-19)

While the nature of his past sins is never made clear, Energumen immediately turns to repentance, involving a horror of the past and a resolution for a different future. The exorcism illustrates the power of the Church and its sacerdotal ministry, and the particular help that priests can be to struggling or possessed individuals. As I will discuss below, Campion's illustration of this priestly aid contrasts with Faustus' Protestant, solitary efforts at repentance in Christopher Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*.

The second form of repentance in *Ambrosia* occurs in the context of conversion. Campion depicts Augustine struggling with his attachment to vices and his desire to become a Christian. Directly before he hears a voice famously ordering him "Tolle, lege," Augustine debates with himself, saying, "Why do you fall down in despair? Cast yourself upon Him who stands and keeps us standing. O true virtue and veritable Savior of the world, why do not I burst my chains forthwith? Why do I only enjoy vanities? Let a cruel hand tear this detestable hair, let lashes tear this guilty breast" (25). Augustine's repentance includes elements of corporeal satisfaction, as he seeks to correct his improper physical attachments. Augustine does not view this personal prayer as adequate, however, and in Act 2, Scene 5, he seeks Ambrose, whom he describes as "physician of our maladies" (33). Campion's presentation of Augustine's conversion emphasizes the

importance of the priests' role in administering the sacraments, and Ambrose leaves Augustine with the exhortation to "put on holy strength. You must cherish the grace that you have received, and you must love me" (37). Augustine must be subject to Ambrose's ecclesiastical authority.¹⁵

The third form of repentance in *Ambrosia* is the most prominent. Whereas the exorcism and Augustine's conversion last only for a few scenes, the Emperor Theodosius' conflict with Ambrose and eventual repentance are the dominant actions of the fifth act. Angered by the murder of several noblemen by a mob in Thessalonica, Theodosius plans retribution but is cautioned by Ambrose, who warns, "A matter of no little moment has brought me here: the dangerous situation in that city, the welfare of your soul, Theodosius, our own duty, and the admonitions of God, our king. Be merciful and good, as He is" (51). Theodosius agrees to spare Thessalonica, but after Ambrose leaves, he is spurred on by demons and some of his vengeful men to punish the city after all. Having slaughtered seven thousand innocent people, Theodosius goes to the basilica and is stopped by Ambrose at the door. Ambrose forbids the emperor from entering, and declares that "you have no right to enter this church until you have come to your senses and have washed away your guilt by penance and repentance" (65). This rebuke provokes a penitential response from Theodosius, who wonders, "With what face shall I look up at Heaven? Can I expect a mild divine judgment on my misdeeds, I, who simply destroyed innocent people in revenge" (65)? Theodosius returns to his home, and Ambrose considers with his fellow priests what sort of penance should be imposed upon

¹⁵ Ambrose does not specifically absolve Augustine on the stage, though the occurrence of an absolution is implied. Clearly, however, Campion emphasizes the sacerdotal element necessary in repentance.

Theodosius. Notably, while they urge that the penance should be light due to Theodosius' political power, Ambrose responds,

My dear Fathers, it would be necessary to be more lenient if the uncommon virtuousness of this man and his susceptible manly disposition could not digest my exhortations and if he did not know that we love him. We give solid food to the stomach that can take it. Besides, what he did was undoubtedly dreadful, and he would not in the least recover his health with a mild medicine. (67)

Ambrose's argument is two-fold: Theodosius' strength of character and virtuous disposition make him capable of enduring a harder penance; and because of the particular heinousness of his sin, he must undergo an unusually rigorous penance. For both ends, Theodosius' initial spirit of repentance is regarded as inadequate. While Theodosius' acknowledgement "I confess that I deserve hell" (67) may be entirely sincere, Ambrose indicates that such a spirit may be only passing, and that to be assured of a true turning of the heart from sin, Theodosius must undergo a more rigorous course of penitential actions.

The ensuing scenes depict aspects of this penance, as Theodosius' men hand out money to the poor, asking them to pray for the emperor, and Theodosius maintains a spirit of fasting and repentance. When Ruffinus leads Theodosius back to the basilica, sure that Ambrose will relent and lift his excommunication, Ambrose warns him that the emperor is still not allowed within. Theodosius nevertheless proceeds forward, saying, "I will go to him and undergo the punishment of a diatribe. Let it be part of the penance" (73). Ambrose and Theodosius meet outside the church, and the bishop excoriates the

emperor, who endures it all willingly, begging, “Do not close to me the gates which Christ opens to those who show repentance” (73). This willingness to be publicly rebuked convinces Ambrose that the emperor is in the proper spirit, and he imposes further penances: Theodosius must confess his crimes at a public hearing, must stand with the common people in the church, and must introduce a new law that prohibits him from enacting impassioned decisions in the future. Theodosius performs these penances, and then comes to Ambrose for his absolution, prayerfully reiterating his confession of wrongdoing: “Have mercy upon me, and lament together with me, poor wretch, to see whether merciful God can perhaps bring himself, at your request, to wash my crime off...Christ have mercy upon me! Father break my fetters” (77). Theodosius acknowledges the necessary role of the priest in the sacrament of penance, and Ambrose responds, “God takes pity on the humble and answers their prayers. Be of good heart, Caesar...I liberate you from your shackles” (77). Upon saying this, a choir of angels then bursts into rejoicing song. Campion’s depiction of this repentance and absolution gives particular emphasis to several distinctly Catholic elements, including the importance of the sacerdotal presence, and the authority of the Church to bind and loose sins, derived from Matthew 16:19: “And whatsoever thou shalt bind on upon earth, it shall be bound also in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth, it shall be loosed also in heaven.” It is only after Ambrose “liberates” Theodosius that the angels in heaven sing.

Writing about *Ambrosia*, Robert Miola has observed that “Campion’s play vindicates each of the three parts of the Catholic sacrament. The contrition expresses specific sorrow and betokens a change of heart; the confession takes two forms, private

and public; the satisfaction cleanses the sinner of the specific sin.”¹⁶ It is also important to observe that the excommunication that Theodosius endures is not simply, though perhaps most importantly, a ban from the Church, but it is also a separation and cutting off of the sinner from the community. Theodosius speaks of himself as a lost sheep, separated from the flock (77), and he states, “I count myself unworthy even to have a place among the savage animals” (73). Repentance brings Theodosius back into communion with God and the community; the sacrament in Campion’s *Ambrosia* fulfils both a spiritual and social function, and this is doubly emphasized in the need to make a public, as well as private, confession.¹⁷

Campion’s *Ambrosia*, apart from containing particularly striking and topical points related to the religious debates of the period, is part of the tradition of Jesuit drama, a dramatic tradition that was intended to educate students. Miola writes, “Not a diversion but a considered strategy, theatrical activity aimed to stir the passions in order to foster authentic commitment, in other words, to educate by arousing delight, pity, and fear.”¹⁸ Campion’s play also makes significant departures from this tradition. As Joseph Simons observes, “It is remarkable that [Campion] deviates from a traditional practice of the time: he discards allegorical figures from the cast, such as Tyranny, Piety, Justice or Death, for which the Renaissance theatre was ultimately indebted to the medieval morality and mystery plays.”¹⁹ Yet while Campion does not make use of allegorical figures, *Ambrosia* is, clearly, a descendent of English mystery and miracle plays. Just as we find in *Ambrosia*, the English pre-Reformation plays were both educational and

¹⁶ Robert Miola, “Jesuit drama in early modern England,” 80-81.

¹⁷ See chapter 2 for a discussion of the social function of confession in the pre-Reformation Church.

¹⁸ Miola, “Jesuit drama in early modern England,” 72.

¹⁹ Campion, *Ambrosia*, pp. XVIII.

celebratory, and typically emphasized sacramental and communal elements. Importantly, in several of these plays—for example, *Everyman*, *The Castle of Perseverance*, typical Corpus Christi cycles, *Mankind*, *Mundus et Infans*, and the *Croxton Play of the Sacrament*—there is a consistent theme of repentance, not only as a sacrament, but as a means of rehabilitating the community.

Repentance, Community, and Pre-Reformation English Plays

In his article “Devils and Vices in English Non-Cycle Plays: Sacrament and Social Body,” John Cox traces the connections among sin, sacraments (particularly penance), and the community in a variety of the pre-Reformation plays. He writes that “penance and the Eucharist were closely identified, both with each other and with renewal of the social body, not merely of the individual's moral and spiritual life.”²⁰ In these plays, personified vices not only lead individuals into sin but also introduce social disharmony, corruption, and division. Penance and the Eucharist correct the individual's relationship not only with God, but with the community as well. Such a presentation of repentance was pervasive in early English drama, and Eleanor Prosser has argued that “we may conceive of the typical Corpus Christi cycle as one vast sermon on repentance.”²¹ Similarly, in arguing that the York Corpus Christi theatre mirrored the Church in its performance of Christ's life, Sarah Beckwith has observed that “Corpus Christi theatre is a theatre of the sacrament of penance as well as the sacrament of the eucharist.”²² The theme of penance is, indeed, pervasive in a wide variety of early

²⁰ John Cox, “Devils and Vices,” 189.

²¹ Eleanor Prosser, *Drama and Religion*, 25.

²² Sarah Beckwith, *Signifying God*, 90.

English plays, and in this important respect, Campion's *Ambrosia* and later Elizabethan and Jacobean dramas are clear descendents of the morality and mystery play tradition.²³

A brief examination of a few representative pre-Reformation dramas will help to clarify the points of correspondence and difference with this tradition in the treatment of penance on the early modern stage. Perhaps most famously, the Morality play *Everyman* depicts the titular character facing death, and struggling to clear his conscience and free himself from sinful attachments that he had developed in his life. G.A. Lester observes that "the plot of *Everyman* is unusual for a Morality Play, but what it teaches is completely in keeping with the others,"²⁴ as the plays follow man's struggle with vices and his use of grace for a redemptive conclusion. Abandoned by Fellowship, Kindred, Cousin, and Goods, *Everyman* nears despair, only to remember Good Deeds: "I think that I shall never speed / Till that I go to my Good Deed. / But Alas, she is so weak / That she can neither go nor speak."²⁵ In fact, Good Deeds is chained to the ground, and says that her sister Knowledge must be the one to guide *Everyman*. Knowledge enters, telling *Everyman*, "Now go we together lovingly / To Confession, that cleansing river" (535-536), who lives in the "House of Salvation." *Everyman* is instructed to "kneel down and ask mercy" (543), and he confesses:

O glorious fountain, that all uncleanness doth clarify,
Wash fro me the spots of vice unclean,
That on me no sin may be seen.
I come with Knowledge for my redemption,

²³ Other important points of descent from the medieval dramatic tradition in the early modern theatre include the use of typology and allegorical figures. See, for example, Peter Happe's *English Drama Before Shakespeare*, 135-162.

²⁴ "Three Late Medieval Morality Plays, pp. xxvi.

²⁵ *Everyman* in *Three Late Medieval Morality Plays*, lines 480-483.

Redempt with heart and full contrition,
For I am commanded a pilgrimage to take,
And great accounts before God to make.
Now I pray you, Shrift, mother of salvation,
Help my Good Deeds, for my piteous exclamation! (545-553).

Everyman expresses both his knowledge of his sins and his contrition for them, fulfilling the requirements of making a good confession. The character Confession then gives Everyman penance, “voider of adversity” (558), instructing him that “When with the scourge of penance man doth him bind, / The oil of forgiveness then he shall find” (571-72). By embracing the scourge of penance, Everyman is able to raise Good Deeds from the shackles that held her. Presenting the three traditional elements of the sacrament of penance—contrition, confession, and satisfaction—*Everyman* clearly emphasizes the importance of the sacrament for the individual’s soul. Furthermore, when Five Wits later speaks to Everyman, the importance of the priesthood for the administration of the sacraments is repeatedly stressed. After Everyman declares that he will go find a “ghostly father,” Five Wits replies, “Everyman, that is the best thing ye can do. / God will you to salvation bring, / For priesthood exceedeth all other thing....The priest bindeth and unbindeth all bands, / Both in earth and in heaven. / Thou ministers of all the sacraments seven...Thou art surgeon that cureth sin deadly” (730-44). Firmly within the Catholic tradition, *Everyman* depicts the parts of penance and asserts the necessary role of the priest in assisting the “curing” of sin.

While the primary motivation for conversion and repentance is Everyman’s concern for his coming death and personal judgment, Julie Paulson argues that the role of

penance is also intimately connected with the central character's separation from his community. She writes,

Penance prepares an individual for death and God's judgment, but also—importantly—penance itself is presented as a practice that binds the individual to his community. Paradoxically, it is only when his community is made so frighteningly separate from Everyman that it can be made fully present...[Through penance] he at last recognizes his true relationship to the world: he is truly separate from all but Good Deeds, the emblem of his responsibility to others.²⁶

As the central turning point for Everyman, the sacrament of penance not only gives him hope in his coming judgment, but rectifies his relationship with his community. Good Deeds, made free through confession and penance, is not simply a hermetical exercise of prayer, but is inherently outward-looking and social in its nature. While Everyman had been accompanied by Fellowship, Kindred, Cousin, and Goods prior to his last days, it was a disordered relationship that did not include Good Deeds. Having gone to confession, Everyman charitably places Good Deeds and Knowledge as his guides.

Similar representations of penance, and the relationship between penance and community, can be found in numerous other Morality and Mystery plays.²⁷ In *Mankind*, Mankind ignores Mercy's admonitions, takes up with the suspect crowd of Mischief, Titivillus, and others, and eventually reaches a point of despair with his troubled conscience. Mankind seeks to hang himself, with the rope kindly provided by Mischief

²⁶ Julie Paulson, "Death's Arrival and Everyman's Separation," 122.

²⁷ In "The Doomsday Mystery Play: An Eschatological Morality," David Leigh identifies the shared message of repentance in the mystery cycle plays that present the Last Judgment and other pre-Reformation drama.

and Newguise, when Mercy interrupts him, telling him to ask God's forgiveness. Mankind's despair, however, is initially dominant: "What! Ask mercy yet again? Alas, it were a vile petition! / Ever to offend and ever to ask mercy, it is a puerility. / It is so abominable to rehearse my iterat transgression; / I am not worthy to have mercy, by no possibility."²⁸ Mercy counters Mankind's despair, urging him to "be repentant here; trust not the hour of death" (864), and Mankind, repentant, promises to avoid his evil companions in the future. Scholars have identified in *Mankind* an echo of the liturgy for Ash Wednesday and Shrovetide exhortations to repent,²⁹ but John Cox argues that *Mankind* also contains an important social element associated with penance. He writes, "*Mankind* is like other pre-Reformation plays in its concern for the social body as well as the salvation of the individual."³⁰ This social element, he argues, is apparent in the contrast between Mercy's embodiment and constant invocation of a charitable community, and the vices' behavior and language that is destructive and abusive to community. Comparing *Mankind* to an early Morality play, Cox argues that

the restoration of community comes about in the same way it does in *The Castle of Perseverance*—by the intervention of Mercy, depicted in the earlier play as one of the Four Daughters of God and in *Mankind* as an attribute of God's self. A mimed ritual absolution thus performs the same function of both plays, for in both it visibly restores sacramental

²⁸ *Everyman in Three Late Medieval Morality Plays*, lines 818-21.

²⁹ See, respectively, Sister Mary Philippa Coogan, *An Interpretation of the Moral Play Mankind* and Kathleen Ashley's "Titivillus and the Battle of Words in *Mankind*." I am indebted to John D. Cox for these references. For a further exploration of some of the penitential imagery in *Mankind*, see also Mark Chambers' "Weapons of Conversion: *Mankind* and Medieval Stage Properties."

³⁰ John Cox, "Devils and Vices," 202.

community and also redeems a representative individual from the oppression of the fiend.³¹

Cox traces this deep relationship between sacramental penance and community through a number of pre-Reformation plays, including *The Castle of Perseverance*, *Mundus et Infans*, the Digby *Saint Paul*, the Digby *Mary Magdalene*, and *Youth and Hick Scorer*. These are representative plays from the period, containing a breadth of subject matter and situation, while sharing the generally emphasized relationship between confession and communal well-being. At the conclusion of *Mundus et Infans*, for example, Perseverance gives the central character the new name of “Repentance,” and teaches him how to repent, covering contrition, confession, and satisfaction (ll. 849-896). Repentance’s contrition for his previous sins includes specific references to their negative effects upon the community (763-806), including the fact that he had to be locked up in Newgate for borrowing money to support his vices of “Pride, wrath, and envy... Sloth, covetise, and lechery” (775-777). In contrast to the deleterious effects that his sins have had, he is encouraged by Perseverance to meditate upon the communion of saints as a means of repenting (865-876).³²

The repeatedly staged relationship between penance and community in pre-Reformation drama finds an echo, as I have shown, in Edmund Campion’s *Ambrosia*. Just as Everyman undergoes rigorous penance, guided by a priest, and is consequently reintegrated into the Christian community, so too the Emperor Theodosius is separated

³¹ Ibid, 202.

³² Cox observes, “Restored social harmony in *Mundus et Infans* is apparent in Repentance’s kneeling before Perseverance as the play ends, just as it is in Mankind’s kneeling before Mercy in *Mankind* or Anima’s before Wisdom in *Wisdom*: in all these plays, the tableau involves more than individual confession and penance, for it also evokes the essence of charitable relationships, which define sacral community” (Ibid, 205).

from the community and from communion with them because of his sin, but reenters the community and church after extended penitential and confessional exercises guided by the Bishop Ambrose. These plays' depictions of a close relationship between the sacraments, particularly penance, and the community were not only based upon a theological understanding of the Church and all of the individuals within it as the mystical Body of Christ. Rather, the sacrament of penance was central to both an individual's assurance of a justified spirit, and community life prior to the Reformation.³³ Following an argument made by John Bossy, Sarah Beckwith observes that "it was one of the chief functions of the priesthood both before and after the Reformation to be a settler of disputes, mediating conflict and reconciling those at odds in preparation for holy communion."³⁴ Especially since the injunction in the Fourth Lateran Council that all Catholics go to confession at least once a year, the sacrament of penance was a regular and important part of parish life, and it was usually performed in Lent, in preparation for the annual reception of communion at Easter.³⁵ Reception of communion was itself a fundamental part of community life, as Eamon Duffy writes, "Receiving communion at Easter was called 'taking one's rights,' a revealing phrase, indicating that to take communion was to claim one's place in the adult community. Exclusion was a mark of social ostracism."³⁶ The public act of receiving communion was dependent upon the parishioner being in good standing with the parish and priest, and was dependent upon the completion of the sacrament of penance. Consequently, penance not only is connected

³³ I discuss this historical relationship between penance and community in chapter 2.

³⁴ Sarah Beckwith, *Shakespeare and the Grammar of Forgiveness*, 53.

³⁵ Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars*, 60.

³⁶ *Ibid*, 94.

to community in the literary representations of Campion and pre-Reformation dramatists, but also was generally understood to be so connected throughout England.

Indeed, this connection is readily apparent in one of the most influential non-dramatic works of the period, Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*. In Book 1, the Redcrosse Knight, having been deceived by Duessa, becomes progressively weaker as the result of his sins. In need of healing through repentance, but unable to accomplish it by himself, Redcrosse is led by Una to the House of Holinesse. The knight is counseled by personifications of the three theological virtues, Fidelia, Speranza, and Charissa, among other characters, and is led by the community in the House of Holinesse to a sincere and thorough repentance.³⁷ Initially, "prickt with anguish of his sinnes so sore, /...he desired to end his wretched days,"³⁸ but the counsel he receives draws him from his despair. Nevertheless, his sins are deeply seated in his soul, and "yet the cause and root of all his ill, / Inward corruption and infected sin, / Not purge'd nor heald, behind remained still, / And festering sore did rankle yet within" (1.10.25.1-4). Redcrosse overcomes this deep attachment to sin through the guidance of Patience and Penance, who dress him in sackcloth and ashes and make him fast and pray. Additionally, "sharp *Remorse* his hart did pricke and nip, / That drops of bloud thence like a well did play; / And sad *Repentance* used to embay / His bodie in salt water smarting sore, / The filthy blots of sinne to wash away" (1.10.27.3-7). The entire community of the House of Holinesse rejoices along with Una at the Redcrosse Knight's reformation. And while these communal elements are allegorically representative in *The Fairie Queene*, it is striking

³⁷ Anthony Low discusses the similarities between the penance of Everyman and the Redcrosse knight in *Aspects of Subjectivity: Society and Individuality from the Middle Ages to Shakespeare and Milton*, pp. 60-97.

³⁸ Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*. 1.10.21.7-8.

that without a catalogue of assistants, the knight cannot repent and free himself from sin. Spenser further emphasizes the essential role of the community in accomplishing repentance, as he writes, “So in short space *they* did to health restore / The man that would not live, but earst lay at deathes dore” (emphasis added, 1.10.27.8-9). Just as in medieval religious drama, the individual’s relationship to his community is deeply connected to repentance in *The Fairie Queene*.

Repentance and the Absence of Community in *Doctor Faustus*

The sacramental and theological framework of the late medieval cycle and mystery plays were explicitly Catholic, and during the Reformation in England, their performance was viewed as a dangerous hearkening back to popish heresies. As Eamon Duffy observes, “Given the integration of popular drama into the devotional and catechetical objectives of the late medieval Church, it was inevitable that the Elizabethan reform would attack the Corpus Christi cycles and other religious plays too.”³⁹ The cessation of the performance of the Corpus Christi plays did not, however, lead to the obliteration of the related themes of penance and community in Elizabethan literature—especially in light of the fact that the plays were not universally banned until 1575—and the theme specifically emerged in the drama at the end of the century.⁴⁰ It is a primary contention of this dissertation that the relationship between penance and community that is so evident in pre-Reformation drama continued to be explored upon the Protestant

³⁹ Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars*, 579.

⁴⁰ See Harold Gardiner’s *Mysteries’ End: An Investigation of the Last Days of the Medieval Religious Stage*, pp. 65-93. He notes, “Elizabeth and her Privy Council, whatever may have been their desires in that matter, were obliged to act slowly in doing away with the old religious stage because of the fact that they could not always have the cooperation of subordinate officials” (70). The lasting popularity of the morality plays was not only with the common people, but with government officials as well, and hence the persistence of the themes commonly contained in the medieval religious plays is hardly surprising.

stage. The extensive reimagining of the role of penance in theological and doctrinal writings in the Church of England did not shift dramatists' attention away from the focus of pre-Reformation dramas, but in fact raised further questions and problems that invited dramatic treatment. If penance is not to be accomplished through auricular confession, but rather through the unmediated penitential prayer of the sinner, in what respect is the sinner's relationship to his community also healed? In *Campion's Ambrosia*, Theodosius' connection to the community and Church is rectified through the guided penance imposed by Ambrose. In a Protestant drama, however, what would this look like? How does a sinner become not only justified with God, but also set at rights with his community, particularly when he is encouraged to repent in solitary prayer?

Aspects of these issues will be explored in a wide variety of early modern dramas in the following chapters, but to begin, it is helpful to turn to Christopher Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*. Marlowe's great damnation tragedy has provoked considerable critical discussion of the religious meaning of the play. Angus Fletcher has recently argued that while *Doctor Faustus* is ambivalent or unclear regarding Calvin's theology of predestination, the play "emerges as a Lutheran work not because it espouses any particular piece of Protestant dogma, but because it adopts the reformer's Skepticism about the possibility of containing philosophical speculation about the afterlife in stable pieces of doctrine."⁴¹ Conversely, Pauline Honderich argues that *Doctor Faustus* is a "Calvinist 'case of conscience'" that contrasts the rigors of Calvinist predestination with the more moderate Anglican positions.⁴² Indeed, it has been suggested that *Doctor Faustus* is such a compelling play precisely because it is the dramatization of a case of

⁴¹ Angus Fletcher, "*Doctor Faustus* and the Lutheran Aesthetic," 188.

⁴² Pauline Honderich, "John Calvin and *Doctor Faustus*," 1-13.

conscience.⁴³ Marlowe was, after all, a student at Cambridge at the same time as William Perkins, whose 1596 work *A Discourse of Conscience* included a considerable section discussing the situations in which oaths must be kept or ought to be broken. Pertinent for Faustus' situation, Perkins writes, "In six cases, an oath binds not consciences at all. 1. If it be made of a thing that is flat against the word of God. For all the power of binding which it hath is by the word of god: & therefore when it is against God's will, it hath no power to constrain."⁴⁴ Part of Doctor Faustus' inability to repent might be understood as an incorrect evaluation of his particular case of conscience—feeling himself bound in his contract with Satan—and in this respect, the tragedy can be viewed as properly within the tradition of Anglican casuistry.

Marlowe's own religious and political sympathies are notoriously difficult to discern, and perhaps may never be conclusively determined, but the critical debates concerning the Lutheran or Calvinist elements in *Doctor Faustus* illustrate the important, underlying Protestantism of the doctor's struggles with his conscience; this Protestantism is, moreover, presented with overt references to the earlier tradition of the pre-Reformation morality plays. As Hardin Craig observed,

[*Doctor Faustus*] has unmistakable features of the morality—the Good and the Evil Angels, the Seven Deadly Sins, and a definite contest for the soul of Faustus. *Dr. Faustus* is a morality play which lacks Shrift, Intercession, and Salvation, although in the end the hero cries out loudly

⁴³ Lily B. Campbell, "Doctor Faustus: A Case of Conscience." Campbell writes, "It is not the initial sin and its consequences that hold us in suspense as we read or behold Marlowe's Doctor Faustus. Rather it is the continuing struggle of conscience, the conflict between hope and despair, where hope would lead him to God again and despair would keep him from salvation, that make the suspense of the play" (223-224).

⁴⁴ William Perkins, *A Discourse of Conscience*, 75.

for these things. In *Dr. Faustus*, the morality play has become a romantic tragedy.⁴⁵

Doctor Faustus works concertedly within England's dramatic tradition; while the morality plays were attacked as embodiments of Catholicism, Marlowe's new drama was not such a great departure from them as may at first appear. Assuming the traditional issues of sin, repentance, community, and damnation, *Doctor Faustus* is new not in its themes, but it is new in its presentation of the Protestant, rather than Catholic, hero.

Repentance is an obvious theme throughout *Doctor Faustus*, but the important point that I would like to emphasize is that in Marlowe's play, like the pre-Reformation dramas discussed above, the concept of repentance is deeply connected to the idea of community. When the play opens, Faustus is sitting alone in his study, and he dismisses the study of logic and rhetoric, medicine, law, and theology, describing them as silly or servile. Turning to the study of magic, Faustus explains his attraction by stating, "Oh, what a world of profit and delight / Of power, of honor, of omnipotence... All things that move between the quiet poles / Shall be at my command."⁴⁶ Faustus' desire for power is reiterated several times in this first scene, and serves as an initial indication of his corrupt relationship to his community. This is further demonstrated by the entrance of Valdes and Cornelius, who urge Faustus to pursue the magic that they practice. Initially, Valdes declares, "What shall we three want?" (1.1.150), seemingly indicating a fellowship among the three, but Cornelius then allows that, after they teach Faustus, he "may try his cunning by himself" (1.1.162). Notably, Valdes and Cornelius never reappear in the play; the community of magicians that Faustus seems to be joining is never shown, and his

⁴⁵ Hardin Craig, "Morality Plays and Elizabethan Drama," 71.

⁴⁶ Christopher Marlowe, *Doctor Faustus*, 1.1.55-59.

only constant companion in the ensuing scenes is Mephistopheles. The nefarious and brief influence of the two magicians, moreover, contrasts with the scene that immediately follows, as two unnamed scholars ask Wagner about Faustus, and on hearing that he is with Valdes and Cornelius, grow worried. The Second Scholar states, “Were he a stranger, and not allied to me, yet should I grieve for him. But come, let us go and inform the rector, and see if he, by his grave counsel, can reclaim him” (1.2.35-38). Despite their doubts that “nothing can reclaim him,” the two scholars resolve, “Yet let us try what we can do” (1.2.39-40). These scholars, part of Doctor Faustus’ true community within the university, see Faustus as separated and attempt to reclaim him. Notably, nothing is made of their efforts, and the rector never appears in the play.

Just as Everyman was cut off from his community until he had repented of his sins and restored Good Deeds to her place, so too Faustus remains separated from his community by his sin, instead embracing the solitary companionship of Mephistopheles. This relationship, moreover, further disorders Faustus’ own desires and his attitude towards the human community. He declares, “Had I as many souls as there be stars, / I’d give them all for Mephistopheles. / By him I’ll be great emperor of the world... The emp’ror shall not live but by my leave, / Nor any potentate of Germany” (1.3.104-113). This desire for arbitrary power over other men is a primary means of appealing to Faustus’ worse nature throughout the play. When the Good Angel urges Faustus to “leave that execrable art” (2.1.15), he responds, “Contrition, prayer, repentance—what of them?” (2.1.16), and the Evil Angel successfully urges him to “think of honor and wealth” (2.1.21). Faustus dreams of concupiscible pleasures and the fruits of power, and resolves to ignore the twinges of his conscience. His conscience, however, does not rest

easily. Time and again he meditates upon death and damnation, only to be distracted by appetitive desires and his pride. In an early example of Faustus' struggle with his conscience, he muses,

Now, Faustus, must thou needs be damned,
And canst thou not be saved.
What boots it, then, to think of God or heaven?
Away with such vain fancies, and despair!
Despair in God, and trust in Beelzebub.
Now go not backward; no, Faustus, be resolute:
Why waver'st thou? O, something soundeth in mine ears,
"Abjure this magic, turn to God again!"
Ay, and Faustus will turn to God again.
To God? He loves thee not;
The god thou servest is thine own appetite,
Wherein is fixed the love of Beelzebub. (2.1.1-14)

In this speech, Faustus reveals several important things. First of all, he recognizes that he is free to choose to turn to God or Beelzebub. When he considers whether or not he will repent, his language is not of one who is unable to, but of one who is unwilling to turn from his demonic path. When he declares "thou must needs be damned," he does so not in the sense of predestination, but in acknowledging it as the result of his consciously made decisions—hence his need to "be resolute" in his choice. Secondly, he openly acknowledges his servitude to his own appetite. Faustus' turn to serve himself, and consequently the devil, is not a choice made in ignorance, but with a terrifying

acknowledgement of his own pride and desire. Finally, in creating a god of his own appetite, Faustus effectively sunders himself from meaningful human relations; his absolute devotion to himself renders any social relationship important only in so far as it too serves Faustus' appetite.

Faustus continues to echo this early struggle with his conscience throughout the play. After signing his soul over to the devil, Faustus at one point contemplates the skies, and resolves, "When I behold the heavens, then I repent / And curse thee, wicked Mephistopheles, / Because thou hast deprived me of those joys" (2.3.1-3). This reflection provokes the reappearance of the Good and Bad Angels, who variously counsel Faustus to repent or to despair, and Faustus then reflects,

My heart's so hardened I cannot repent.
Scarce can I name salvation, faith, or heaven
But fearful echoes thunders in mine ears:
"Faustus, thou art damned!" Then swords and knives,
Poison, guns, halters, and envenomed steel
Are laid before me to dispatch myself;
And long ere this I should have slain myself
Had not sweet pleasure conquered deep despair. (2.3.18-25)

Notably, *Doctor Faustus* echoes *Mankind*, in which the hero is given a rope by Mischief and Newguise to hang himself with when he despairs (and Mephistopheles gives Faustus a knife with which to kill himself in 5.1.47-51). Both Faustus and *Mankind* turn to suicidal thoughts when contemplating the horrors of their sins. But whereas *Mankind* is counseled and saved by Mercy, who leads him to repent, Faustus on the other hand is

distracted by pleasures and conversation with Mephistopheles. Indeed, directly following the above meditations, Faustus concludes, “I am resolved Faustus shall ne’er repent. / Come, Mephistopheles, let us dispute again / And argue of divine astrology” (2.3.32-34). Again, Faustus is entirely sure of his own agency in choosing to repent or not. He *chooses* not to repent, instead seeking pleasures and distractions. Whereas Mercy was there to counsel Mankind, Faustus’ only community is Mephistopheles, who is himself bound to serve Faustus’ appetites and desires.

Faustus’ sins separate him both from God and the community. In the latter part of the play, Faustus’ interactions with others are always trivial—he pulls pranks on the Pope, puts on a show for the Emperor while satisfying a petty grudge against a knight, tricks the Horse-Courser, and fetches grapes for the Duchess. His sins, furthermore, do not only affect himself, but also spread a negative influence upon others. While the interludes with Wagner, Robin, and Rafe are comically presented, Faustus’ devotion to satanic arts clearly trickles into the community at large. When Robin sees Wagner’s use of demonic powers, he resolves, “God forgive me, he speaks Dutch fustian. Well, I’ll follow him, I’ll serve him, that’s flat” (1.4.74-75). Faustus’ devotion to the devil spreads to those in the surrounding community. At the beginning of Act Four, the Chorus announces that “when Faustus had with pleasure ta’en the view / Of rarest things and royal courts of kings, / He stayed his course and so returned home, / Where such as bear his absence but with grief— / I mean his friends and nearest companions” (4.0.1-5). Who are these friends and nearest companions? Marlowe makes the decided point of not showing a single friend to the audience. Faustus’ “fame spread forth in every land” (4.0.12), but he is never shown to have a friend, and when in the final act Faustus’ hour is

approaching, he is described as loving to “banquet and carouse and swill / Amongst the students” (5.1.4-5). Faustus continues to distract himself with passing pleasures, and he does so not in the company of any close friend, but with unnamed “Scholars.”

When the mysterious “Old Man” appears and counsels Faustus to repent, the doctor responds, “Ah, my sweet friend, I feel thy words / To comfort my distressed soul. / Leave me a while to ponder my sins” (5.1.57-59), but when he is left alone, he is again unable to bring himself to repent. Like the many characters in the pre-Reformation dramas that recognize their sins, Faustus knows he has done wrong but needs more than momentary impulses to repent. Marlowe shows man, without human companion, to be ineffectual in accomplishing meaningful repentance, as the demon Mephistopheles is always there to distract, intimidate, or encourage Faustus on his wrong path. Faustus himself admits the degree to which he has cut himself off from his community, exclaiming to the First Scholar, “Ah, my sweet chamber-fellow! Had I lived with thee, then had I lived still, but now I die eternally” (5.2.3-4). Acknowledging his separation from the community due to his sins, Faustus also urges the three scholars to leave him when his time has expired, “lest you perish with me” (5.2.48). He understands, then, that an individual’s sins do not harm only himself. Faustus’ final moments, spent in terrifying solitude, are entirely fitting given the manner in which he had sundered himself from meaningful, charitable human relationships.

Doctor Faustus’ final monologue, uttered directly before the devils take him to hell, displays the hero’s wavering struggle to repent. Fully conscious of his sins and their necessary spiritual consequences, Faustus nevertheless hesitates to make truly penitential

prayer. Addressing himself in a manner that echoes an examination of conscience, he states,

Ah, Faustus,
Now hast thou but one bare hour to live,
And then thou must be damned perpetually.
Stand still, you ever-moving spheres of heaven,
That time may cease and midnight never come!...
Let this hour be but
A year, a month, a week, a natural day,
That Faustus may repent and save his soul! (5.2.62-70)

Faustus knows, intellectually, that he ought to repent, but Marlowe carefully demonstrates his lack of actual prayer. Faustus' invocations are to the sun and heavens, rather than God, and his speech exhibits horror and despair more than contrition. He continues,

Oh, I'll leap up to my God! Who pulls me down?
See, see where Christ's blood streams in the firmament!
One drop would save my soul, half a drop. Ah, my Christ!
Ah, rend not my heart for naming of my Christ!
Yet will I call on him. Oh, spare me, Lucifer! (74-78)

Faustus' prayers and efforts to repent become confused, and his calling upon Christ at the conclusion of line 76 evolves into his calling upon Lucifer in line 78. Faustus, habituated to a life devoted to the devil and his own appetite, unconsciously returns to his typical course of demonic prayer, and he is unable to sustain a serious contemplation of Christ's

infinite mercies and the enormity of his offenses. The ensuing lines of the monologue show Faustus praying to the earth, that it will swallow him, and to the heavens, that he might simply evaporate. When the clock strikes, however, Faustus once more speaks directly to God:

Oh God,
If thou wilt not have mercy on my soul,
Yet for Christ's sake, whose blood hath ransomed me,
Impose some end to my incessant pain.
Let Faustus live in hell a thousand years,
A hundred thousand, and at last be saved!
Oh, no end is limited to damned souls.
Why wert thou not a creature wanting soul? (5.2.95-102)

Faustus betrays a deep form of despair, for even while he is praying, he does not admit that God will have mercy on his soul; instead of praying for mercy, he wishes that he did not have a soul, and prays that he might simply cease to exist. This thought leads him to curse his parents for conceiving him (5.2.110), followed by cursing himself and Satan. Marlowe's thoughtful craft is fully evident here, as instead of prayer, Faustus turns to cursing. Again, his habitual attachment to sins and prayers to the devil leave him unable to even arouse sincere feelings of contrition; he is, rather, filled with hate for himself and Satan, expressing the opposite sentiment of the all-governing charity of God. Faustus' final words, as the devils carry him off, are one final exhibition of his devotion to the devil: "Adders and serpents, let me breathe awhile! / Ugly hell, gape not. Come Not, Lucifer! / I'll burn my books. Ah, Mephistopheles!" (5.2.118-120). Faustus ends by

asking mercy of Satan, rather than God, and his final, emphatic statement of Mephistopheles' name is an exhortation to the only community that he knew and to which he had dedicated himself.

Conclusion

Everyman, Campion's Emperor Theodosius, and Marlowe's Faustus are three radically different characters, displaying markedly different personalities, filling distinct social roles, and struggling with notably different sins. In each character's case, however, repentance is shown to be extremely important and, to varying degrees, difficult to accomplish. In each case, moreover, the struggle to accomplish repentance is deeply associated with the character's connection to his community, just as it was for the Redcrosse Knight in *The Faerie Queene*. One has little doubt that, but for Ambrose's guidance, Theodosius would only have performed a cursory repentance that would not effect a profound change in his life and mode of rule. The same might be said of Everyman's need for Knowledge's and, subsequently, Confession's guidance. In both cases, the external forum of repentance is explicitly Catholic—involving elements of contrition, confession, and satisfaction—and Theodosius' and Everyman's willing subjection of their wills to the authority of Ambrose and Confession is the direct means of accomplishing proper repentance. In *Doctor Faustus*, Marlowe follows the same themes that we find in *Everyman* and *Ambrosia*, but presents the drama of repentance within the reformed framework of Protestant theology. In doing so, he raises several important questions that address the degree to which an individual can actually accomplish meaningful repentance—especially regarding grievous and habitual sins—

without an external guide, as well as questions regarding how a person whose actions have harmed the larger community can be reconciled and brought back into communion with his society. In exploring some of the themes of the medieval dramatic tradition within the context of the new Protestant theology of repentance, Marlowe was insightful, but hardly alone. As the following chapters will demonstrate, these same questions of repentance and community are also raised in works by many of the major dramatists of the era.

Chapter 2: Forms of Penance in Early Modern Europe

In her article “Lay Piety and Community Identity in the Early Modern World,” Gretchen Starr-LeBeau argues that “for many of the laity, it appears, penance, as part of a larger practice of confession, penance, and consolation, was central to their participation in and understanding of their individual and collective religious lives.”⁴⁷ Why was penance so central to both individual and collective understandings? Penance was, first of all, essentially connected to an individual’s relationship with God. Whether in Catholic or Protestant circles, penance was regarded as a necessary element of each Christian’s spiritual life. But one’s spiritual life includes actions performed within the context of a community or society, and consequently, penance incorporated a necessary social dimension. This social element of penance was most directly connected with an individual’s status regarding his local church; as Steve Hindle writes, “The parish was *the* locale in which community was constructed and reproduced...the corporate character of societal development was most obviously manifested in the lived experiences of people working and worshipping in close proximity with one another.”⁴⁸ The centrality of the parish for community life gave additional emphasis to the social element of penance, as a person in bad standing with his church was ostracized from the community, and could

⁴⁷ Gretchen Starr-LeBeau, “Lay Piety and Community Identity,” pp. 395.

⁴⁸ Steve Hindle, “A Sense of Place? Becoming and Belonging in the Rural Parish, 1550-1650,” p. 96. Emphasis in the original.

rectify that relationship only through penance. Starr-LeBeau writes, “The sacrament of penance, linked with the sacrament of the Eucharist, was essential to defusing strife and maintaining peace among residents. Penance thus played a role in the political dynamic of early modern communities.”⁴⁹ Penance was the primary means of both acquiring self-knowledge, through examining one’s conscience and acknowledging one’s strengths and weaknesses, and forming a peaceful and charitable community life.

In the preceding chapter, I have shown how elements of this deep connection between penance and community were portrayed on the English stage, both before and during the Reformation. In *Everyman*, *Doctor Faustus*, and Campion’s *Ambrosia*, a similar understanding of the social and spiritual nature of penance is apparent. In the following chapters, I will demonstrate that this theme in early modern drama was by no means limited to Campion and Marlowe, but that it had wide resonance in some of the most well known works of playwrights from Shakespeare to Ford. But before examining Elizabethan and Jacobean drama more closely, it is necessary to outline various theologies and forms of repentance as they existed and were understood in the early modern world. This chapter will provide an overview of the four general conceptions of penance that held sway during the Reformation. I begin by describing the Catholic sacramental understanding of penance, then turn to examine Luther’s and Calvin’s rejection of this understanding and their distinct assertions concerning a habitual state of repentance, and finally, discuss several of the most influential positions espoused by leaders of the Church of England during the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. In discussing these various religious traditions, I will focus upon the defined nature of

⁴⁹ Gretchen Starr-LeBeau, “Lay Piety and Communal Identity,” 400.

penance and the ways in which such a definition had an impact upon the communal or social element of penance that I have discussed above.

The Catholic Sacrament of Penance

When a man or woman shall have committed any of all the sins that men are wont to commit, and by negligence shall have transgressed the commandment of the Lord, and offended, they shall confess their sin, and restore the principle itself.

Numbers 5:6-7

And I say to thee: That thou art Peter; and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give to thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven. And whatsoever thou shalt bind on upon earth, it shall be bound also in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth, it shall be loosed also in heaven.

Matthew 16:18-19⁵⁰

Convened in response to the growing influence of Protestant sects in the first half of the sixteenth century, the Council of Trent reaffirmed and clarified the Catholic Church's position regarding many important points of doctrine, including the discussion and definition of the seven sacraments. Whereas the Protestant traditions generally acknowledged only Baptism and the Eucharist as sacraments, in 1547 the Seventh Session of the Council of Trent decreed, "If anyone says that the sacraments of the New Law were not all instituted by Our Lord Jesus Christ, or that there are more or less than seven, namely, baptism, confirmation, Eucharist, penance, extreme unction, order and matrimony, or that any one of these seven is not truly and intrinsically a sacrament, let

⁵⁰ These passages are rendered in the Douay-Rheims translation as the most fitting Catholic early modern English rendition. I will indicate when using Protestant translations in my discussion of Protestant theology and biblical interpretation.

him be anathema.”⁵¹ Later sessions were devoted to the detailed explanation of these sacraments, but most pointedly here, the Council affirms that the number and nature of the sacraments originate from the actions and words of Christ himself. This was no new claim by the Council of Trent, as it is evidently held by Thomas Aquinas and many of the early Church fathers. Indeed, as the noted Reformation historian Philip Hughes writes, “Trent is a witness to the age-long tradition... It never does more than state, with the peculiar authority and explicitness of a General Council, what the body of the teaching theologians had been agreed on for centuries and the Church as a whole had implicitly accepted and practiced.”⁵² The Tridentine emphasis upon the number and origin of the sacraments is a direct response to the assertions made by Luther, Calvin, and many of the Reformers, rather than a new theological formulation.

With respect to the sacrament of penance, the Church recognized several important passages in the Gospels as the formal institution of the sacrament. As quoted above, and also of extreme importance to the papacy’s claims of authority and preeminence, Matthew 16:18-19 famously recounts Jesus giving Peter the “keys to the kingdom of heaven,” and the power to bind and loose.⁵³ The Church understood this passage as the institution of the sacrament of penance, and read it in conjunction with John 20:23, in which Jesus “breathed upon [the apostles]; and he said to them: Receive ye

⁵¹ *The Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*, 51.

⁵² Philip Hughes, *The Church in Crisis*, 324.

⁵³ While Luther’s views were to radically change over time, in his 1520 work “The Pagan Servitude of the Church” (also known as “The Babylonian Captivity of the Church”), Luther too directly interprets this passage as pertaining to sin and forgiveness, while rejecting any other papal authority. He writes, “Other Romanists are even more shameless in their deductions from the passage in Matthew 16 [:19]: ‘Whatsoever ye shall bind’, etc. They claim that here the pope is given authority to decree laws, whereas, in that passage, Christ was dealing with those sins which were to be retained, and those to be forgiven; He was not giving authority to take the whole church into captivity and oppress it by any laws” (*Martin Luther: Selections from His Writings*, 305).

the Holy Ghost. Whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them; and whose sins you shall retain, they are retained.” Following this foundation of the sacrament of penance, the Catholic Church developed the tradition of auricular confession to include the three formal parts of penance: contrition, confession, and satisfaction.

The Fourteenth Session of the Council of Trent, held in 1551 under Pope Julius III, was devoted to the sacraments of penance and extreme unction, and after discussing the foundation of the sacrament in John 20:23, the Council defines the form and matter of the sacrament:

the form of the sacrament of penance, in which its efficacy chiefly consists, are those words of the minister: *I absolve thee*, etc., to which are indeed laudably added certain prayers according to the custom of holy Church, which, however, do not by any means belong to the essence of the form nor are they necessary for the administration of the sacrament. But the acts of the penitent himself, namely, contrition, confession, and satisfaction, constitute the matter of this sacrament, which acts, inasmuch as they are by God’s institution required in the penitent for the integrity of the sacrament and for the full and complete remission of sins, are for this reason called the parts of penance.⁵⁴

The form, then, consists in the absolving blessing of the priest, while the matter consists in the three actions of the penitent. In delineating these elements, the Council of Trent follows the discussion of the sacrament of penance that occurs at the end of the *Summa*

⁵⁴ *The Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*, 90-91.

Theologica. In particular, Thomas Aquinas states that “each sacrament is divided into matter and form as its essential parts. Hence it has been said above (Q. 60, AA. 5,6) that sacraments consist of things and words.”⁵⁵

These three actions of the penitent are important; as we saw in both *Everyman* and *Ambrosia*, contrition, confession, and satisfaction were all necessary parts of the reformation of the repentant sinner. Faustus, on the other hand, had moments of contrite thought, but never confessed his sins to God or a priest, and he certainly never made satisfaction for his wrongs. Similarly, in *Hamlet*, Claudius demonstrates sentiments of contrition and he attempts to pray, but is unable to truly repent because he refuses to make satisfaction for his wrongs and abandon the fruits of his sins.⁵⁶ Given these distinctions, it is important to clearly identify what is meant by these formal parts of the sacrament of penance. Proceeding through a discussion of the three acts of the penitent person, the Council of Trent states that “Contrition, which holds the first place among the aforesaid acts of the penitent, is a sorrow of mind and a detestation for sin committed with the purpose of not sinning in the future.”⁵⁷ Contrition, then, involves attention to both the past and the future, as it “implies not only an abstention from sin and the resolution and beginning of a new life, but also a hatred of the old.”⁵⁸ The Council proceeds to state that in some cases, a penitent sinner might accomplish perfect contrition

⁵⁵ Thomas Aquinas, *The Summa Theologica*, Vol. 5, IIIa. Q. 90, AA. 2. Aquinas offers an extensive discussion of the sacrament of penance in the preceding questions, a theological exposition that stood as a model for the Council of Trent’s later statements regarding the sacrament of penance. See IIIa. QQ. 84-90, and Supplement. QQ. 1-28.

⁵⁶ See chapter 3 for a full consideration of repentance in *Hamlet*.

⁵⁷ *The Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*, 91.

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, 91.

through charity and be reconciled with God before receiving the sacramental words of absolution from a priest.⁵⁹ However, imperfect contrition

is called attrition, since it commonly arises either from the consideration of the heinousness of sin or from the fear of hell and of punishment...And though without the sacrament of penance it cannot *per se* lead the sinner to justification, it does, however, dispose him to obtain the grace of God in the sacrament of penance.⁶⁰

In practice, then, contrition led penitent sinners to seek the sacrament of penance in order to be reconciled with God and to be assured that such reconciliation was accomplished; in conjunction with Reformation debates about the assurance of salvation, the sacrament of penance filled an important role as a salve for troubled consciences.

Regarding the second part of the sacrament of penance, confession, the Council of Trent again pointed towards Matthew 16:18-19 and John 20:23, among other passages, and states that priests may

in virtue of the power of the keys, pronounce the sentence of remission or retention of sins. For it is evident that priests could not have exercised this judgment without a knowledge of the matter, nor could they have observed justice in imposing penalties, had the faithful declared their sins in general only and not specifically and one by one. From which it is clear

⁵⁹ Ibid, 92. Charity is understood here as the love of God and love of man; hence, perfect contrition is only accomplished through an absolute love on the penitent's part for God and his fellow men.

⁶⁰ Ibid, 92.

that all mortal sins of which they have knowledge after a diligent self-examination, must be enumerated by the penitents in confession.⁶¹

As will be clarified below, it is this particular understanding of the necessity for auricular confession to a priest that was rejected by the early Protestant theologians, and as the ensuing chapters of this work will demonstrate, the spoken confession of sins to priests or other characters emerges as an important and challenging theme in early modern English drama, particularly as it relates to the community on the stage. For example, in John Webster's *The White Devil*, auricular confession is made to the Cardinal Monticelso, newly elected as Pope Paul IV, but the penitent is insincere, and the Pope has been previously encouraging vice. The upshot of such a confession leads not to reformation, but to the destruction of the community.⁶² Hence, the degree to which a penitent sinner could or should confess his sins was not merely a matter of theological dispute, but deeply affected people's regular forms of prayer and imaginative or conceptual relationship with God and his community, and this manifested itself in the popular drama of the period.

The final part of the penitent's actions in the sacrament of penance is satisfaction, and while auricular confession certainly connected the sinner to his community, it is satisfaction which incorporates the most obvious communal element. In responding to some of the challenges raised by the Reformers, the Council of Trent declares "that it is absolutely false and contrary to the word of God, that the guilt is never remitted by the Lord without the entire punishment being remitted also."⁶³ Hence, while guilt might be

⁶¹ Ibid, 93.

⁶² I discuss *The White Devil* at length in chapter 4.

⁶³ Ibid, 97.

absolved in the sacrament, satisfaction was necessary to account for the remaining punishment. The Catholic Church's understanding of the necessity for satisfaction entails other positions of serious contention during the Reformation, including the existence of Purgatory, the efficacy of good works, doctrines of justification, and prayers for the dead. Attempting to counter misrepresentations of the Church's understanding of the efficacy of satisfaction, the Council states, "no Catholic ever understood that through our satisfactions the efficacy of the merit and satisfaction of Our Lord Jesus Christ is either obscured or in any way diminished."⁶⁴ The Council goes on to explain that while Christ's death accomplished absolute satisfaction for sins, nevertheless, the Bible is full of instances in which humans must make satisfaction for their wrongdoings.⁶⁵ Moreover, the Council declares, "it is in keeping with divine clemency that sins be not thus pardoned us without any satisfaction... For without doubt, these satisfactions greatly restrain from sin... and by acts of the opposite virtues destroy habits acquired by evil living."⁶⁶ Hence satisfaction, like the sacrament of penance as a whole, looks back at past sins and also looks forward, as the penitent sinner attempts to avoid his moral failings in the future. The act of making satisfaction, however, often involved the doing of good deeds, and such deeds would be performed within the community. If a person had stolen from his neighbor, he must make restitution, and in ongoing disputes about land, property, or

⁶⁴ Ibid, 98-99.

⁶⁵ Question 13, Article 1, of the Supplement to the *Summa Theologica*, addresses this issue by distinguishing between quantitative and proportionate qualities, stating, "Man becomes God's debtor in two ways; first, by reason of favors received, secondly, by reason of sin committed: and just as thanksgiving or worship or the like regard the debt for favors received, so satisfaction regards the debt for sin committed... man cannot make satisfaction to God if *satis* (enough) denotes quantitative equality; but he can, if it denote proportionate equality... and as this suffices for justice, so does it suffice for satisfaction" (*The Summa Theologica*, Vol. 5, Supplement, QQ. 13, AA. 1).

⁶⁶ *The Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*, 97-98.

reputation, the confessor would insist that satisfaction include making a peaceful resolution of the conflict.⁶⁷

Just as the freeing of Good Deeds in *Everyman*'s satisfaction had salubrious effects upon both his soul and his relationship to his community, so too, penance was generally regarded as beneficial to both the individual and his community. John Bossy has suggested that during the Reformation, the sacrament of penance shifted from "the social to the personal." He maintains that prior to the Reformation, for the average layman, "the emphasis of the sacrament lay in its providing part of the machinery for the regulation and resolution of offenses and conflicts otherwise likely to disturb the peace of the community."⁶⁸ In fact, penance was commonly understood as carrying political significance, since it had such an obvious connection to the well-being of the community. As Starr-LeBeau argues, "Penance, confession, and reconciliation...became an important means for lay people to challenge local political and social conditions and to insist on a re-evaluation of village disagreements."⁶⁹ In fact, not only was penance social in terms of one's local community, but at times it incorporated the understanding of the entire Church as one's community. A medieval example of this attitude can be clearly seen in Chrétien de Troyes's romance *Percival*, as Chrétien recounts Perceval's repentance after he has wandered for five years without praying or worshiping God. The knight is instructed that he should make satisfaction by helping anyone who needs assistance, as an ultimately charitable action.⁷⁰ In contrast to this embodiment of the medieval tradition concerning penance and community however, Bossy suggests that the effect of the

⁶⁷ See Eamon Duffy's *The Stripping of the Altars*, 57-63.

⁶⁸ John Bossy, "The Social History of Confession in the Age of the Reformation," 21.

⁶⁹ Gretchen Starr-LeBeau, "Lay Piety and Community Identity," 414.

⁷⁰ See Joseph Goering's "A Layman's Penance" in *Medieval Christianity in Practice*, pp. 151-155, for a helpful discussion of this passage.

Counter Reformation was “to shift the emphasis away from the field of objective social relations and into a field of interiorized discipline for the individual.”⁷¹ The loss of the sacrament of penance, then, did not simply result in a change in methods of prayer and assurance of justification, but it also changed the ways in which conflicts within communities, particularly in rural parts of Europe and England, were resolved. The Catholic sacrament of confession, then, not only held the social function of being a means of adjudicating disputes and solving differences, but it also opened a door for private penances that could satisfy and comfort a troubled conscience, without attaching a stigma to the confessing person in the community.

Martin Luther and Penance

Martin Luther’s Ninety-Five Theses begin with a series of declarations concerning penance:

1. When our Lord and Master, Jesus Christ, said “Repent”, He called for the entire life of believers to be one of penitence.
2. The word cannot be properly understood as referring to the sacrament of penance, i.e., confession and satisfaction, as administered by the clergy.
3. Yet its meaning is not restricted to penitence in one’s heart; for such penitence is null unless it produces outward signs in various mortifications of the flesh.

⁷¹John Bossy, “The Social History of Confession in the Age of the Reformation,” 21.

4. As long as hatred of self abides (i.e., true inward penitence) the penalty of sin abides, viz., until we enter the kingdom of heaven.
5. The pope has neither the will nor the power to remit any penalties beyond those imposed either at his own discretion or by canon law.
6. The pope himself cannot remit guilt, but only declare and confirm that it has been remitted by God; or, at most, he can remit it in cases reserved to his discretion. Except for these cases, the guilt remains untouched.

Notably, at this early point, Martin Luther still refers to the sacrament of penance, identifying those elements of confession and satisfaction that were traditionally recognized by the Catholic Church. However, his initial theses do partially forecast the later developments in his theology concerning the sacrament of penance. Luther's critique of the papal authority to bind or loose penalties in the fifth and sixth theses is a direct reference to John 20:23 and Matthew 16:18-19. In prescribing limits to the pope's powers and implying a more restricted interpretation of these passages, Luther undermines both the basis of the papacy's claims to authority, and the basis of the Catholic Church's understanding of the institution of the sacrament of penance.

On June 15, 1520, Pope Leo X responded to Luther's growing influence and continuing disregard for papal reprimands by issuing the bull *Exsurge Domine*, which condemned several points of Luther's teaching, including elements of his Ninety-Five Theses. Enumerating forty-one specific quotations from Luther's writings that were not in accord with the Church's teaching, *Exsurge Domine* condemned the statement that the traditional understanding of the three parts of penance "has no foundation in Sacred

Scripture nor in the ancient sacred Christian doctors.”⁷² While many later Reformation debates addressed the question of the Real Presence in the sacrament of the Eucharist, it is evident here that in the years following Luther’s theses, the sacrament of penance was a pivotal point of contention. *Exsurge Domine* continues by condemning several other positions espoused by the Reformers concerning penance, including the position that “in the sacrament of penance and the remission of sin the pope or the bishop does no more than the lowest priest; indeed, where there is no priest, any Christian, even if a woman or child, may equally do as much.”⁷³ This formulation was to evolve into what was described as the priesthood of all believers, and is a clear development of Luther’s attack upon the special authority of the papacy and clerical authority. Furthermore, it fundamentally changes the relationship of the sinner and his community in the sacrament of penance, since in this case no sacerdotal authority determines the means or modes of satisfaction, nor necessarily insists upon communal harmony and reconciliation.

While Rome was responding to Luther’s previous challenges concerning the nature of confession, papal authority, and indulgences, the year 1520 also marked the publication of Luther’s more ambitious theological work, *The Pagan Servitude of the Church*. Luther begins this piece by noting his evolving positions, and expresses the wish that people would burn his earlier works on indulgences because he had now arrived at the conclusion that “*Indulgences are Evils devised by the Toadies at Rome.*”⁷⁴ He continues by stating his new understanding of the sacraments, identifying only three:

⁷² “Condemning the Errors of Martin Luther: Exsurge Domine.” *Papal Encyclicals Online*. n.p, n.d.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ Martin Luther, *Selections from His Writings*, 250.

baptism, penance, and the Eucharist.⁷⁵ The remainder of *The Pagan Servitude of the Church* is divided into sections with thorough explanations of his conception of these three sacraments, followed by more concise attacks upon the four other sacraments of the Church of Rome: confirmation, marriage, ordination, and extreme unction. In Luther's evolved view, the very nature of the sacraments was different from that propounded by the Catholic Church, as he denied the performative efficacy—*ex opere operato*—of the sacraments, asserting instead that they were dependent upon a person's faith in Christ. Indeed, faith had become utterly central to Luther's thought concerning the sacraments, for since justification was through faith alone, the importance of the sacraments diminished. For baptism, penance, and the Eucharist, Luther "insisted that faith was absolutely necessary for making the sacrament effective."⁷⁶ Notably, Luther openly acknowledges the social, communal aspect of penance, as he condemns the Catholic Church's use of the sacrament of penance as a form of social control: "The penitential promise has been transformed into a most outrageous instrument of tyranny, and a power of control has been established greater than any in the temporal sphere."⁷⁷ In speaking of penance as a potential "instrument of tyranny," Luther demonstrates his understanding of the great social role that penance had played prior to the Reformation, and as I will show, he even lauded the practice of auricular confession as beneficial to society, once it was divorced from a sacramental framework.

As might be expected, Luther begins his section on the sacrament of penance by attacking the Catholic Church's interpretation of Matthew 16:18-19 and John 20:23, and

⁷⁵ Ibid, 256.

⁷⁶ Harold J. Grimm, *The Reformation Era 1500-1650*, 127.

⁷⁷ Martin Luther, *Selections from His Writings*, 316.

he argues that the passage from Matthew “makes no mention at all of conferring power, but only deals with the service performed by the administrator promising the words of forgiveness.”⁷⁸ These words of forgiveness, for Luther, are not the essential form of the sacrament, and in elevating to the priesthood all believers, he viewed the utterance of such words as accidental to the nature of the sacrament.⁷⁹ Luther asserted that faith was the essence of the sacrament of penance, and that the three parts of the sacrament (contrition, confession, and satisfaction) that the Catholic Church recognized were improperly spoken of by the Church. Rather, describing contrition he writes, “Wherever faith is found, the certainty of punishment causes contrition, and the trustworthiness of the promises [of God] is the means of consolation; and through this faith a man merits forgiveness of sin.”⁸⁰ Luther stresses that faith is the source of contrition, and he further states that, “without doubt, confession of sins is necessary.”⁸¹ Confession springs from contrition as a “singular medicine for afflicted consciences,” and pointing to the particular Catholic practice of auricular, private confession, Luther is also approving: “As for secret confession as practiced to-day, though it cannot be proved from Scripture, yet it seems a highly satisfactory practice to me; it is useful and even necessary.”⁸²

Luther’s primary difference with the Catholic Church, however, is that such auricular confession need not be made to a priest, but can be made to any of the faithful. This change has potentially large ramifications for the relationship between penance and community. One might ask, how can a child, or one’s close friend, not only provide

⁷⁸ Ibid, 316.

⁷⁹ Concerning the priesthood of all believers, in *The Pagan Servitude of the Church*, Luther wrote, “we, who have been baptized, are all uniformly priests in virtue of that very fact. The only addition received by the priests is the office of preaching, and even this with our consent.” (Ibid, 345).

⁸⁰ Ibid, 317.

⁸¹ Ibid, 319.

⁸² Ibid, 319.

proper advice, but also ensure that the penitent sinner rectifies his relationship with his community? If there is no elevated authority that determines and enforces the form that satisfaction should take, how would conflicting neighbors be brought to peace? Luther passes over such questions without comment, though he makes a particular point of stressing the universal Christian community in his discussion of penance, writing, “It is impossible for anything to be of greater weight and importance than the glory of Christian fellowship. But they tie us down to places and days and persons till the name of ‘brother’ loses its value.”⁸³ Addressing the final part of penance—satisfaction—Luther writes that the Roman practices of indulgences and other common forms of satisfaction are an abuse, and that works cannot merit salvation. He stresses the fact that satisfaction is entirely secondary to contrition, which is itself entirely dependent upon faith. This, again, changes the relationship between penance and community. Within this framework, Everyman’s satisfaction would not necessarily include Good Works, since faith, finally, is all that matters. Indeed, as Luther writes concerning the baptized Christian, “Even if he wished, he could not lose his salvation however often he sinned, save only if he refused to believe. No sins have it in their power to damn him, but only unbelief.”⁸⁴ From this perspective, confession and satisfaction are both unnecessary for the justification of one’s soul; they might be helpful practices, but they play no essential role in the sacrament of penance. Similarly, reconciliation with one’s community is superfluous and tangential with respect to the essential question of belief.

⁸³ Ibid, 322.

⁸⁴ Ibid, 295. Luther strongly reiterates this absolute role of faith in many of his later writings. In *Concerning Christian Liberty*, for example, he writes, “no good work can profit an unbeliever to justification and salvation; and, on the other hand, no evil work makes him an evil and condemned person, but that unbelief, which makes the person and the tree bad, makes his works evil and condemned” (*Great Voices of the Reformation*, 91).

Given the diminished role of penance in Luther's theological framework, it too was soon after removed from his list of sacraments, leaving only baptism and the Eucharist.⁸⁵ Aspects of confession still persisted in early modern Lutheranism for some time, and even became a focal point of dispute and control in thoroughly Lutheran cities in Germany. As Ronald Rittgers observes, "owing to its obvious sacerdotal trappings, even in its reformed guise, private confession became an important battleground between clerics and magistrates for religious authority."⁸⁶ In the final chapter of this work, I argue that elements of this political control of the confessional are apparent in Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*, but the important point here is the acknowledgment that while penance, and particularly auricular confession, could not fit within Luther's sacramental definitions, it was nevertheless recognized as filling an important role for troubled consciences, for political authorities, and for the general Christian community.⁸⁷

John Calvin and Penance

John Calvin's understanding of the sacraments was far closer to Martin Luther's than the Catholic Church's, and in both his magisterial *Institutes of the Christian Religion* and his responses to the Council of Trent, he affirmed that there were only two

⁸⁵ It is worth noting that Luther's understanding of the Eucharist differed from the purely symbolic interpretation propounded by other Protestants like Zwingli. Luther "denounced transubstantiation as an Aristotelian doctrine made obligatory a mere three centuries earlier by the Lateran decree of 1215. Nevertheless, he continued to insist on a real presence of Christ's glorified body, coexisting with the substance of the consecrated bread and wine" (A. G. Dickens, *The Counter Reformation*, 41).

⁸⁶ Ronald K. Rittgers, "Private Confession and the Lutherization of Sixteenth-Century Nördlingen," 1082-3.

⁸⁷ Rittger's book *Reformation of the Keys: Confession, Conscience, and Authority in Sixteenth Century Germany* examines this relationship between temporal and spiritual authority in Lutheran states (particularly Nürnberg) as they related to auricular confession during the Reformation. This work is especially helpful in emphasizing the importance of confession and the interpretation of the "keys" in Reformation Lutheranism.

sacraments, baptism and the Eucharist. For Calvin, the sacraments accompanied the Gospel as a support of faith; however, “throughout his teaching he insisted upon the secondary and supplementary character of the sacraments.”⁸⁸ Rather than viewing the sacraments as an extraordinary means of grace or justification of the soul, Calvin asserted that the sacraments depended upon the faithful elect, and thus were a confirmation of the divinely pre-ordained salvation of the individual.⁸⁹ Penance was not regarded as a sacrament, but rather as a constant disposition through which a person avoided sin and tried to better himself.⁹⁰ Francois Wendel observes, “for Calvin, as for Luther, one of the consequences of faith is that it shows the Christian that though he is justified by Christ he remains more or less a sinner all his life, and that this sin was to be combated by penitence.”⁹¹ What does Calvin mean by penitence? In his *Catechism of the Church of Geneva*, the Scholar who is being interrogated states that “the whole doctrine of the gospel is comprehended under the two branches, faith and repentance,” prompting the further question from the Master, “What is repentance?”⁹² The Scholar answers,

Dissatisfaction with and a hatred of sin and a love of righteousness, proceeding from the fear of God, which things lead to self-denial and mortification of the flesh, so that we give ourselves up to the guidance of

⁸⁸ Francois Wendel, *Calvin: The Origins and Development of His Religious Thought*, 312.

⁸⁹ As Francois Wendel writes, “The existence of the sacraments depended, in [Calvin’s] view, upon a prevenient divine promise; for the sacrament was no more than a confirmation of the promise, to give us additional faith in it” (Ibid, 313).

⁹⁰ See Joel R. Beeke, “Calvin on Piety.” In *The Cambridge Companion to John Calvin*, 125-152, esp. 141.

⁹¹ Francois Wendel, *Calvin: The Origins and Development of His Religious Thought*, 243.

⁹² John Calvin, *Selections from His Writing*, 265.

the Spirit of God, and frame all the actions of our life to the obedience of the Divine will.⁹³

Penance is not a sacrament, but rather a broadly encompassing habit or mode of life, and one that springs entirely from the faith of the elect. It does not involve auricular confession of sins, nor words of absolution, but it does incorporate elements of voluntary self-denial and mortification as a sign of faith and justification. In this case, a person's relationship to his community might potentially be reconciled through satisfaction and good works, but these things are accidental to repentance. Such mortifications—or, indeed, any actions by a sinner—are in no way actually conducive to salvation; it is faith, not works, that gives an individual the assurance of justification.⁹⁴

Having disposed of penance as a sacrament, Calvin made a point of responding to the Catholic Church's conception of the sacraments in many of his writings. In 1547, two years after the beginning of the Council of Trent and one year after Martin Luther's death, Calvin wrote the *Acts of the Council of Trent with the Antidote*, responding to particular decrees from the documents of the Council. Calvin, like Luther prior to the Council, attacked the number of sacraments identified by the Catholic Church, writing, "They insist that Seven Sacraments were instituted by Christ. Why, then, did they not order him to institute them? The number Seven which they place under the sanction of an anathema has not only no support from Scripture, but none even from any approved author."⁹⁵ Calvin argues that the sacrament of penance is a particular problem for the

⁹³ Ibid, 265.

⁹⁴ In the part of the *Catechism* immediately preceding the definition of repentance, Calvin attempts to anticipate arguments that such a conception would negate the point of trying to do good works (effectively discouraging righteous action). See John Calvin, *Selections from His Writing*, pp. 264-265.

⁹⁵ Ibid, 210.

Church, asking “if a sacrament consists of spiritual grace and an external sign, where will they find anything of the kind in penance?”⁹⁶ He reiterates this question when he responds to the sixth session of the Council, and he argues,

They [the Council] go farther, and say, that this penitence with which they trifle consists not only in contrition of heart, but the confession of the mouth and the satisfaction of works...why should I begin a long discussion here? The point is the remission of sins: which is the knowledge of salvation. (Luke 1:77) God promises it to us free in the blood of Christ: of auricular confession he says not a word.⁹⁷

Disparaging both auricular confession and satisfaction, Calvin again undermines the traditional relationship between penance and community; if the knowledge of salvation is of sole importance, what would prompt an individual to reconcile himself with his community? Whereas Martin Luther had found much to praise in the non-sacramental practice of auricular confession to any fellow believer, Calvin condemns the practice entirely, and repeatedly and emphatically denies its presence in Scripture. And as Philip Hughes writes, “Whatever finds no mention in Scriptures must be cast out. Crucifixes and images go, and all decorations, and all vestments, along with altars and their lights.”⁹⁸ The sacrament of penance numbered among such elements.

Instead of acknowledging any sacramental qualities, Calvin is quite clear in the *Institutes of the Christian Religion* that penance is a constant state for the justified elect.

⁹⁶ Ibid, 211.

⁹⁷ Ibid, 212.

⁹⁸ Philip Hughes, *A Popular History of the Reformation*, 252.

When explicating the Apostle's Creed, Calvin explains the phrase "remission of sins" by writing,

The faithful receive this remission when, confused, afflicted and oppressed by the consciousness of their sins, they are terrified by their consciousness of the divine judgment and are disgusted with themselves and...they mortify their flesh and whatever is from themselves. For as they go on constantly repenting (for this is requisite) as long as they live in the prison of their body, so steadily and constantly they obtain that remission itself.⁹⁹

This unvarying state of repentance springs from the continuing faith of the individual, and leads to a constant remission of sins. The total depravity of human nature renders repentance, like all actions, inefficacious in itself, but it is covered by Christ's purifying sacrifice. Repentance would promote charity by its very nature, but no essential element in the state of repentance requires reconciliation with one's community. Nevertheless, repentance should inform every aspect of the Christian's life, and it is a primary indication of a person's faith and, consequently, justification.

Repentance and the English Church

The degree to which Martin Luther, John Calvin, and other continental reformers influenced the developments that took place in the Church of England during the

⁹⁹ John Calvin, *Selections from His Writing*, 303.

Reformation is a convoluted and much disputed subject.¹⁰⁰ Many of the early reformers in England were followers of Martin Luther; William Tyndale, for example, translated and printed parts of Luther's writings while working on his Bible translation. Similarly, Thomas Cranmer relied upon Luther's thought in several of his reforms and in the *Book of Common Prayer*, and Cromwell was known to be sympathetic to Lutheran theological positions. However, Henry VIII's visceral dislike for Luther, as well as his vehement disagreement with reformers who questioned the doctrine of the Real Presence and transubstantiation of the bread and wine, resulted in a significant limitation of Luther's influence. Notably, Henry VIII also made a point of insisting upon the continuation of the sacrament of penance, even after asserting himself as head of the Church of England, and after having seemingly dispensed with other sacraments. In this respect, the Ten Articles of 1536 echo Martin Luther's position in *The Pagan Servitude of the Church* that there were three sacraments: baptism, the Eucharist, and penance. The Church of England, like Luther, was to eventually drop penance, though in the third of the Ten Articles, Henry VIII asserted, through Cranmer, that the people "must most constantly believe that [penance] was institute of Christ in the New Testament as a thing so necessary to man's salvation that no man, which after his baptism is fallen again, and hath committed deadly sin, can, without the same, be saved, or attain everlasting life."¹⁰¹ Not only does Henry reiterate the traditional understanding of the foundation of the sacrament of penance, but he further emphasizes the three parts of the sacrament—contrition, confession, and

¹⁰⁰ For a brief but helpful overview of the points of contention concerning the degree of continental reformers' influence in England, see Diarmaid MacCulloch's *The Later Reformation in England, 1547-1603*, pp. 55-68. Andrew Pettegree discusses some of the extent of Calvin's influence and popularity in England in "The Spread of Calvin's Thought" in *The Cambridge Companion to John Calvin*, pp. 208-213.

¹⁰¹ David Cressy and Lori Anne Ferrell, eds., *Religion and Society in Early Modern England: A Sourcebook*, 19.

satisfaction—and stresses the appropriateness of auricular confession to a priest: “ [the people] ought to repute the same as a very expedient and necessary mean, whereby they may require and ask this absolution at the priest’s hands, at such time as they shall find their consciences grieved with mortal sin.”¹⁰²

Yet, in its discussion of penance, the Third Article also displays the influence of the continental reformers’ understanding of justification. Philip Hughes observes that when the article states that God will “repute” a sinner as justified, “the word *repute* is pure Lutheranism; for the Catholic doctrine is that God does not *repute* the faithful and contrite sinner justified but really justifies him.”¹⁰³ Hence, even in affirming penance as a sacrament, Henry VIII and Cranmer included language that was indicative of Protestant influence. In the Six Articles of 1539, Henry VIII again asserted his conservative leanings, this time with Cranmer in serious opposition. Henry declared in the final article that “auricular confession is expedient and necessary to be retained and continued, used and frequented in the Church of God.”¹⁰⁴ Only with Henry’s death would the reformers make further progress in changing England’s traditional religion.

Under Edward VI such changes came rapidly, and by 1549, the Uniformity bill replaced the Latin Mass with the first Book of Common Prayer. Imposed for use throughout the country, the Book of Common Prayer provided the rubrics and prayers for only two sacraments, Baptism and Holy Communion. This was followed in the next year by the Forty-Two Articles, an important enlargement of Calvinist influence upon the Church of England, and though the articles had limited immediate influence due to

¹⁰² Ibid, 19.

¹⁰³ Philip Hughes, *The Reformation in England*, Vol. 1, p. 350.

¹⁰⁴ Henry Bettenson, ed., *Documents of the Christian Church*, 329.

Edward's death, they proved to be a model for the Thirty-Nine Articles under Elizabeth I. In both sets of articles, penance was no longer considered a sacrament, as article XXV of the Thirty-Nine Articles declared that the other five sacraments of the Catholic Church "are not to be counted for sacraments of the gospel, being such as have grown partly of the corrupt following of the apostles, partly are states of life allowed in the scriptures; but yet have not like nature of sacraments with baptism, and the Lord's supper, for that they have not any visible sign or ceremony ordained of God."¹⁰⁵

Despite the Thirty-Nine Articles' definitive exclusion of penance as a sacrament in the Church of England, penitential practices were not entirely removed from the officially endorsed English religious life. The 1559 Book of Common Prayer, for instance, contains several notable remnants of the Catholic practice of auricular confession. In the Morning Prayer, the minister pronounces "The Absolution" to the congregation, stating:

Almighty God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which desireth not the death of a sinner, but rather that he may turn from his wickedness and live: and hath given power and commandment to his ministers, to declare and pronounce to his people being penitent, the absolution and remission of their sins: he pardoneth and absolveth all them which truly repent.¹⁰⁶

Echoing the Catholic tradition of absolution as an integral part of the sacrament of penance, the Book of Common Prayer still indicates a special ability of the minister to "pronounce" absolution and remission, though not within a sacramental framework. In

¹⁰⁵ David Cressy and Lori Anne Ferrell, eds., *Religion and Society in Early Modern England: A Sourcebook*, 66.

¹⁰⁶ *The Book of Common Prayer 1559*, p. 51.

the ceremony for Holy Communion, however, there is an even more direct reference to the previous practice of auricular confession. With the directions that the exhortation should be said “at the discretion of the curate,” the service provides these words addressed to the congregation:

if any of you which by the means aforesaid, cannot quiet his own conscience, but requireth further comfort or counsel, then let him come to me, or some other discreet and learned minister of God’s Word, and open his grief that he may receive such ghostly counsel, advice, and comfort as his conscience may be relieved, and that by the ministry of God’s Word he may receive comfort and the benefit of absolution, to the quieting of his conscience.¹⁰⁷

In allowing for the practice of non-sacramental auricular confession in certain troublesome cases, the Church of England recognized the salving and social role that such discussion of sins might play, while disallowing any interpretation that doing so was spiritually efficacious, at least in terms of obtaining sacramental graces. In this same sense, the Book of Common Prayer includes “The Order for the Visitation of the Sick,” and while extreme unction had been also dropped as a sacrament, the rubrics include the instructions that “here shall the sick person make a special confession, if he feel his conscience troubled with any weighty matter.”¹⁰⁸ This confession was to be followed by an absolution given by the minister. Thus, while only two sacraments were officially recognized by the Church of England, the Book of Common prayer and some of the

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, 256-7.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, 303.

endorsed devotional practices were close enough to their traditional ancestors to justify Christopher Haigh's observation that "the parliamentary struggles of 1559 produced an ambiguous Book of Common Prayer: a liturgical compromise which allowed priests to perform the Church of England communion in Catholic regalia, standing in the Catholic position, and using words capable of Catholic interpretation."¹⁰⁹ Penance was no longer a sacrament, but its sacramental past would be remembered in services as various as Morning Prayer, Holy Communion, and the Visitation of the Sick.

Before I turn to a brief examination of late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century discussions of penance, conscience, and contrition in England, it is important to note that the rigorous and aggressive imposition of Protestant thought and devotional practices that was carried out by Elizabeth's administration should be considered against the backdrop of the recalcitrant, recusant, and sometimes rebellious traditionalists among the common people.¹¹⁰ Since this work is concerned with the imaginative influences upon late Elizabethan and Jacobean playwrights, it is significant that in much of England, even approximate degrees of uniformity in Protestant religious practices took decades to implement, and in consequence, the cultural memory of a larger sacramental framework in which auricular confession played an integral role would have been familiar to many of the playwrights examined in the following chapters.

¹⁰⁹ Christopher Haigh, *English Reformations*, 241.

¹¹⁰ This is a large and much disputed topic, but the revisionist works by such scholars as Eamon Duffy (*The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England 1400-1580*), Christopher Haigh (*English Reformations: Religion, Politics and Society under the Tudors*), and J.J. Scarisbrick (*The Reformation and the English People*) have done much to show that the Protestant Reformation in England did not spring from the demands of the common people, as the older narrative had it, but was imposed upon them. For a work that seeks to demonstrate the degree of influence of Protestant and political thought among the common people of England, see Ethan H. Shagan's *Popular Politics and the English Reformation*.

Questions of Conscience in Late Elizabethan and Jacobean England

In the preface to his work *Ductor Dubitantium* (1660), Jeremy Taylor suggests that the Church of England, in the great endeavor of freeing itself from the heretical Catholic Church, had understandably devoted its energies elsewhere than to the guidance of men's particular moral questions. Private conferences with a minister were not enough, however, and neither were the casuistical writings of the Catholics or Lutherans. Because of the shortcomings of these other traditions of casuistry, and because of the lack of an English tradition, Taylor concludes that "it was necessary that the Cases of Conscience be written over anew, and established upon better principles, and proceed in more sober and satisfying methods, nothing being more requisite than that we should all *be instructed, and thoroughly prepared to every good work.*"¹¹¹ Casuistry, commonly named "cases of conscience" in early modern England, undertook the application of moral and divine law to specific, difficult cases. The tradition of English casuistry grew out of the Catholic instructions that were given to priests to prepare them to shrive and guide parishioners in the medieval Church. Camille Slights observes that

The casuistry of the Roman Church was written in Latin and intended primarily to guide the priest in the confessional. The upheaval of the Reformation destroyed the traditional system of moral and ecclesiastical discipline; the reformers rejected the sacrament of penance, the confessional fell into disuse, and the Roman body of casuistry became suspect. Because the Roman Catholic system was rejected and the

¹¹¹ Jeremy Taylor, *Ductor Dubitantium*, pp. vii. Italics in the original.

Genevan system of discipline was not adopted, the English Church was left without a well-articulated program for guiding men's consciences.¹¹²

Indeed, in his Preface, Taylor makes a particular point of attacking the Catholic sacrament of confession, arguing that it neither provides for proper repentance nor supplies a correct guide for future action, since "the casuists of the Roman church take these things for resolution and answer to questions of conscience that are spoken by an authority that is not sufficient."¹¹³ Rather than provide his answers to difficult questions by citing Church authorities, Taylor attempted to distance himself from Catholic casuistry by relying more heavily upon syllogistic reasoning in the application of moral law.¹¹⁴

During the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, casuistry saw a particular boom in popularity, and as Lowell Gallagher argues, "associated with the rise of auricular confession in the thirteenth century, casuistry had become, by the end of the sixteenth century, part of a common language, a widespread method of problem-solving by calibrating particular circumstances against general precepts."¹¹⁵ Indeed, it was so widespread that, between 1564 and 1660, somewhat more than six hundred collections of casuistry had been published.¹¹⁶ Cases of conscience dealt with a wide variety of topics, ranging from whether one should kneel when praying, to questions of marriage and chastity, as well as political questions concerning the taking of oaths of fidelity to a state

¹¹² Camille Wells Slight, *The Casuistical Tradition in Shakespeare, Donne, Herbert, and Milton*, 4.

¹¹³ Jeremy Taylor, *Ductor Dubitantium*, pp. iv.

¹¹⁴ As Slight writes concerning the difference between the two, Catholic casuistry "consisted of survey of authoritative opinions on hundreds of moral problems or cases of conscience. In contrast, Protestantism assumes that ultimately everyone is his own casuist and must think through every moral doubt for himself" (*The Casuistical Tradition*, 35).

¹¹⁵ Lowell Gallagher, *Medusa's Gaze: Casuistry and Conscience in the Renaissance*, 5.

¹¹⁶ Camille Wells Slight, *The Casuistical Tradition*, 8. Slight is quoting A. E. Malloch's "John Donne and the Casuists," in *Studies in English Literature* 2 (1962): 58.

or king.¹¹⁷ Casuistry was, in this respect, particularly associated with an individual's relationship to his society. Filling the role of spiritual guidance in the confessional, many of the cases addressed by the casuists explicitly addressed the difficulties of right action with respect to one's community. Hence, the traditional association between penance and community shifted in part to an association of cases of conscience and community. The combination of casuistry's wide popularity and extensive range of application resulted in its broad use and adoption by many great writers of the era. A. E. Malloch, for example, has written persuasively concerning John Donne's disagreement with, but similarity to, the casuists: "if [Donne] disagreed with their methods, he also appears to have shared with them many of the habits of thought which produced those methods."¹¹⁸ Similarly, George Herbert's *The Temple* has been interpreted as resolving several problems of conscience in casuistical terms.¹¹⁹ More broadly, Paula McQuade has argued that "casuistry, with its characteristic pattern of reasoning in which a general question is examined in light of its particular circumstances, specifically influenced the development of early modern English tragedy."¹²⁰ In lieu of the sacramental framework of confession of the Catholic Church, cases of conscience provided a popular and influential means of correcting, salving, and advising struggling consciences and rectifying the relationship between a sinner and his community.

¹¹⁷ For a helpful discussion of casuistry and the various topics that it dealt with in seventeenth-century England, see Keith Thomas, "Cases of Conscience in Seventeenth-Century England," in *Public Duty and Private Conscience in Seventeenth-Century England*, 40.

¹¹⁸ A. E. Malloch, "John Donne and the Casuists," pp. 75.

¹¹⁹ Camille Wells Slight, "Casuistry in *The Temple*," in *The Casuistical Tradition in Shakespeare, Donne, Herbert, and Milton*, 183-246.

¹²⁰ Paula McQuade, "Casuistry and Tragedy: Cases of Conscience and Dramatizations of Subjectivity in Early Modern England," 2.

In conjunction with casuistry, homilies also played an important role in shaping the general understanding of repentance in early modern England. In the second volume of the Elizabethan *Book of Homilies*—homilies that were required by the Thirty-Nine Articles to be read in the parishes throughout England—a lengthy sermon is devoted to repentance. After an introductory statement declaring that “no doctrine is so necessary in the Church of GOD, as is the doctrine of repentance and amendment of life,” the homily takes its primary text from Joel 2.12-13: “Return unto mee with all your heart, with fasting, weeping, and mourning, rent you hearts and not your clothes, and return unto the Lord your GOD, for hee is gracious and mercifull, slow to anger, and of great compassion, and ready to pardon wickednesse.”¹²¹ The homily proceeds to explicate the senses in which one turns to God, and the manner of true repentance, which must take place in the heart, rather than feigned or outward repentance, which only rends one’s clothing. In the second section of the homily, four parts of repentance are identified: contrition, confession, faith, and the amendment of life in works worthy of repentance. Confession, as this homily identifies it, is not sacramental, nor is it auricular and given to a member of the clergy; rather, confession is privately made in prayer to God, and “this is then the chiefest and most principall confession that in the Scriptures and worde of GOD wee are bidden to make, and without which wee shall never obtaine pardon and forgivenessse of our sinnes.”¹²² The homily makes a specific point of attacking the Catholic practice of auricular confession and absolution, and repeatedly asserts that the proper way to repent is privately in prayer, followed by a reformed life.

¹²¹ *The Second Tome of Homilies*, 509-510.

¹²² *Ibid*, 527.

Included within this homily of repentance, however, is an acknowledgement of the relationship between penance and the community. While the “chiefest and most principal confession” is that made to God in private prayer,¹²³ nevertheless, one can also confess to one’s neighbor: “the faythfull ought to acknowledge their offences, whereby some hatred, rancour, grudge, or malice, hauing rysen or growen among them one to another, that a brotherly reconciliation maye be had, without the which nothing that wee doe can bee acceptable vnto God.”¹²⁴ The homily stresses the importance of being at peace with one’s neighbors, and encouraging peace in the community, which includes praying for the neighbors’ confessed weaknesses. As the homily declares, “we ought to confesse our weaknesse and infirmities one to another, to the end that knowyng eche others frailenesse, we may the more earnestly praye together unto almighty God.”¹²⁵ This echoes the older Catholic understanding of the relationship between penance and community, especially since the community is understood as both an important part of reconciliation and a means of support in the avoidance of further sins. However, the homily is careful to distinguish this conception of penance from the Catholic sacrament, as immediately following this discussion of community, the homily stresses that auricular confession as conducted by the Roman Church was wrong, and that priests ought to also confess to their congregations.¹²⁶

The Bishop Lancelot Andrewes, held in high esteem for both his learning and administrative abilities under James I, delivered a homily on the same passage from the Book of Joel on Ash Wednesday, 1619, defining repentance as “nothing else but *redire*

¹²³ Ibid, 527.

¹²⁴ Ibid, 528.

¹²⁵ Ibid, 528.

¹²⁶ Ibid, 528-529.

ad principia [to return to first principles], ‘a kind of circling,’ to return to Him by repentance from Whom by sin we have turned away.”¹²⁷ Repentance is not sacramental, but a constant state that one must strive for, and it consists of two parts:

First, a “turn,” wherein we look forward to God, and with our “whole heart” resolve to “turn” to him. Then a turn again, wherein we look backward to our sins wherein we have turned from God, and with beholding them our very heart breaketh. These two are two distinct, both in nature and names; one, conversion from sin; the other, contrition for sin... These two between them make up a complete repentance, or, to keep the word of the text, a perfect revolution.¹²⁸

Andrewes goes on to explain that fasting and penitential acts are also important both for disciplining the mind and body, and for forming a habit of spirit that is humble and able to avoid sin in the future. In these elements, Andrewes’ development of the three Catholic parts of the sacrament—contrition, confession, and satisfaction—is evident, but he places the repentance entirely within the context of the individual’s private actions and prayers, just as the *Book of Homilies* had insisted half a century earlier.¹²⁹

In works of casuistry and in homilies, the Church of England reinforced its non-sacramental position on the nature of penance, instead encouraging a more individualized, unmediated penitential relationship with God. This freedom from the

¹²⁷ Lancelot Andrewes, *Selected Writings*, 69.

¹²⁸ *Ibid*, 70.

¹²⁹ Andrewes was also well known for his resolution of cases of conscience; as a casuist, he sought to account for the loss of the advisory function of the Catholic priest in the confessional. See Keith Thomas, “Cases of Conscience in Seventeenth-Century England,” in *Public Duty and Private Conscience in Seventeenth-Century England*, 40.

confessional, however, gave rise to doubts concerning an individual's assurance of forgiveness, and such worries shaped the advisory function of English casuistry, as well as, more broadly, the popular imagination in England.¹³⁰ This shift also fundamentally affected the traditional relationship between penance and community. As the following chapters will demonstrate, such concerns and worries over proper penance and justification permeated the early modern English stage, particularly with respect to the relationship between penance and community. Just as *Everyman* and *Ambrosia* present penance in its traditional role as essential for the relationship between God and man and between man and his community, and *Doctor Faustus* depicts the problems of accomplishing penance when separated from the community, so too later Elizabethan and Jacobean dramatists investigate similar themes with respect to habitual sin, corrupt communities, false and feigned penitence, and political authority.

¹³⁰ Worries concerning the assurance of salvation were also the result of Calvin's doctrines of predestination, a topic frequently addressed in homilies as well. For example, in an undated Whitsunday sermon, John Donne argues against "double predestination"—the position that God also predestines some people to hell (*John Donne: The Major Works*, 272-3; see also p. 355), and in a Christmas sermon, Donne admonishes that "If I should inquire upon what occasion God elected me, and writ my name in the book of Life, I should sooner be afraid that it were not so, than finde a reason why it should be so" (*The Complete Poetry and Selected Prose of John Donne*, 502).

Chapter 3: Penance and Community in *Hamlet* and *The Renegado*

In a brief devotional handbook titled *A Werke for Householdiers, or for them that have the gydyngge or governaunce of any co[m]pany*, first published in London in 1530, Richard Whitford discussed several points of doctrine of the Roman Catholic faith, and he supplemented this discussion with several suggestions pertaining to daily devotions and the sacraments. In particular, after a section in which he explicates the Ten Commandments, Whitford writes, “I have knowen many come unto confessyon that coude not tell how to do or what to saye there. I shall therefor set forth here a shorte fourme & manner thereof.”¹³¹ This attention to form and manner is itself a point of interest, given Henry VIII’s impending excommunication in 1533, the first Act of Supremacy (1534), and the theological upheaval that was troubling Europe at the time of Whitford’s writing. However, as Christopher Haigh observes, Whitford pays little attention to such debates, and the “only hint in Whitford’s book that the orthodox faith faced any challenge was a passing warning that ‘good devout Christians’ should take no notice of heretics who denied the sacrament of penance.”¹³² Rather than wade into the

¹³¹ Richard Whitford, *A Werke for Householdiers*, np.

¹³² Christopher Haigh, *English Reformations*, 28. Haigh is generally correct, though Whitford does also refer to anti-confession reformist theologians when he writes of the sacrament of confession, “Syth than all Christen people have recevued and held the same soo many hondred yeres, take you that use and custome for sufficient auctorite to folow the same and to put all maner of contrary opynion clene out of mynde and

theological debates of the age, Whitford continues to detail precisely the importance of the sacrament and the form that it should take. He reminds his readers that “those persones whatsoever they be, that (after their baptisme and christendom) have done any deedly synne can never be in the state of salvacyon without the fayth and wyll of confession.” The sacrament of penance is understood to be utterly necessary for any who have committed grave, or mortal, sins. The “form and manner” which Whitford proceeds to describe are, moreover, quite specific:

Fyrst teche your folkes to come reverently unto the ghostly father with meke and sobre countenance and behavyour (for it is no laughyng game). Than knele downe at the place apoynted, and there make a crosse upon the foreheed or fronte, with In nomine patris (as before is shewed) and tha forth with say thus...

Whitford goes on to describe an examination of conscience that moves through the seven deadly sins, but what he particularly emphasizes here—that auricular confession ought to be performed to a priest while kneeling—is notable. Whitford’s conception of proper repentance is based upon sacramental forms and the mediation of the priest acting *in persona Christi*, but it also includes a specific physical disposition of being upon one’s knees. While many other pamphlets and religious handbooks point to a similar understanding of the sacrament of confession, Whitford’s *A Werke for Householdiers* is important because it quickly became a bestseller, going through eight editions in the

in no wyse to here speke or talke therof.” Whitford is, clearly, consciously supporting the orthodox understanding of the sacrament of confession.

seven years following its initial publication. As Haigh observes about Whitford, “He had been a major publishing phenomenon.”¹³³

The period following the successes of Richard Whitford’s religious tracts and handbooks saw a tremendously contentious and radical series of religious and political changes in England, and these changes included the abandonment of the traditional sacrament of confession. However, exactly one century after the first publication of *A Werke for Householders*, a play was published that explicitly depicted the Catholic sacrament of auricular confession taking place on the English stage. Philip Massinger’s *The Renegado* was first performed in 1624 and subsequently published in 1630, having been approved by the censors of the Revels Office as fit material for publication.¹³⁴ The performance of the rite of confession in *The Renegado* is only one of a number of remarkable elements of this work; it also includes a performance of the sacrament of baptism on stage, and, perhaps most famously, a Jesuit priest who is the central character and hero of the play. Yet Massinger’s portrayal of repentance, taking place according to the older sacramental framework of auricular confession, is of particular note because it addresses the continually resurfacing questions regarding repentance that appear in Elizabethan and Jacobean dramas. Issues related to the ways in which one can or should properly repent of sin, or how one can achieve some certitude of forgiveness as a salve for a guilty conscience, arise repeatedly in the drama and literature of the period. Indeed, one of the best and most famous examples can be found in Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, when Claudius attempts to repent but finds that he is unable. In contrast to the understanding of repentance that Richard Whitford outlines in *A Werke for Householders*, Shakespeare

¹³³ Haigh, *English Reformations*, 25.

¹³⁴ Philip Massinger, *The Renegado*, 67.

depicts an attempt at repentance that accords with the reformed theology of unmediated prayer as a sufficient representation of a penitent and justified spirit. Notably, however, Claudius' physical disposition of kneeling while he attempts to accomplish unmediated penitential prayer echoes the physical form of confession that Whitford describes and that Massinger depicts. This chapter will examine Shakespeare's presentation of repentance in *Hamlet*, particularly Claudius' failed attempt, and then contrast it with the unusual performance of confession in Massinger's *The Renegado*. In detailing the convergence among the physical, intellectual, and spiritual elements of repentance that such a comparison reveals, a consistent thematic presentation of the connection between penitential practices and community becomes apparent. For Claudius and Grimaldi, the need for an external guide, a spiritual counselor, is indicative of the social elements of penance that not only rectify a sinner's relationship to society, but in fact facilitate a sinner's ability to prayerfully repent to God.

Claudius and Failed Repentance

With his usual insightful reflections on many of the difficult questions of his age, Michel de Montaigne's essay "On Repenting" offers a serious consideration of some of the personal difficulties of conscience that are involved in the action of repentance. Montaigne begins with observations stemming from his personal experiences, but he then turns his attention to the difficulties of repenting of sins that have been performed with intellectual consideration and assent. He writes,

as for those other sins, so often repeated, deliberated and meditated upon, those sins which are rooted in our complexions and, indeed, in our professions or vocations, I cannot conceive that they could be rooted so long in one identical heart without the reason and conscience of him who is seized of them being constant in his willing and wanting them to be so; and the repentance which he boasts to come to him at a particular appointed instant is hard for me to imagine.¹³⁵

This sort of sin—habitually performed with willful consideration, as distinct from sin committed in a moment of passion—is precisely the type of sin that Shakespeare depicts in his presentation of Claudius and Gertrude in *Hamlet*. It is of this willful sin that Claudius famously attempts to repent when Hamlet happens upon him praying, and it is this same kind of sin that Hamlet vehemently urges his mother to abandon in the following scene. Montaigne addresses the difficulty of repenting of such consciously performed sin, as he writes, “But if you do not unburden yourself of the evil there had been no cure...I can find no quality so easy to counterfeit as devotion unless our morals and our lives are made to conform to it.”¹³⁶ One might spuriously go through the motions of repentance or devotion, but if the evil or result of sin is cherished, no true repentance has taken place.

¹³⁵ Michel de Montaigne, *The Essays: A Selection*, 241.

¹³⁶ Ibid. pp. 241. This sentiment is clearly reiterated in *The Second Tome of Homilies* (Volume Two of the Elizabethan Books of Homilies) in the sermon “A Homilee of Repentaunce, and of true reconciliation unto God”: “Now lest any man should thynke that repentaunce doeth consist in outwarde weeping and mourning only...This thyng dyd hypocrites sometyme counterfayte and folowe, as though the whole repentaunce dyd stand in such outwarde gesture. He teacheth then, that an other maner of thyng is required, that is, that they must be contrite in their heartes, that they must utterly detest and abhorre sinnes, and beyng at defiaunce with them, returne unto the Lorde their GOD, from whome they went away before. For God hath no pleasure in the outwarde ceremonie, but requireth a contrite and humble heart” (516).

Polonius echoes this reflection and emphasizes the ease with which false devotion and contrition can be assumed when he plans with Claudius to eavesdrop on Hamlet and Ophelia. He declares, “’Tis too much proved that with devotion’s visage / And pious action we do sugar o’er / The devil himself” (3.1.49-51),¹³⁷ and this provokes a self-examining aside from Claudius, “How smart a lash that speech doth give my conscience. / The harlot’s cheek, beautied with plast’ring art / Is not more ugly to the thing that helps it / Than is my deed to my most painted word. / O heavy burden!” (3.1.52-56). Claudius’ thoughts echo Montaigne’s reflections upon sin, and this aside is particularly important because it demonstrates the degree to which Claudius’ conscience is troubled even before he witnesses the reenactment of his sin in Hamlet’s “Mousetrap.” In this scene, however, Claudius’ secretly troubled conscience presents a conspicuous contrast to the seemingly disturbed mind that he and Polonius seek to understand. The scene begins with Rosencrantz telling Claudius that Hamlet “does confess he feels himself distracted” (3.1.5) and Guildenstern assumes the same language in explaining that they “would bring him on to some confession / Of his true state” (3.1.9-10). This language of confession is pertinent, for while Claudius admits guilt—specifically, sinful guilt—to the audience, he and Polonius seek to overhear Hamlet’s confession of the cause of his “antic disposition.” When Hamlet enters with his famous third soliloquy, he too broods upon the role of conscience, finding that “conscience does make cowards of us all” (3.1.85), and upon seeing Ophelia, declares, “Nymph, in thy orisons / Be all my sins remembered” (3.1.91-92).¹³⁸ The ensuing conversation between Hamlet and Ophelia is antagonistic, but it

¹³⁷ William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, in *The Norton Shakespeare*, 2nd ed.

¹³⁸ Hamlet, seemingly unconsciously, echoes the ghost of his father with this statement, as the ghost’s final words in their first meeting were “Remember me” (1.5.91), an obvious reference to the Catholic tradition of praying for the remission of the punishment for the sins of the souls in Purgatory.

follows Hamlet's and Claudius' distinct reflections upon sin. Hamlet questions, "Why wouldst thou be a breeder of sinners? I am myself indifferent honest, but yet I could accuse me of such things that it were better my mother had not borne me" (3.1.122-125), and in Ophelia's pained cry, "O heavenly powers, restore him!" (3.1.141), we can hear impetration for the restoration of Hamlet's mind and, perhaps, his soul.

The various characters' preoccupation with sin and forgiveness is not exclusive to the first scene of Act Three. The ghost of Hamlet's father makes a clear reference to the sacrament of confession when he states that he was "Cut off even in the blossoms of my sin, / Unhouseled, dis-appointed, unaneled, / No reck'ning made, but sent to my account / With all my imperfections on my head" (1.5.76-79). In contrast to this dreadful account, Laertes' final words also display a spirit of repentance, as he implores, "Exchange forgiveness with me, noble Hamlet. / Mine and my father's death come not upon thee, / Nor thine on me" (5.2.271-3), and Hamlet's response is explicitly theological: "Heaven make thee free of it!" (5.2.274). Both the purgatorial references of the ghost and the social elements of Laertes' desire for forgiveness directly incorporate elements of repentance. Furthermore, the emphases of these two statements—the prior upon the personal repercussions of sin, and the latter upon sin's social ramifications—depict the two aspects of the nature and role of repentance and confession in the Catholic Church. As Eamon Duffy observes concerning confession prior to the Reformation, "for the majority of parishioners, it remained a less subjective exercise, a time for practical reassessment, reconciliation with neighbors, and settling of spiritual accounts."¹³⁹ Confession absolved sin, but it also served the important practical effect of reuniting the

¹³⁹ Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars*, 60.

community.¹⁴⁰ The penitential words of the ghost and Laertes exemplify both the social and spiritual dimensions of repentance, and these are variously alluded to throughout *Hamlet*.

In the middle of the play, however, just as in the first scene of Act V, sin and repentance are repeatedly presented in conjunction with eavesdropping. Indeed, each of the three following scenes of the third act presents a different situation in which sin and the admission of guilt are observed or overheard. Act Three, Scene Two contains “The Mousetrap,” before which Hamlet urges Horatio, “Even with the very comment of thy soul / Observe mine uncle” (3.2.72-73), and Claudius’ incriminating reaction confirms his guilt. The following scene finds Claudius upon his knees, praying in attempted repentance as Hamlet secretly observes and considers whether to kill him. Finally, Act Three, Scene Four, presents Hamlet urging his mother to repent while Polonius attempts to overhear and is then killed by Hamlet. The eavesdropping and close observation of others in these scenes are not only indicative of the danger and corruption of the state of Elsinore, but also thematically connected with knowing and acknowledging one’s sins and the sins of others. In none of these cases, however, is this acknowledgement of sin performed in the context of the Catholic sacrament of confession, which, as the Council

¹⁴⁰ See also John Bossy, “The Social History of Confession in the Age of the Reformation.” Bossy suggests, “for the average layman, and notably for the rural layman in the pre-reformation church, the emphasis of the sacrament lay in its providing part of a machinery for the regulation and resolution of offenses and conflicts otherwise likely to disturb the peace of the community. The effect of the Counter-Reformation... was, I suspected, to shift the emphasis away from the field of objective social relations and into a field of interiorized discipline of the individual” (21). See also my discussion of this function of the sacrament of penance in chapters 1 and 2.

of Trent affirms, must include the specific enumeration of mortal sins to a priest.¹⁴¹ Claudius' attempt at repentance, then, invites a close examination.

Much of the critical attention given to the scene in which Hamlet observes Claudius praying has been focused not upon Claudius' efforts to repent, but upon Hamlet's reaction to Claudius. Such a focus is not amiss, as Hamlet's sinister resolution to kill Claudius when "his soul may be as damned and black / As hell whereto it goes" (3.3.94-95) understandably earns condemnations such as Samuel Johnson's: "This speech...is too horrible to be read or to be uttered."¹⁴² Similarly, in arguing that Hamlet combines the role of confessor and avenger, Paul Stegner maintains that "Hamlet spares Claudius's life in the prayer scene not because of the tension between Christian and vengeful impulses, but rather because of the spiritual imperative governing his conception of revenge...Hamlet considers damnation necessary for satisfying the Ghost's dread command."¹⁴³ Certainly, sin and revenge are pertinent to the moral decisions that Hamlet must make, but in this moment of temptation, Hamlet does *not* commit murder. As Richard Harp writes,

"Hamlet is indeed forced to scheme and employ subterfuge, not on his own initiative but in response to circumstances, but it is to a noble end: to be neither a man of blood vengeance who was naively credulous about the words of a ghost nor a man who shirked his responsibilities to see justice

¹⁴¹ "Our Lord Jesus Christ, when about to ascend from earth to heaven, left behind Him priests, His own vicars, as rulers and judges, to whom all the mortal sins into which the faithful of Christ may have fallen should be brought in order that they may, in virtue of the power of the keys, pronounce the sentence of remission or retention of sins. For it is evident that priests could not have exercised this judgment without a knowledge of the matter, nor could they have observed justice in imposing penalties, had the faithful declared their sins in general only and not specifically and one by one" (*The Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*, 92-93).

¹⁴² Samuel Johnson, *Johnson on Shakespeare*, 193.

¹⁴³ Paul Stegner, "'Try what repentance can': *Hamlet*, Confession, and the Extraction of Interiority," 117.

done and the truth known by the people of his state. This is surely at the very heart of nobility: to seek the truth and to minister justice without using the basely corrupt weapons of those in power who have no interest in either end.¹⁴⁴

Yet aside from these crucial points of plot and insights into Hamlet's character, the scene of Claudius' prayer is also important because it clarifies and nearly embodies the many references to sin and repentance that occur throughout the play. Claudius is guilty of serious wrongdoings, and his conscience is plagued by the knowledge of these wrongs, yet his desire to repent is unsuccessful. Why?

When Claudius is finally alone, his tortured exclamation begins with an explicit recognition of his sin, "O, my offence is rank! It smells to heaven. / It hath the primal eldest curse upon't, / A brother's murder" (3.3.36-38), echoing his earlier acknowledgement to the audience of his "heavy burden" (3.1.56). Yet he also immediately proceeds to admit, "Pray can I not. / Though inclination be as sharp as will, / My stronger guilt defeats my strong intent" (3.3.38-40).¹⁴⁵ Why is Claudius unable to pray? Why is he unable to repent? He reasons that mercy is above the depth of his guilt, but he also immediately realizes that he cannot pray for forgiveness "since I am still possessed / Of those effects for which I did the murder— / My crown, mine own ambition, and my queen" (3.3.53-55). Claudius is unable to pray because he is unwilling to abandon the fruits of his sin, and he exemplifies Montaigne's diagnosis of those whose

¹⁴⁴ Richard Harp, "The Nobility of Hamlet." In *Hamlet*, Ignatius Critical Editions, 231-244.

¹⁴⁵ Discussing this passage, Anthony Dawson has observed, "The question whether this is a 'Catholic' or a 'Protestant' attitude hovers over this formulation. The implication that, if he could genuinely repent then mercy would come his way, smacks of Catholicism, but the sense of the ineluctably corrupt will feels like a reformed viewpoint" ("Claudius at Prayer," in *Religion and Drama in Early Modern England: The Performance of Religion on the Renaissance*, 242).

sins are “rooted in our complexions and, indeed, in our professions or vocations.”¹⁴⁶

Claudius understands that he cannot adequately repent through prayer alone, since the wrongs he has committed require social restitution. His sins not only have been against God’s law, but have harmed his community and consequently must be accounted for in any effort of sincere repentance in both spiritual and social terms. When Claudius mentions “mine own ambition,” he clearly recognizes a barrier beyond the fact that he murdered the old king: how can he repent when he has just finalized with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern his plot for Hamlet’s murder in England? Claudius acknowledges the fact that while there is much acting and posturing in Elsinore, “’tis not so above. / There is no shuffling, there the action lies / In his true nature.”¹⁴⁷ Here too Claudius echoes Montaigne and remembers Polonius’ words: the counterfeit of devotion is easily accomplished, but it does nothing.

Claudius’ moment of prayer occurs as a result of desperation in response to a deeply troubled conscience. Despite his recognition that he cannot continue to possess the fruits of his sins or carry out his plan to murder Hamlet if he wants to truly repent, Claudius frantically forces himself to pray, “Help, angels! Make assay. / Bow, stubborn knees; and heart with strings of steel, / Be soft as sinews of the new-born babe. / All may be well” (3.3.69-72). Claudius is never more pitiable than here, and his pathetic plea that “all may be well” seems to place some hope, despite his attachments to sin, in the efficacy of his repentance and, perhaps, the infinite capacity of God’s mercy and grace.

¹⁴⁶ Michel de Montaigne, *The Essays: A Selection*, 241.

¹⁴⁷ Anthony Esolen discusses the same difficulty between acting and sincere prayer in his essay “To Play or Not to Play: How to Lie or Tell the Truth in Hamlet’s Denmark” (*Hamlet*, Ignatius Critical Editions, 199-215). He writes, “Claudius is a miserable man, without a friend to confide in; his evil ensures that he can survive only in a world of lies. In that unreality the King can kneel, and fold his hands, and exclaim, and weep. But he can also see, in a flash of self-knowledge, the reality of his black bosom and the imperturbable light of God” (215).

This final hope is all the more notable given the fact that Claudius' attempt at repentance follows the reformed prescriptions of the Church of England in several respects. The Catholic sacrament of confession had been abolished in England as in most of the Protestant regions of Europe, and the references to repentance in 1559 *Book of Common Prayer* are of a distinctly non-sacramental nature. Instead, the penitent sinner was to speak directly to God, asking for forgiveness. In contrast to the necessary sacerdotal element of confession to which Richard Whitford refers in *A Werke for Householdiers*, the *Book of Common Prayer* outlines moments of general confession and absolution that carry no sacramental gravity or necessity.¹⁴⁸ For example, its prescriptions for the ceremony of Holy Communion include the following guidelines for penance:

...so search and examine your own consciences, as you should come holy and clean to a most godly and heavenly feast...First to examine your lives and conversation by the rule of God's commandments, and whereinsoever ye shall perceive yourselves to have offended, either by will, word, or deed, there bewail your own sinful lives, confess yourselves to Almighty God with full purpose of amendment of life. And if ye shall perceive your offenses to be such as be not only against God but also against your neighbors, then ye shall reconcile yourselves unto them, ready to make restitution and satisfaction.¹⁴⁹

It is important to point out that the *Book of Common Prayer* here retains the social or communal dimension of penance. Before taking communion, a person should not only

¹⁴⁸ See chapter 2 for a full discussion of the penitential elements in the *Book of Common Prayer*.

¹⁴⁹ *The Book of Common Prayer, 1559*, p. 257.

offer up penitential prayer, but also make peace with everyone in that person's community. Nevertheless, sufficient repentance is accomplished without a mediating priest or auricular confession, and it is not a sacrament, but one of a number of different prayers that one should say. Absolution is given by the minister prior to the reception of communion, but is generally given to the entire congregation at once, recalling the *Absolutionem* that the Catholic priest would say following the *Confiteor* in the Mass of the pre-Reformation Sarum Rite, and not the sacramental absolution given by the priest during Catholic confession.¹⁵⁰ This same understanding of repentance as described in the *Book of Common Prayer* is outlined in "A Homilee of Repentaunce, and of true reconciliation unto God" from the second volume of the Elizabethan homilies, and the sermon makes a particular statement against the auricular and sacramental conception of the Church of Rome.¹⁵¹

Claudius follows the general form of repentance that one finds in the 1559 *Book of Common Prayer*, not only in his examining his conscience before he begins his unmediated penitential prayer, but also in his falling upon his knees to do so. The *Book of Common Prayer* states that during the general confession prayers, the congregation should be "all kneeling humbly upon their knees,"¹⁵² and Richard Hooker notes the same in his *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, writing, "When we make profession of our faith, we stand; when we acknowledge our sins, or seek unto God for favour, we fall down: because the gesture of constancy becometh us best in the one, in the other the

¹⁵⁰ Ibid, 259-260.

¹⁵¹ *The Second Tome of Homilies*, 528-531.

¹⁵² *Book of Common Prayer*, 1559, p. 259.

behavior of humility.”¹⁵³ Claudius kneels in attempted repentance, though he himself has acknowledged the social barriers and willful attachments that prove prohibitive to his achieving true or meaningful repentance. Indeed, Claudius is not fooled, as Hamlet was, by his attempt at devotion, and he rises from the ground declaring, “My words fly up, my thoughts remain below. / Words without thoughts never to heaven go” (3.3.97-98). Not only does Claudius’ statement reveal the futility of Hamlet’s—or anyone’s—attempts to manipulate the supernatural outcome of God’s judgment through a determined death, but it also implies questions about the efficacy of such a form of repentance. Claudius rises from his attempt at repentance without being reformed, and, perhaps even more strikingly, he never again makes a direct reference to his troubles of conscience. Claudius exemplifies what Montaigne, among many in the Christian tradition, had recognized: without the aid of external guidance, advice, and encouragement, the abandonment of habitual sin and its fruits is extraordinarily difficult. Claudius does want to repent, as is apparent in his declaration, “My stronger guilt defeats *my strong intent*” (emphasis added, 3.3.40), but his attachment to sin and despairing guilt overwhelm this desire. Moreover, as discussed in the first chapter of this work, public restitution and penance like that performed by Theodosius in Campion’s *Ambrosia* is a particularly difficult thing to accomplish, and it too is assisted by a spiritual counselor or saintly community. In his letter to Timothy, the apostle Paul speaks of consciences that become too hardened, or cauterized, to respond penitently, writing, “Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils: Speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their conscience seared with a

¹⁵³ Richard Hooker, *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, 127.

hote iron.”¹⁵⁴ Claudius needs more than the troubles of conscience that Hamlet stirred with “The Mousetrap” to accomplish successful repentance, and the lack of a spiritual guide, or the sacramental framework of confession, as well as his refusal to justify himself with his community is surely a primary cause of his failure to repent. While the Church of England made allowances for sinners to seek private guidance from a priest, it did not require such a conference, and thus the action of confessing and procuring aid was left to the initiative of the repentant sinner.¹⁵⁵ Claudius, hardened in his sin, requires further external requirements than the prescriptions of kneeling in penitential prayer.

Grimaldi and Successful Repentance

In contrast to Claudius’ failure in privately repenting of habitual sin, Philip Massinger’s *The Renegado* presents a character who is as devoted to sin as is Claudius, but who achieves a successful repentance and transformation of his life. Antonio Grimaldi, the titular character of *The Renegado*, suffers pangs of conscience and struggles with despair much as Claudius does, and Massinger’s presentation of the difficulties of repentance echoes Shakespeare’s depiction of Claudius’ attempt and

¹⁵⁴ 1 Timothy 4:1-2, *The Holy Bible: 1611 Edition, King James Version*. The 1599 Geneva Bible offers a commentary upon this passage that is similarly reflective of Claudius’ problem: “Whose conscience waxed so hard, that there grew an hard fleshiness over it, and so became to have a canker on it, and now at length required of very necessity to be burned with an hot iron” (*1599 Geneva Bible*, 1 Timothy 4:1-2, Commentary Note 3).

¹⁵⁵ For example, in a preparatory prayer for Holy Communion in the 1559 *Book of Common Prayer*, the priest states, “if there be any of you which by the means aforesaid, cannot quiet his own conscience, but requireth further comfort or counsel, then let him come to me, or some other discreet and learned minister of God’s Word, and open his grief that he may receive such ghostly counsel, advice, and comfort as his conscience may be relieved, and that by the ministry of God’s Word he may receive comfort and the benefit of absolution, to the quieting of his conscience, and avoiding of all scruple and doubtfulness” (*The Book of Common Prayer, 1559*, p. 257). The absolution mentioned here is not sacramental in nature, nor necessarily more efficacious than private prayers of repentance.

failure. Shakespeare and Massinger, among other great playwrights of the age, show themselves to be sensitive to the profound difficulties of conscience and human experience involved with repentance, particularly as it relates to community. However, Grimaldi's repentance explicitly follows the sacramental form of Catholic confession, offering a distinct contrast to the form of repentance that Claudius follows. Similarly, whereas Claudius' attachment to the fruits of his sins kept him from making restitution and satisfaction to his community, Grimaldi proceeds through a course of action that specifically redeems him with respect to the Christian community in *The Renegado*, and this satisfaction allows him to re-enter fully the community from which he had been estranged.

Antonio Grimaldi is introduced on the stage as a man deeply attached to sin and antagonistic to religious sentiment. When he first appears, he insults and threatens the servant Gazet, and then curses:

'Swounds! Wherefore do we put to sea, or stand
The raging winds aloft, or piss upon
The foamy waves when they rage most, deride
The thunder of the enemy's shot, board boldly
A merchant's ship for prize, though we behold
The desperate gunner ready to give fire
And blow the deck up? Wherefore shake we off
Those scrupulous rags of charity and conscience,
Invented only to keep churchmen warm,
Or feed the hungry mouths of famished beggars,

But, when we touch the shore, to wallow in
All sensual pleasures? (1.3.42-53)¹⁵⁶

Grimaldi's creedal devotion to "sensual pleasures" and his disparaging comments about charity and conscience are in keeping with the Jesuit Francisco's earlier description of him as a "debauched villain" (1.1.109) who had committed blasphemy in St. Mark's in Venice, and who had stolen the nobleman Vitelli's sister Paulina and sold her into slavery to the Turks (1.1.109-117). All of these elements show that Grimaldi does indeed live up to his title as a renegado, a "person who deserts, betrays, or is disloyal to an organization, country, or set of principles," or, more particularly, "an apostate; *esp.* a Christian who converts to Islam" (*OED*. "Renegado, *n.* and *adj.*" def. 1.a. and 2). Grimaldi is traitorous both politically and religiously, and as he presents himself at the beginning of the play, his primary devotion is to selfish pleasure.

Grimaldi's independent nature, however, eventually leads him into trouble with his employers, the Turks, when he recklessly argues with an already incensed Asambeg, the Viceroy of Tunis. He insults the Turkish troops and allies, and describes the Knights of Malta by stating, "I have ever found them, / As provident to direct and bold to do / As any trained up in your discipline" (2.5.70-72). Unable to curb his sensual appetites, it is little surprise that Grimaldi is unable to control his tongue, and his ensuing punishment includes the confiscation of his ships and goods, as well as strictures barring him from theft, alcohol, and women. The result of this loss breaks Grimaldi's spirit, driving him to declare, "I have forgot / I e'er had ireful fierceness, a steeled heart, / Insensible of

¹⁵⁶ Philip Massinger, *The Renegado*.

compassion to others” (3.2.35-37). This broken spirit and loss of temporal goods lead the renegado to consider repentance, but he finds that,

Look upward

I dare not, for should it but be believed

That I—dyed deep in hell’s most horrid colours—

Should dare to hope for mercy, it would leave

No check or feeling in men innocent

To catch at sins the Devil ne’er taught mankind yet.

No, I must downward, downward! Though repentance

Could borrow all the glorious wings of grace,

My mountainous weight of sins would crack their pinions. (3.2.63-71)

Grimaldi recognizes the enormity of his sins, and sinking into despair, he resolves to kill himself (3.2.91-98). Like Claudius in *Hamlet*, Grimaldi expresses a desire to repent, but finds that there are several substantial barriers: he is deeply attached to his sins, and he doubts the efficacy of repentance as a means of attaining forgiveness. As a sharp contrast with the vengeful Hamlet happening upon Claudius, however, it is the Jesuit Francisco who overhears Grimaldi, and after urging the Boatswain to restrain him from suicide, determines, “I’ll provide / A lodging for him, and apply such cures / To his wounded conscience as heaven hath lent me. / He’s now my second care; and my profession / Binds me to teach the desperate to repent” (3.2.100-104). While also working with Vitelli to free his kidnapped sister and convert Donusa to Christianity, Francisco embraces his role as a confessor and guide for the repentant sinner.

Francisco's role as a confessor and spiritual counselor proves to be entirely necessary for Grimaldi to repent successfully of his sins. The renegade's conscience is plagued by the memory and recognition of the gravity of his plundering and rapine, and he repeatedly wishes that he might make restitution of some sort to those whom he had wronged: "Oh, with what willingness would I give up / My liberty to those that I have pillaged" (4.1.53-54). Grimaldi is fully cognizant of the social ramifications of his sin, and in desiring to repent, he recognizes that he is obligated to make satisfaction to those whom he had wronged. As the Master and Boatswain of Grimaldi's crew observe, however, it is the sacrilege that Grimaldi committed in Venice that weighs most heavily upon his conscience and pushes him towards despair. Furthermore, the sacrilegious act of running up to the altar and throwing the consecrated hosts upon the ground was committed while Francisco was the celebrant, and was done during a penitential moment when the congregation of St. Mark's was "full of tears and groaned beneath the weight / Of past offences, of whose heavy burden / They came to be absolved and freed" (4.1.24-26). Grimaldi had not simply committed sacrilege, but he had attacked the community's most central and valued ritual, and he had mocked and abused the forms of repentance and absolution that the Catholic Church offers. How, then, could he later repent? Like Claudius in *Hamlet*, Grimaldi is unable to accomplish transformative repentance on his own; instead, the audience learns from the Master of Grimaldi's crew that Francisco "promised / To use some holy and religious finesse" (4.1.44-45). This finesse takes the dramatic form of Francisco's entering "*in a cope like a bishop*," a stage direction which emphasizes the sacerdotal role of Francisco in relation to the penitent sinner. Grimaldi's response to the sight is a deeply felt reawakening of his penitent spirit:

In this reverend habit—
 All that I am turned into eyes—I look on
 A deed of mine so fiendlike that repentance—
 Though with my tears I taught the sea new tides—
 Can never wash off. All my thefts, my rapes,
 Are venial trespasses compared to what
 I offered to that shape—and in a place, too,
 Where I stood bound to kneel to't. (*Kneels.*) (4.1.73-80)

Grimaldi's confession of guilt leads him to kneel before the priestly figure of Francisco, and, directly referencing the Catholic words of absolution—*ego te absolvo*—Francisco responds, "'Tis forgiven. / I—with his tongue whom, in these sacred vestments, / With impure hands thou didst offend—pronounce it. / I bring peace to thee" (4.1.80-83).

Francisco pronounces forgiveness both as the person whom Grimaldi had wronged during his sacrilegious rampage in St. Mark's, and as the priest, acting *in persona Christi*, forgiving Grimaldi of the sin of the sacrilege. Francisco's forgiveness of Grimaldi incorporates both the social and spiritual traditions of the sacrament of confession. After pronouncing forgiveness, however, Francisco emphasizes another element that is lacking in Claudius' attempt at repentance. Alluding to the debate concerning faith and works in the Reformation, Francisco urges Grimaldi to "zealous undertakings" (4.1.87) as a means of accomplishing a true repentance and correction of his erring ways. Grimaldi effusively responds to his absolution, "What celestial balm / I feel now poured into my wounded conscience! / What penance is there I'll not undergo...Can good deeds redeem me? / I will rise up a wonder to the world, / When I have given strong proofs of how I am

altered” (4.1.88-99). In a striking contrast with Claudius’ frustrated statement after his attempt at prayer, “My words fly up, my thoughts remain below. / Words without thoughts never to heaven go” (3.3.97-98), Grimaldi is delighted by the salve that his conscience feels, and he follows Francisco’s exhortations to change his future actions. Importantly, these future actions include saving the Christians—specifically Vitelli, Paulina, and Donusa—by helping them escape from the Turks. In liberating Paulina, whom he had sold into slavery, Grimaldi makes proper restitution to the community that he had harmed, and he does so under the guidance of his spiritual counselor Francisco.

Grimaldi’s resolve to do penance and good deeds is reminiscent of the relationship between the titular character of the medieval morality play *Everyman*, and his companion Good Deeds.¹⁵⁷ In this play, Good Deeds is bound to the ground by Everyman’s sins, until Knowledge leads Everyman to Confession. Everyman is instructed to “Kneel down and ask mercy,”¹⁵⁸ and Confession declares, “a precious jewel I will give thee, / Called penance, voider of adversity” (ll. 557-558). Having knelt before Confession, Everyman, like Grimaldi, embraces his penance, and expresses joy in his repentant state: “Thanked be God for his gracious work, / For now I will my penance begin. / This hath rejoiced and lighted my heart, / Though the knots be painful and hard within” (573-576). Everyman subsequently dons the Garment of Contrition (ll. 636-650). Massinger’s presentation of Grimaldi’s reception of the sacrament of confession follows this Catholic tradition regarding repentance, and it clearly echoes the sentiments and form of penance in *Everyman* and in the outline that Richard Whitford had written some

¹⁵⁷ For a more extended consideration of *Everyman* and the relationship between penance and community, see chapter 1.

¹⁵⁸ *Three Late Medieval Morality Plays*, line 543.

hundred years before in his *A Werke for Householders*. In both Whitford's and Massinger's works, auricular confession is performed, while kneeling, to a priest who is acting in his office as an *alter Christus*. Both emphasize the sacerdotal and sacramental elements of repentance. Similarly, Massinger's *The Renegado* fits entirely within the understanding of the sacrament of penance as it is discussed in the fourteenth session of the Council of Trent.¹⁵⁹ Grimaldi expresses sincere contrition, makes his confession to an ordained priest, and successfully performs the satisfaction that he is given by his confessor. Grimaldi's repentance proves beneficial to the entire Christian community, in contrast to the destruction of the community that comes about as a result of Claudius' failure to repent. Along with this impact upon community life, the central distinctions between the repentances of Claudius and Grimaldi relate to the status of repentance as a sacrament, and the role of the confessor in guiding, counseling, and absolving the penitent sinner.

Habitual Sin, Penance, and the Community

Paul Stegner has argued that "*Hamlet* engages the changes in confessional practices by presenting both Catholic and Protestant confessional rites as offering the promise of consolation and reconciliation and indicating that these promises cannot be realized in the theological world of the play."¹⁶⁰ Indeed, Claudius' attempt at repentance in Protestant terms is a potent contrast to the ghost's clear references to the sacrament of confession and the existence of Purgatory. However, *Hamlet* does not depict anything

¹⁵⁹ For a thorough discussion of penance and defined by the Council of Trent, see chapter 2.

¹⁶⁰ Paul Stegner, "'Try what repentance can': *Hamlet*, Confession, and the Extraction of Interiority," 106.

resembling the Catholic rite of confession. Moreover, Roland Mushat Frye maintains that the character Hamlet is explicitly Protestant in his attitude toward confession, particularly when urging his mother to repent. As he writes, “That last scene of the third act is a brilliant dramatization of the Protestant conception of individual confession.”¹⁶¹ If Hamlet assumes aspects of the role of a confessor, as Stegner argues, he is only performing a shallow imitation of the sacramental efficacy of a priest’s role in the traditional rites. In fact, the repeated combination of eavesdropping with the admission of guilt that occurs in *Hamlet* serves to emphasize the actual absence of the priest: there is no one in Denmark who can absolve, only those who can revenge. Claudius too follows the Reformers’ understanding of penance, and his failure to repent raises challenging questions about the forgiveness or comfort that such theological conceptions offer. The only priest in *Hamlet* appears at Ophelia’s burial, and his pointed and grudging statement that “great command o’ersways the order” (5.1.210) is a clear reference to governmental control of religious practice—a theme that would be deeply resonant to all English Christians who had lived under Mary or Elizabeth.¹⁶² When describing the relationship between faith and repentance, Martin Luther wrote that “wherever faith is found, the certainty of punishment causes contrition, and the trustworthiness of [God’s] promises is the means of consolation; and through this faith a man merits forgiveness of sin.”¹⁶³ Luther insists that faith accomplishes adequate repentance, reiterating that God “is

¹⁶¹ Roland Mushat Frye, “Prince Hamlet and the Protestant Confessional,” 38.

¹⁶² Stephen Greenblatt similarly observes that the scene of Ophelia’s burial is a definite allusion to the English religious debates concerning burial practices, writing, “The proper funeral that is being invoked here (and partially denied Ophelia) seems far closer to the full Catholic ritual of interment, with the ringing of bells and attendant ceremonies, than to the simple burial for which zealous Protestants were calling. And it is clear from this and the subsequent exchange that what is at stake is not only the communal social judgment upon Ophelia, suspected of suicide, but also the communal ritual assistance given to the dead by the living—that is, the requiem masses and other ‘charitable prayers’ designed to shorten the soul’s purgatorial suffering” (*Hamlet in Purgatory*, 246).

¹⁶³ Martin Luther, *Selections from His Writings*, 317.

propitiated only by faith in the contrite heart.”¹⁶⁴ Claudius demonstrates a definite faith, at least in so far as he never doubts the existence of God, and he expresses some degree of contrition, yet Shakespeare depicts him as unsatisfied, unassured of salvation, and as deeply attached to his sins after his penitential prayer as he was before he attempted it. In portraying this central problem of repentance—particularly for those deeply attached to a sin or the fruits of sin—Shakespeare indicates the need for exterior guides beyond those required by the Church of England. This, we might say, is particularly true when the sins are of a public nature, and when the course of repenting and making satisfaction includes a severe humbling of oneself before the community. Might Claudius have successfully repented if, instead of rushing off to private prayer, he had sought a priest or minister who could guide, admonish, and perhaps absolve him?

Massinger too depicts the problems of repentance and assurance, but in *The Renegado*, he stresses the role of the priest both in fulfilling the formal element of absolution in the sacrament of confession, and in guiding the penitent through his contrition and subsequent devotion to a changed life of good works that rectifies his relationship to his community. Joshua Mabie has observed that in contrast to two other early modern plays that deal with a Christian converting to Islam—Robert Darborne’s *A Christian Turned Turk* (1612) and Thomas Heywood’s *The Fair Maid of the West* (1631)—Massinger’s play “challenges rigid notions of the permanence of turning Turk by opening up the possibility of both partial and complete prodigal return.”¹⁶⁵ Yet, surely, the striking point is not only that Grimaldi is able to repent successfully, but also the way

¹⁶⁴ Ibid, pp. 323.

¹⁶⁵ Joshua Mabie, “The Problem of the Prodigal in *The Fair Maid of the West*, *A Christian Turned Turk*, and *The Renegado*,” 308.

in which he accomplishes this repentance. The renegade in Robert Daborne's *A Christian Turned Turk*, for example, does refer to his troubled conscience, but when he is interrupted by his one-time rival Francisco, who seeks to help him, he despairs instead of repenting.¹⁶⁶ It is quite possible that Massinger is consciously responding to Daborne's *The Fair Maid of the West* in his use of the name Francisco, as both Franciscos have previous relationships with the renegades, but Massinger pointedly distinguished his character by emphasizing the priest's necessary role in assisting the penitent and performing sacramental rites. Grimaldi is successful in repenting precisely because he is guided by a priest; the external requirements beyond repentant prayer provide the necessary pressure to break Grimaldi free from his sinful attachments and drive him to seek to make satisfaction with the Christian community that he had so seriously wronged. Thus, while the outcomes of Claudius' and Grimaldi's efforts at repentance are dramatically different, both Shakespeare and Massinger explore the difficulties of repentance in the context of habitual sin and its social ramifications; the substantial changes in the theological understanding of repentance during the Reformation occasioned problems of conscience and assurance that both playwrights found rich in dramatic material. Between Hamlet's troubled recognition that "conscience does make cowards of us all" (*Hamlet*, 3.1.85) and Francisco's resolution to "apply such cures / To [Grimaldi's] wounded conscience as heaven hath lent me" (*The Renegado*, 3.2.101-102), we find some of the deeply human troubles, and perhaps some of the hopes, associated with the forms of repentance that were debated and staged in early modern England.

¹⁶⁶ Robert Daborne, *A Christian Turned Turk*, in *Three Turk Plays from Early Modern England: Selimus, A Christian Turned Turk, and The Renegado*. Ward, the renegade, declares, "could I redeem the time, / The world should speak my penitence. / Could I call back but one seven years / Though all my life were servile after, / Were my soul but free / From innocent blood and fearful blasphemy, / On the condition I might live an age / Tortured upon a wheel" (13.142-149). Rather than repent, he despairs and resolves upon revenge.

Chapter IV: Corrupt Community and Corrupt Penitent in *The Jew of Malta*, *The Revenger's Tragedy*, and *The White Devil*

In *Doctor Faustus*, Mephistopheles' responds to Faustus' question, "How comes it then that thou art out of hell?" (1.3.74) with the quick but striking statement, "Why this is hell, nor am I out of it" (1.3.75). He proceeds to explain that having lost the beatific vision, he is constantly tormented, regardless of where he physically or spiritually appears to be. In Book IV of *Paradise Lost*, Milton's Satan expresses a similar condition of eternal torment as he looks on Eden. Prompted by the beauty of Eden, Satan's "conscience wakes despair, / that slumbered, wakes the bitter memory / Of what he was, what is, and what must be."¹⁶⁷ Satan's despair involves both the knowledge of his past rebellion as well as his refusal to repent. Echoing Mephistopheles, he declares in a soliloquy that is reminiscent of an examination of conscience,

Me miserable! Which way shall I fly
Infinite wrath, and infinite despair?
Which way I fly is hell; myself am hell;
And in the lowest deep a lower deep
Still threatening to devour me opens wide,
To which the hell I suffer seems a heaven.

¹⁶⁷ John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, IV.10.

O, then, at last relent: is there no place

Left for repentance, none for pardon left? (IV.73-80)

Hell exists within Satan, so while he leaves the burning lake in Book 1 of *Paradise Lost*, he never truly escapes from the torment and despair of damnation. Satan feels this torment particularly sharply when gazing on the beauty of Eden, and though he is led to an initial thought of repentance, Satan understands that he will never choose to humble himself, musing that he can only repent “by submission; and that word / Disdain forbids me, and my dread of shame / Among the spirits beneath, whom I seduced... They little know / How dearly I abide that boast so vain, / Under what torments inwardly I groan; / While they adore me on the throne of hell” (IV.81-89). Notably, Satan’s resolve to never repent does not only have to do with humbling himself to God, but also because of the public shame that he would feel in the face of the fallen angels. Here, then, is a particularly striking illustration of the important relationship between penance and community. Satan’s evil community of fallen angels acts as a profound obstacle for repentance, inverting the proper help that a community ought to provide to one attempting to repent. Satan’s pride is, of course, the primary reason for his fall and his refusal to repent, but he also explicitly nominates his community as a further anchor in his attachment to sin.

This reference to community does not end Satan’s reflections, as he further considers, “But say I could repent, and could obtain / By act of grace, my former state; how soon / Would height recall high thoughts, how soon unsay / What feigned submission swore? ...never can true reconciliation grow / Where wounds of deadly hate have pierced so deep” (IV.93-99). In a demonic combination of perceptive reason

subjected to overpowering passion, Satan is consumed with such hatred for the good that while he understands repentance as a possible choice, he also understands that it is one he will never choose. The hate that precludes the possibility of repentance is entirely within himself, but he remains dedicated to it none the less. It is this deep devotion to hate—the antithesis of God’s essential charity—that finally leads to Satan’s infamous creed: “So farewell hope, and with hope farewell fear, / Farewell remorse: all good to me is lost; / Evil be thou my good” (IV.108-110). Driven by sin and his community, Satan not only refuses to repent, but moves in the opposite direction, recommitting himself to evil.

The corruption of community remains a theme throughout the rest of *Paradise Lost*, as when Satan first beholds Adam and Eve, he declares to himself, “League with you I seek, / And mutual amity, so strait, so close, / That I with you must dwell, or you with me, / Henceforth...Hell shall unfold, / To entertain you two...there will be room, / Not like these narrow limits, to receive / Your numerous offspring” (IV.375-385). Satan seeks union with them through sin, falsely suggesting that this will be a new “mutual amity.” But the fact that sin leads to the destruction of community is also apparent in *Paradise Lost*, contradicting Satan’s speech. Indeed, after Adam and Eve fall, they angrily argue with one another several times (IX.1065-1189), and when Satan returns to Hell to tell the fallen angels of his success, they turn into serpents, and are unable to congratulate him (X.504-577).¹⁶⁸ Milton, then, not only shows that an evil community proves to be a substantial problem for someone who considers repentance, but he also demonstrates the destructive tendencies within a community so dedicated to sin. Sin will,

¹⁶⁸ When Satan announces to Hell his success, Milton writes, “a while he stood, expecting / Their universal shout, and high applause, / To fill his ear; when, contrary, he hears / On all sides, from innumerable tongues, / A dismal universal hiss, the sound / Of public scorn” (X.504-509). Indicative of the perfect devolution of community, even in success Satan cannot be congratulated, and he hears the “sound of public scorn” which he had feared when considering repentance.

finally, destroy community entirely. Observing this emphasis in *Paradise Lost*, Anthony Low writes, “The problem, for Milton as for modernity in general, arises from the absence of mediation and subsidiarity in the society he envisages. The Middle Ages...were rich in mediating institutions and overlapping communities...The people of that time had a more communal sense of prayer and reconciliation, especially of intercessory prayer for others.”¹⁶⁹ The loss of those mediating institutions, including the sacrament of penance, proved threatening to community life, and Low argues that “although Milton was certainly an individualist by instinct and conviction, his poetry also reveals that he feared the isolation and loneliness entailed by fallen subjectivity.”¹⁷⁰ In *Paradise Lost*, this isolation is the result of sin and a vicious community, and is readily apparent in Satan’s solitary journey to Eden and many soliloquies.

Yet in contrast to this destructive element of a vicious community, Milton also depicts the fruits of repentance, as Adam and Eve pray at the conclusion of Book X for forgiveness. Whereas at the end of Book IX, Adam and Eve violently argue with one another, their repentance in Book X restores harmony (X.1097-1104; XI.136-180), and Eve signals their new unity through repentance by declaring to Adam her intention that, “I never from thy side henceforth to stray” (XI.176). As this and the next chapter will demonstrate, the vexed but deep relationship that Milton depicts among sin, community, and repentance was a topic that was also repeatedly explored on the early modern stage by a variety of playwrights. In Marlowe’s *The Jew of Malta*, Middleton’s *The Revenger’s Tragedy*, and Webster’s *The White Devil*, we find three communities that are deeply corrupt and filled with vice. This corruption leads directly to abuses and manipulations of

¹⁶⁹ Anthony Low, *Aspects of Subjectivity: Society and Individuality from the Middle Ages to Shakespeare and Milton*, 173-174.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid*, 171.

penitential forms, and inhibits rather than encourages sincere repentance for sin. Individuals are not able to be reconciled with these corrupt communities, and indeed, the vicious tendencies within the communities discourage even a spiritual reconciliation with God.

The Jew of Malta

Christopher Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*, discussed in chapter 1, is intimately concerned with the difficulties surrounding repentance for the individual sinner. Faustus' sins separate him from the normal bonds of society, and in that separation, he finds himself unable to accomplish meaningful or transformative penance. In Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta*, however, we find a complex presentation of both sincere and feigned moments of repentance, and the play depicts the enormously troubled relationship among the unrepentant offender, the Church, and an unjust community. Like the presentation of Jews in much of early modern English literature, Marlowe's Barabas stands outside, and has a deeply antagonistic relationship with, the general Christian community. At the opening of the play, however, the Christians are shown to be in desperate need of Barabas' wealth in order to pay the heavy taxes imposed upon them by their Turkish rulers. In seizing Barabas' goods, the governor Ferneze states, "we take particularly thine / To save the ruin of a multitude; / And better one want for a common good / Than many perish for a private man."¹⁷¹ Barabas is offered as a sacrifice for the community with which he is not religiously or socially connected. This dependency of the community upon a person who is apart from and opposed to itself complicates Barabas' later brutalities. Furthermore, the community's need for a sacrifice to cleanse or free itself is

¹⁷¹ Christopher Marlowe, *The Jew of Malta*, 1.2.97-100.

an important and revealing factor. As Ferneze declares to Barabas and the other Jews, “through our sufferance of your hateful lives, / Who stand accursed in the sight of heaven, / These taxes and afflictions are befall’n” (1.2.63-65). The governor blames the presence of the Jews for Malta’s misfortune, and treats his seizure of their goods as a purgative measure. When, in the opening scene of *The Jew of Malta*, Barabas mentions his daughter Abigail, “whom I hold as dear / As Agamemnon did his Iphigen” (1.1.136-137), this ominous reference to the purgative sacrifice of one’s daughter foreshadows both Barabas’ loss of wealth and the eventual death of Abigail, and mirrors Ferneze’s attitude towards Barabas. Indeed, as Dena Goldberg suggests concerning the seizure of Barabas’ wealth, “The ills of the community are due to some source of pollution in its midst and only the exculpation of that evil will restore general well-being. While Iphigeneia is admittedly a substitute for the transgressors, Barabas, Ferneze asserts, is the real thing, the polluting element itself.”¹⁷² Barabas is a problem because he lives in close proximity with the community, but is antagonistic towards it. His sacrificial loss of wealth, however, does not prove cathartic, but rather redoubles Barabas’ determination to work evil upon the Christians. Goldberg writes, “the roles of Barabas and Ferneze constitute an inversion of what local mythology would lead the audience to expect. The Jew has replaced the Christian as sacrificial victim.”¹⁷³ But as an unwilling victim, Barabas is further motivated to destroy the society that has harmed him.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷² Dena Goldberg, “Sacrifice in Marlowe’s *The Jew of Malta*,” 234.

¹⁷³ *Ibid*, 236.

¹⁷⁴ Troni Y. Grande discusses the theme of the “scapegoat” in her work *Marlovian Tragedy: The Play of Dilation*. She writes, “Barabas chiefly prevents tragic catharsis through his evocative role as ironic scapegoat, through which Marlowe parodies the Judeo-Christian notion of atonement and redemption” (142).

Barabas' ensuing course of revenge includes inciting the governor Ferneze's son Lodowick and his friend Mathias to kill each other, killing his daughter and the entire convent that she had entered when she converted, murdering two priests who find out about his deeds, and facilitating the Turks in the sacking of the city. His vengeful deeds are clearly directed in some cases at the political side of the community, and in some cases at the religious side. Barabas' determination to destroy the city is reminiscent of Satan's determination in *Paradise Lost* to bring about the fall from Eden; in both cases, an absolute animosity towards the community motivates the characters. Barabas' assault upon the community is concerned not merely with the external features of community, but with the interior, spiritual elements as well. Indeed, as the Prologue character Machiavel famously states, "I count religion but a childish toy, / And hold there is no sin but ignorance" (Prologue, 14-15). Barabas' utter separation from his community has led scholars to see him as a representation of Gnostic attitudes, and to conclude that "Marlowe criticizes the desire for Gnostic transcendence and demonstrates, in Barabas's murderous assault on family, friends, and enemies, that gnosis may lead to a dangerous feeling of superiority not only to material circumstances but other humans as well."¹⁷⁵ This, indeed, is a true separation from one's community, and when Barabas himself quotes Terence with the line, "Ego mihi sum semper proximus" ('My own affairs are my chief concern,' 1.1.188), the audience is likely to see not only that Barabas stands apart from his community due to his religion, but also that he is consumed by a proud, possibly Gnostic, self-serving attitude that trumps even family ties.

¹⁷⁵ Roger E. Moore, "'I'll Rouse My Senses, and Awake Myself': Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta* and the Renaissance Gnostic Tradition," 38.

If Barabas' separation from his community is reminiscent of Marlowe's other great solitary character Doctor Faustus, so too *The Jew of Malta*, like *Doctor Faustus*, is concerned with certain problems related to repentance. In *The Jew of Malta*, however, Marlowe focuses the audience's attention upon the differences between sincere and insincere repentance, and the difficulties that arise when an already unjust community is manipulated by the outward show of piety. Sincere repentance, conversion, and confession are displayed by Abigail, Barabas' daughter. Disillusioned with her father and his religion after her forced role in the deaths of Lodowick and Mathias, Abigail summons the friar Jacomo, asking to be admitted into a convent. He admonishes her that she had insincerely expressed such a wish before, and she responds, "Then were my thoughts so frail and unconfirmed, / And I was chained to follies of the world. / But now experience, purchased with grief, / Has made me see the difference of things. / My sinful soul, alas, hath paced too long / The fatal labyrinth of misbelieve" (3.3.64-70). Abigail enters the convent in a penitential spirit, guided by a friar who insists that her conversion must be sincere and unwavering.

Abigail's penitential retreat is short lived, however, as Barabas poisons the entire convent. The two friars Jacomo and Bernardine rush to the convent to hear the last confessions of the nuns, and find Abigail slowly dying. Bernardine hears her confession, and she states,

Be you my ghostly father: and first know
That in this house I lived religiously,
Chaste, and devout, much sorrowing for my sins.
But ere I came—...

I did offend high heaven so grievously

As I am almost desperate for my sins;

And one offense torments me more than all. (3.6.12-19)

Abigail, making her last confession, admits to her role in her father's plan to have Lodowick and Mathias kill each other. Despite the fact that she was acting according to her father's commands, Abigail's contrite recognition of her misdeeds makes her "almost desperate," and she concludes her confession saying, "To work my peace, this I confess to thee. / Reveal it not, for then my father dies" (3.6.31-32). After Bernardine reassures her concerning the seal of the confessional, she utters her last words, "Death seizeth on my heart. Ah, gentle friar! / Convert my father that he may be saved, / And witness that I die a Christian" (3.6.38-40). These final words are important, for they unify the themes of repentance and community in *The Jew of Malta*; Abigail was spiritually troubled by her past sins and thus confesses them, but her final declaration shows her penitential desire to be united with the Christian faith and community, and extends that desire in her hoped-for conversion of Barabas. This confessional scene is explicitly Catholic; unlike Claudius' solitary penitential prayers in *Hamlet*, Abigail contritely confesses to a priest, and seeks reconciliation with both the community and God by this means.

Despite the sincerity of Abigail's repentance and conversion, the signs of corruption in the community that she so wished to be a part of are readily apparent in the friar Bernardine's response to her, directly following her declaration that she dies a Christian. He states, "Ay, and a virgin, too. That grieves me most" (3.6.41). Playing on popular anti-Catholic polemics depicting priests using confession as a means of

seduction,¹⁷⁶ Marlowe reinforces the presentation of Maltese society as unjust and full of vice. Abigail, sincerely repentant for her sins, and seeking to lead an amended life, becomes an object of lust for the representative of the Church. Her final wish, that Bernardine should attempt to convert her father, rings hollow after the friar's own character is shown to be filled with licentiousness. And indeed, when the friars are later led to believe that Barabas is converting and will donate his wealth to one of the monastic communities, they are also shown to be utterly avaricious. As Fred Tromly argues, "as the play progressively makes clear, Barabas cares less about his wealth than do Malta's Christians...covetous as Barabas may be, most of the Christians turn out to be worse, being at least as greedy and far less intelligent."¹⁷⁷ The representatives of the Church in *The Jew of Malta* are shown to have the same vices as the general population and as Barabas, but their offenses are all the more reprehensible because they abuse the power that they are entrusted with, including the power to hear confessions and absolve sins.

It is precisely this failing in the friars that Barabas exploits, as they approach him with the accusation of murder that was learned from Abigail's confession. Bernardine addresses Barabas, "Stay, wicked Jew! Repent, I say, and stay!" (4.1.26). Again, Marlowe emphasizes the theme of repentance, combining it with wicked ministers of the Church and community. Bernardine reveals what he learned from Abigail, and Barabas responds,

[*aside to Ithamore*] She has confessed and we are both undone.

[*Aloud*] My bosom inmates! [*Aside*] But I must dissemble.

[*Aloud*] Oh, holy friars, the burden of my sins

¹⁷⁶ See Note 1, page 327, *English Renaissance Drama: A Norton Anthology*.

¹⁷⁷ Fred Tromly, *Playing with Desire: Christopher Marlowe and the Art of Tantalization*, 98-99.

Lie heavy on my soul. Then, pray you, tell me:
Is't not too late now to turn Christian?
I have been zealous in the Jewish faith,
Hard-hearted to the poor, a covetous wretch...
But what is wealth?
I am a Jew, and therefore am I lost.
Would penance serve for this my sin,
I could afford to whip myself to death— (4.1.50-63)

Barabas, quickly discerning the grasping nature of his accusers, feigns repentance, and expresses a wish to follow his daughter and “turn Christian.” The insincerity of his desire, however, contrasts starkly with the sincere repentance voiced by Abigail in the immediately preceding scene. Marlowe sets these two moments of repentance, one truthful and the other deceitful, in direct succession as a powerful juxtaposition that demonstrates the difficulty of discerning the veracity of penitential words and actions. Barabas, just like his daughter, speaks of joining the Christian faith and community, but unlike his daughter, he comprehends that the community itself, and particularly the Church’s representatives, are deeply corrupt. Barabas’ utterly false repentance—including his stated desire “To fast, to pray, and wear a shirt of hair, / And on my knees creep to Jerusalem” (4.1.65-66)—convinces Giacomo and Bernardine, who consequently attempt to outbid each other in their efforts to secure Barabas’ fortune for their particular religious houses. In their excitement, they ignore the obvious fact that Barabas’ expressions of repentance are couched in rhetorical excesses, and his resolve to murder both of them falls upon unsuspecting friars blinded by his false repentance and their own

avariciousness. Their vice is met by vice, and the injustice of the Maltese community is matched by the cruelty and cunning of the alien figure outside that community, Barabas, who makes particular use of penitential sentiments to manipulate his interlocutors.

What, then, is the understanding of repentance in *The Jew of Malta*? Abigail truly repents, and dies virtuously, while Barabas falsely repents, and when he finally dies, does so cursing: “Damned Christian dogs and Turkish infidels!...Die, life! Fly, soul! Tongue, curse thy fill and die!” (5.5.85-88). Like Faustus, Barabas dies cursing. And while Abigail, through her conversion, seems to have entered into the community, in fact her virtue sets her apart from the anger, lust, and desire for wealth that primarily describe Maltese society in the play. In a wonderful if deeply ironic twist, it is Barabas who, without ever attempting to become part of the Christian community, most closely embodies the values held by Malta, and fittingly becomes the governor of the island through his betrayal of it.¹⁷⁸ Indeed, Barabas recognizes the similarity between his own abuse of power and self-serving attitude and those of the Maltese when, as the governor, he meditates upon the Christians and Turks, saying, “Thus, loving neither, will I live with both, / Making a profit of my policy; / And he from whom my most advantage comes / Shall be my friend. / This is the life we Jews are used to lead, / And reason, too, for Christians do the like” (5.2.111-114). Barabas embodies all that is worst in Malta, and his rise to power and final downfall is representative of the general danger to a society that has become corrupt. Matthew Prosner, developing aspects of Stephen Greenblatt’s arguments, observes, “the conflict in *The Jew of Malta* is between an individual and

¹⁷⁸ As Patrick Cheney has also noted, Barabas “represents the symmetrical, inverted figure of the king” (*Marlowe’s Counterfeit Profession*, 149).

society which negatively mirror each other, the society being the defining force.”¹⁷⁹ If a community is constituted of selfish individuals who, even when given the power of the Church, pursue lives of vice, the community itself will suffer from both interior and exterior threats. The one important contrast to such corruption in *The Jew of Malta* is Abigail, whose sincere repentance and efforts to lead a holy life are unacceptable for both her father and the community; it is fitting, then, that she dies, since the very representatives of the Church use her confession for personal gain. In this context, while repentance is shown to be important for Abigail’s spiritual life as well as her desire to be rectified with the community, it is also shown to be easily abused, both by a feigning penitent and by the absolving priest. Marlow’s play indicates that while repentance is indeed important for the life of the community, its dual roles within the Church and society make it particularly vulnerable to abuse, especially when society or the Church is corrupt.

The Revenger’s Tragedy

Thomas Middleton’s *The Revenger’s Tragedy* is, as the title would lead one to believe, a work firmly within the tradition of Renaissance revenge dramas. However, in its presentation of a deeply corrupt society—a society in which both the government and the family are shown to collapse—Middleton’s play raises several of the same questions that audiences find in Marlowe’s *The Jew of Malta* and that Milton later depicts in *Paradise Lost*. How does repentance rectify an individual’s relationship to society if the society itself is unjust or corrupt? And in what ways is repentance then susceptible to

¹⁷⁹ Matthew Prosner, *The Gift of Fire: Aggression and the Plays of Christopher Marlowe*, 111.

abuse, manipulation, or deception?¹⁸⁰ Vindice, the central character of *The Revenger's Tragedy*, and in certain respects both the hero and villain of the play, tempts and encourages serious sin in both his sister and mother to test them, and subsequently forces a confession and repentance from his mother at knife point. In this respect, Vindice embodies Milton's description of Satan in *Paradise Lost*, as "the tempter ere the accuser of mankind."¹⁸¹ Like Satan, Vindice both tempts and accuses his mother, and is distinct from the demonic figure only in that he actually does seek to make his mother repent. This tempter/confessor character embodies the conflicts within Middleton's drama, for while Vindice seeks to correct horrible wrongs done by the Duke and his family, he becomes utterly bloody, vengeful, and destructive. Indeed, in the opening scene of the play, Vindice enters while holding the skull of his murdered fiancée, who had been poisoned because she would not succumb to the Duke's lustful desires. Traditionally, a skull functioned as a *memento mori*, and the consideration of death that a skull provoked was regarded as an important and valuable point for Christian meditation. As Thomas More writes in his unfinished meditation *The Four Last Things* (c. 1522), "remembering death in this way, pondering the realities of death as such, will work with us to the preservation of our souls from every kind of sin."¹⁸² In *The Revenger's Tragedy*, however, Vindice does not use the skull as a *memento mori* that leads him to virtue. Nor does he, like Hamlet with Yorick's skull, philosophize on the scale of human action and

¹⁸⁰ *The Revenger's Tragedy* is not Middleton's only work that stages repentance. Indeed, Herbert Heller has traced a substantial pattern of the treatment of repentance in Middleton's plays, writing that there is a "general pattern of repentance in Middleton's drama—a revelation of the character's sinfulness (with references to its demonic nature and the character's eternal destiny); a repudiation of that sinfulness; an acknowledgement of divine grace; and, in some plays, a hortatory effort and/or a test of the penitent" and he notes "Middleton's propensity, bordering on compulsion, for restaging and reconsidering repentance across genres and time periods of his career" (*Penitent Brothellers: Grace, Sexuality, and Genre in Thomas Middleton's City Comedies*, 75).

¹⁸¹ John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, IV.10.

¹⁸² Thomas More, *The Four Last Things, The Supplication of Souls, A Dialogue of Conscience*, 36.

life in the face of mortality. Rather, the skull serves as a prompt for revenge and murder, and Vindice uses the skull as his murder weapon when he eventually poisons the Duke.¹⁸³ Just as Vindice both tempts and confesses his mother, his carrying of the skull serves as a reminder of the need to be virtuous while he simultaneously follows a bloody course of murder.

Central to the problematic nature of Vindice's actions throughout *The Revenger's Tragedy* is his relativism regarding who should be punished and who should be led to repent for their sins. When Vindice's mother, Gratiana, agrees to try to convince her daughter Castiza to sleep with the Duke's son Lussurioso, Vindice is horrified, and later encourages her confession and repentance. Yet Vindice does not seek to encourage repentance in Lussurioso for his lustful pursuits, and instead simply kills him in revenge. While family allegiance and affection partially account for this difference, Vindice's selectiveness in promoting the spiritual good for some and the destruction of others betrays an attitude that is antagonistic towards the community. That is, his appreciation of repentance as a spiritual good is not governed by true charity, for in that case repentance would be seen as something to be encouraged in all people. Vindice's lack of charity might be contrasted with Duke Vincentio in *Measure for Measure* or Malevole in *The Malcontent*, as each of the latter two characters seeks to encourage repentance even in those who had wronged them.¹⁸⁴ Vindice's selective promotion of repentance, on the

¹⁸³ Samuel Schoenbaum has traced parallels between pictorial representations of the Dance of Death and *The Revenger's Tragedy*, and in following this aspect of the *memento mori* theme in Middleton's play, he concludes, "*The Revenger's Tragedy*, as well as the later woodcuts and etchings of the Danse Macabre, is an intensely personal drama of death's triumph" ("*The Revenger's Tragedy*: Jacobean Dance of Death," 204).

¹⁸⁴ I discuss both *Measure for Measure* and *The Malcontent* in chapter 6.

other hand, illustrates an anti-communal attitude towards penance that echoes the isolated and destructive presentation of confession in Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta*.

In a series of lectures delivered at Oxford in 1647, Robert Sanderson begins his ninth lecture by stating that prayer is performed for both spiritual and social ends. He declares,

*That the ultimate end of the Laws, is the good of the commonality, or the public peace and tranquility; This is proved first from those very words of the Apostle, that we may live a quiet & peaceable life. The Apostle doth here exhort, that both privately, but especially in publick Congregations...Requests, Prayers, and Supplications, with thanksgivings, may be made, as first for all men in general, out of Charity, and in order to a spiritual end, viz. Eternal happiness in the life to come...and in order to a Temporal end, to wit, external felicity in this present life.*¹⁸⁵

In this lecture, Sanderson considers the role of law in society, and whether lawgivers can command and enforce virtue, since he regards law as concerned with both temporal and spiritual ends. In the passage above, however, Sanderson clearly conceives of prayer in the same way; a healthy spiritual life not only benefits the individual, but is conducive to a healthy society. When this understanding is contrasted with Vindice's approach to virtue and repentance in *The Revenger's Tragedy*, however, the destructiveness of his selective encouragement of virtue becomes all the more apparent. Vindice does not seek the good of the community, though he is in fact destroying much that is evil in it. Rather, Vindice's own course of action is murderous and treasonous enough that when, at the

¹⁸⁵ Robert Sanderson, *Several Cases of Conscience Discussed in Ten Lectures in the Divinity School at Oxford*.

conclusion of the play, the honest gentleman Antonio assumes the vacant throne, he orders Vindice and his brother to be taken and executed, declaring, “How subtly was that murder closed! Bear up / Those tragic bodies; ‘tis a heavy season. / Pray heaven their blood may wash away all treason.”¹⁸⁶ Vindice, in murdering all of the evil people in the state, had himself become a great threat and problem within the community. As J. L. Simmons observes, “Vindice's tragedy is that, while having such a penetrating moral vision of the evil around him, he is infected and duped by that evil when he suits his tongue to the world's desires.”¹⁸⁷ Vindice became part of the evil community that he was destroying—just as Barabas finally came to be representative of the Maltese community—and so rather than having rectified what was wrong, his violent course necessitated that he too must be removed.

When Vindice, disguised as a courtier, is conscripted by Lussurioso to try to seduce Vindice’s own sister for the prince, he is initially horrified, but then considers, “It would not prove the meanest policy / In this disguise to try the faith of both [his sister and mother]; / Another might have had the selfsame office, / Some slave, that would have wrought effectually, / Ay, and perhaps o’erwrought ‘em” (1.3.176-180). In testing his sister and mother, Vindice gains intimate knowledge of their spiritual strengths and weaknesses, and he finds that his sister Castiza is utterly unapproachable, and that she rejects all of Lussurioso’s offers. Delighted, Vindice attempts to convince his mother to urge on Lussurioso’s suit with Castiza. Initially, the mother rejects the proposition, declaring, “Oh, fie, fie! / The riches of the world cannot hire a mother / To such a most unnatural task” (2.1.86-88). Yet Vindice continues to pressure his mother, using great

¹⁸⁶ Thomas Middleton, *The Revenger’s Tragedy*, 5.3.147-149.

¹⁸⁷ J. L. Simmons, “The Tongue and Its Office in *The Revenger’s Tragedy*,” 64.

eloquence, all the while worrying that he might succeed: “[*aside*] I e’en quake to proceed. My spirit turn edge / I fear me she’s unmothered, yet I’ll venture” (2.1.113-114). When his mother finally succumbs, and agrees to try to convince Castiza to sleep with Lussurioso, Vindice declares to himself, “O suff’ring heaven, with thy invisible finger / E’en at this instant turn the precious side / of both mine eyeballs inward, not to see myself” (2.1.131-133). Vindice’s lines show, on the surface, his horror at his mother’s willingness to assist in the seduction of her daughter, but the lines might also be understood to convey Vindice’s partial realization that he himself has become the direct occasion of his mother’s sin. Yet his prayer to heaven is not one made by a sincerely spiritual or prayerful man, as he then assists his mother in attempting, yet again, to convince Castiza to go to Lussurioso.

When his mother and sister leave the stage with Castiza still standing firm, Vindice again meditates upon the spiritual failings of his mother, saying,

Why does not heaven turn black, or with a frown
Undo the world? Why does not earth start up
And strike the sins that treat upon’t? Oh,
Were’t not for gold and women, there would be no damnation;
Hell would look like a lords great kitchen without fire in’t.
But ‘twas decreed before the world began
That they should be the hooks to catch at man. (2.1.255-261).

Amazingly, Vindice takes the fall of his mother as stereotypical evidence that women are the source of sin and temptation of men in the world, echoing Adam’s feckless accusations against Eve after he also eats the forbidden fruit. In an utterly blind and

obtuse manner, Vindice ignores the fact that it was he, himself, who was tempting his mother, and that her fall from virtue was occasioned by his own consciously eloquent efforts to make her fall. This is an important point, for Middleton presents the audience with a character who will later insist upon forcing his mother to repent for her wrongs, but he does so without ever having acknowledged his own role in leading her to sin. What sort of confessor, then, could Vindice possibly be?

After Vindice tempts his mother and sister, repentance becomes an important theme in *The Revenger's Tragedy*. Vindice prays, "Forgive me, heaven, to call my mother wicked" (2.2.98), perhaps indicating a partial recognition of his responsibility. And the Duke, when woken in his bed by Lussurioso, thinks that he is about to be assassinated, and begs, "Oh, take me not in sleep! I have great sins; / I must have days, / Nay, months, dear son, with penitential heaves, / To lift 'em out, and not to die unclear. / Oh, thou wilt kill me both in heaven and here" (2.3.9-13). The Duke's exclamation does not fit within a Calvinist conception of predestination, since he views his salvation as dependent upon his repentance and purgation of his sins.¹⁸⁸ However, the Duke's penitential attitude is only momentary, as he returns to his unjust and lustful ways immediately after he is assured of his safety. Indeed, he even guides the policy of the state according to his sins, as he declares, "It well becomes that judge to nod at crimes / That does commit greater himself and lives. / I may forgive a disobedient error, / That expect pardon for adultery / And in my old days am a youth to lust... My hairs are white, and yet my sins are green" (2.3.125-133). The Duke is not concerned with repentance, as

¹⁸⁸ As D.C. Gundy observes, "To a Jacobean audience, the Duke's unprincipled use of religion as a device to buy time would in itself have been evidence of villainy. To the cognoscenti in the playhouse, however, the nature of the Duke's plea would have seemed more damning than the device itself. For... the old man is using the terminology of Roman Catholic 'works' theology rather than the Protestant language of 'faith.'" ("Tourneur's *The Revenger's Tragedy* II.ii. 216-18," p. 11).

he had been when he was worried about impending death, and his motivation to ignore others' sins stems from an aversion to hypocrisy more than from a desire for virtue. A similar disregard for the true fruits of penance is evident when Vindice and Hippolito murder the Duke in revenge for his poisoning Gloriana. Vindice gloats to the Duke, "now I'll begin / To stick thy soul with ulcers. I will make / Thy spirit grievous sore; it shall not rest, / But, like some pestilent man, toss in thy breast" (3.5.176-179). Vindice is not seeking to create a penitential spirit in the Duke for the good of his soul, as Hamlet had done with his mother, but rather attempts to cause as much pain as possible. In this respect, the incorrect attitude towards repentance that pervades *The Revenger's Tragedy* is clearly connected to the play's presentation of community: the Duke himself abuses his power and speaks of penance only when convenient, and his subjects, including Vindice, follow suit. The corrupt community speaks of penance in entirely self-serving ways, mirroring what we have seen in *The Jew of Malta* and standing as a striking contrast with the more charitable and just uses of penance in *Measure for Measure* and *The Malcontent*.

The only scene in *The Revenger's Tragedy* in which true repentance is shown is when Vindice brings his mother Gratiana to confess and repent of her part in trying to seduce her daughter for Lussurioso. Vindice and Hippolito enter, pointing daggers at Gratiana's heart, declaring that she is a "wicked, unnatural parent" (4.4.3). Irony abounds in the scene, as the mother's wickedness contrasts with the fact that her sons are threatening her life, which could also properly be described as wicked and unnatural. The corruption of the community and the family in *The Revenger's Tragedy* is encapsulated in this scene, as Vindice reveals to his mother that he had been the tempter that led to her

downfall, and as he exhorts her to repent, he simultaneously threatens her. When Gratiana realizes that her sons know everything, she kneels down before them, crying, “Oh, sons, / Forgive me! To myself I’ll prove more true. / You that should honor me, I kneel to you” (4.4.37-39). Middleton presents the audience with a kneeling, confessing penitent, but instead of speaking to a priestly figure, she confesses to her violent, bloody son whose very name Vindice indicates his embodiment of revenge. Gratiana kneels, weeping, and Vindice declares, “I’faith, ‘tis a sweet shower; it does much good. / The fruitful grounds and meadows of her soul / Has been long dry. Pour down, thou blessed dew! / Rise, mother. Troth, this shower has made you higher” (4.4.46-49). Taken out of context, Vindice’s exhortations fit easily within the mold of a conscientious spiritual advisor or confessor, deeply concerned with the spiritual well-being of the kneeling penitent. However, Vindice had already murdered the Duke in revenge, and is in the midst of plotting Lussurioso’s death as his mother confesses; his concern for penance and spiritual health is essentially uncharitable, and extends only to those in his family, to whom he was also the tempter. Gloriana responds to Vindice, “O you heavens, / Take this infectious spot out of my soul! / I’ll rinse it in seven waters of mine eyes. / Make my tears salt enough to taste of grace! / To weep is in our sex naturally given, / But to weep truly, that’s a gift from heaven” (4.4.50-55).¹⁸⁹ Despite Vindice’s hypocrisy in exhorting penance as he plots murder, Gloriana is truly converted, and her penitential attitude effects such a change in her ways that when her daughter Castiza comes to test her, she remains firm in denouncing Lussurioso.

¹⁸⁹ Gratiana’s diction in these lines echoes those of Gertrude in *Hamlet*, when the prince is exhorting her to repentance. Gertrude declares, “O Hamlet, speak no more! / Thou turn’st mine eyes into my very soul, / And there I see such black and grained spots / As will not leave their tinct” (3.4.78-81).

Arthur Kistner and M.K. Kistner have argued that “Vindice's relationship to the court, the source of corruption, grows stronger throughout the play, and as it does, his virtue declines.”¹⁹⁰ The final consequence of Vindice’s becoming part of the court in order to destroy it, they suggest, is that he too must be destroyed. By the conclusion of the play, Vindice has become as much a part of the corrupt community as any of those upon whom he was seeking to wreak vengeance, and consequently, Antonio’s final sentence of execution is the natural, moral imperative that the plot has demanded. The Kistners’ compelling argument also applies to Vindice’s understanding of the importance of repentance. While he saw it as necessary that his mother repent for her role in attempting to seduce Castiza, Vindice never truly repents for his own role in tempting his mother or for the series of murders he carries out. When Antonio assumes the rule of the city, and Vindice and Hippolito admit to him that they killed the prior dukes, Antonio sentences them to death. In this final, important moment, Vindice no longer acknowledges the necessity of repentance, instead boasting:

May not we set as well as the duke's son?
Thou hast no conscience. Are we not reveng'd?
Is there one enemy left alive amongst those?
'Tis time to die when we are ourselves our foes...
And now, my lord, since we are in forever,
This work was ours which else might have been slipp'd,
And if we list, we could have nobles clipp'd
And go for less than beggars, but we hate
To bleed so cowardly; we have enough. I'faith,

¹⁹⁰ Arthur Kistner and M. K. Kistner, “Morality and Inevitability in *The Revenger's Tragedy*,” 40.

We're well: our mother turn'd, our sister true,

We die after a nest of dukes. Adieu. (5.3.127-146)

Vindice is happy that his mother has repented, and that his sister remains true, but while he acknowledges that he and Hippolito are murders, he displays no remorse. Vindice, just like Barabas in *The Jew of Malta*, was ostensibly outside, and opposed to, the corrupt community that surrounded him. And, just like Barabas, Vindice becomes the embodiment of that corruption by the end of the play, abusing and neglecting the understanding of repentance which he had earlier pressed upon his mother. By the conclusion of *The Revenger's Tragedy*, Vindice is so remorseless and deadly in pursuit of revenge that he reflects Satan's all-consuming desire to be revenged upon God in *Paradise Lost*. Satan, in fact, recognizes the goodness and beauty in Adam and Eve even as he seeks their destruction, but Vindice's more narrow motivation seeks death without qualification or pause. Middleton, then, like Marlowe and Milton, demonstrates that penance is particularly prone to abuse when it connects the penitent to a corrupt society. Penance, as a means of justifying one's relationship to society, becomes fraught with problems when the society itself does not appreciate the virtues that penance would lead one to embrace. At the close of *The Revenger's Tragedy*, Vindice is not penitent, and does not attempt to escape his capital sentence; rather, he is proud of his sins, and pleased to die after the "nest of dukes" that he has murdered.

The White Devil

The conclusion of the fourth act of John Webster's *The White Devil* contains one of the most striking instances of confession in early modern English drama. The Cardinal

Monticelso emerges from the papal enclave as the newly elected Pope Paul IV, and his first words are, “Concedimus vobis apostolicam benedictionem et remissionem peccatorum” (“We grant you the apostolic blessing and the remission of sins”).¹⁹¹ Immediately following this papal blessing and absolution, however, the Pope proceeds to condemn Vittoria and Bracciano, who had murdered their spouses and fled from Rome, as he declares, “We cannot better please the divine power / Than to sequester from the holy church / These cursed persons. Make it therefore known, / We do denounce excommunication / Against them both; all that are theirs in Rome / We likewise banish” (4.3.66-71). Combining both absolution and excommunication in the new Pope’s first speech, Webster neatly emphasizes the relationship between repentance and community, while raising important questions regarding the seriousness with which penance and communion with the Church are treated. Indeed, only two scenes earlier, the then-Cardinal had shown himself to be very far from a model churchman, as he had advised the wronged Duke Francisco to subtly seek revenge upon Bracciano: “Bear your wrongs concealed, / And, patient as the tortoise, let this camel / Stalk o’er your back unbruised...Play with your nostrils till the time be ripe / For th’bloody audit and the fatal gripe” (4.1.14-19). The Cardinal advises this, despite the outward (though false) protestations from Francisco that “Far be it from my thoughts to seek revenge” (4.1.3). As it turns out, however, the Cardinal supplies Francisco with his “black book” (4.1.33), in which are kept records of all the evildoers in the city, who instead of being punished, are employed when needed.

The Cardinal’s vicious character, being thus revealed to the audience at the beginning of Act IV, creates an inauspicious impression of the man who becomes Pope at

¹⁹¹ John Webster, *The White Devil*, 4.3.60-61.

the end of the act. It is, consequently, surprising to find that when he hears a confession directly after his election to the papacy, he fulfills his office in a conscientious manner. After giving his blessing as the new Pope, Monticelso notices that the unscrupulous Lodovico was conversing with Francisco, and when he asks, privately, what the conversation was about, Lodovico initially refuses to tell him. When, however, the pope reveals his suspicion, "About some murder, was't not?" (4.3.105), Lodovico responds

I'll not tell you;
And yet I care not greatly if I do—
Marry, with this preparation: Holy father,
I come not to you as an intelligencer,
But as a penitent sinner. What I utter
Is in confession merely, which you know
Must never be revealed. (4.3.106-111)

Lodovico's cunning plan is important for several reasons. First of all, the Pope admits, "You have o'erta'en me" (4.3.111), indicating his acknowledgement that he is bound by the seal of the confessional. This acknowledgement is surprising, given his earlier counsel to Francisco to seek bloody and secret revenge. Lodovico's dependency upon the secrecy of confession is also important, however, because it treats the sacrament in a formulaic, legalistic manner. Notably lacking from Lodovico's attitude is any sentiment of contrition, one of the three essential elements on the penitent's part for the Catholic sacrament of penance.

Lodovico confesses to the Pope that he is going to murder Bracciano in revenge for Isabella's death, a murder that might be pleasing to the new pope, since Bracciano

had also murdered the pope's nephew, Camillo. The Pope's response, however, is again surprising, as he declares

Miserable creature!

If thou persist in this, 'tis damnable.

Dost thou imagine thou canst slide on blood

And not be tainted with a shameful fall?

...Instruction to thee

Comes like sweet showers to overhardened ground:

They wet, but pierce not deep. And so I leave thee

With all the Furies hanging 'bout thy neck,

Till by thy penitence thou remove this evil

In conjuring from thy breast that cruel devil. (4.3.117-128)

The Pope properly discerns that while Lodovico has invoked the seal of the confessional, his lack of actual penitence and his murderous plans preclude absolution. Rather than absolving Lodovico, he urges him to abandon his evil path, and specifically identifies his need of penitence. The fact that a pope who has been shown to be calculating and vicious appears on the early modern English stage and, instead of abusing the sacrament of penance, conscientiously counsels the sinner to reform his ways is remarkable. Rather than staging an abuse of the administration of the sacrament, Webster's pope uncharacteristically honors the office of the confessor. Indeed, Monticelso's counsel is impressive enough that the typically murderous, calloused Lodovico muses, "I'll give it o'er. He says 'tis damnable. / Besides, I did expect his suffrage, / By reason of Camillo's death" (4.3.129-131). Lodovico expected that since the Pope had cause to desire the death

of Bracciano, he might find the pontiff willing to embrace the plan, but instead, he receives spiritual counsel that, for the moment, convinces him to change his ways.

The Pope never reappears in *The White Devil* after this confession scene, and the audience can only wonder whether his new office effected a deep change in a character who had previously been less than admirable.¹⁹² However, the relationship between repentance and community that this confession scene crystallizes is repeatedly depicted throughout the play. Indeed, the murderous Lodovico, whom the Pope had urged to repent, is banished from Rome in the opening scene of the play. The expulsion from the community is accompanied by the admonition from Antonelli, “Come, my lord, / You are justly doomed. Look but a little back / Into your former life. You have in three years / Ruined the noblest earldom” (1.1.12-15). Antonelli and Gasparo proceed to catalogue Lodovico’s wrongs, which include several murders and a completely dissolute life, but Lodovico proves unrepentant. Speaking of the banishment, Gasparo finally hopes, “This gentle penance may both end your crimes / And in the example better these bad times” (1.1.3.6-37). That is, in punishing Lodovico by separating him from the community, and echoing the later excommunication that the Pope pronounces, the authorities hope that it will not only reform the murderer, but also prove beneficial to the moral life of the community. In this case, however, the community punishes an unrepentant sinner, and Lodovico eventually returns as the central figure in the series of murders that occur in the final act of *The White Devil*. In this important respect, Lodovico is like Milton’s Satan: both are impenitent, both are cast from their prior places of honor, and both return to accomplish the destruction of the community.

¹⁹² Edwin Benjamin has made the interesting argument that Monticelso is redeemed by the fact that he simply disappears and relinquishes his cause for revenge: “As Francisco loses himself by pursuing revenge, Monticelso finds himself by abandoning it” (“Patters of Morality in *The White Devil*,” 13).

Gasparo's allusion to "these bad times" when speaking with Lodovico is an early indication to the audience of the corruption within the community that will soon be revealed. In this respect, the Roman society in *The White Devil* is as corrupted as the Maltese community in *The Jew of Malta*, and the degenerate society in *The Revenger's Tragedy*.¹⁹³ Many murders occur in Webster's tragedy, including the assassination of the Duke Bracciano, the murder of spouses, and siblings killing one another. Both the family and the larger community play important parts in this corruption. For the community as a whole, Lodovico's just banishment at the opening of the play should be contrasted with the abuse of justice in Vittoria's arraignment in the Third Act. Alison Shell has argued that "Within *The White Devil*, the impudent Vittoria is cast as idol, and the scene of her trial is a prolonged apocalyptic that exposes not only her, but those who are impeaching her."¹⁹⁴ Shell convincingly traces elements of anti-Catholic polemic in the trial scene, which is conducted by the Cardinal Monticelso, and demonstrates that both Vittoria and Monticelso to various degrees represent the titular "white devil." What is particularly important for this argument, however, is that while drawing upon popular anti-Catholic language and imagery, Webster foregrounds the relationship between community and penance, by having the Cardinal sentence Vittoria to a house of convertites, "a house of penitent whores" (3.2.271). The Cardinal embodies both the religious and secular authority in this trial, and he sentences Vittoria to penitential sequestration from the community, but Vittoria, like Lodovico, is completely impenitent. Vittoria explodes in

¹⁹³ The fact that the community in *The White Devil* is corrupt is readily apparent, though George Holland makes the interesting argument that the corruption spreads from the leader, Bracciano, to the other parts of society, and from the major characters to the minor ones. See "The Function of the Minor Characters in *The White Devil*," 43-54.

¹⁹⁴ Alison Shell, *Catholicism, Controversy, and the English Literary Imagination, 1558-1660*, p. 47.

anger, declaring, “you have ravished Justice, / Forced her to do your pleasure” (3.2.279-280), and when the Cardinal responds, “She’s turned Fury” (3.2.283), Vittoria rages

That the last Day of Judgment may so find you
And leave you the same devil you were before!
...I will not weep;
No, I do scorn to call up one poor tear
To fawn on your injustice...
It shall not be a house of convertites.
My mind shall make it honest to me
Than the Pope’s palace, and more peaceable
Than thy soul, though thou art a cardinal. (3.2.284-297).

Vittoria’s response demonstrates the problems for a community when dealing with an unrepentant sinner. Seeing no need for repentance, Vittoria stands outside the community and asserts that in her mind she is justified. Furthermore, she judges the community’s miscarriage of justice, and invokes the all-encompassing final judgment of Christ as a contrast to the judgment she has just received. The community cannot impose an actual spirit of penitence, and indeed, when at the house of convertites, Vittoria continues to receive amorous visits from Bracciano.

Vittoria’s refusal to act penitently even during her trial serves as a striking contrast to her feigning of penitence when it suits her. When Bracciano confronts her with jealous accusations, Vittoria, still in the house of convertites, rebukes him, “What have I gained by thee but infamy?.../ Is this your palace? Did not the judge style it / A house of penitent whores? Who sent me to it?” (4.2.109-116). Heretofore unrepentant,

Vittoria feigns a resolve to change her ways as a punishment for Bracciano's jealousy.

She declares

Let me hear no more of you.
I had a limb corrupted to an ulcer,
But I have cut it off; and now I'll go
Weeping to heaven on crutches. For your gifts,
I will return them all; and I do wish
That I could make you full executor
To all my sins. Oh, that I could toss myself
Into a grave as quickly! (4.2.121-128).

Vittoria echoes political language common to debates between Anglicans and Puritans over whether unrepentant sinners were corrupted limbs that ought to be cut off to save the body politic, or whether they might be regenerated in some manner.¹⁹⁵ Vittoria's use of this language is telling, since she, currently ostracized from the community, had herself been viewed as a corrupted limb.¹⁹⁶ But her invocation of penance is deceptive, just as Lodovico's invocation of the seal of confessional was an abuse of the sacrament of penance. The corrupt community is, as one might expect, full of corrupted uses of penitential forms and language.

Repentance is repeatedly referred to throughout *The White Devil*, but in no instance does a character actually repent. After Flamineo murders his brother Marcello,

¹⁹⁵ See Deborah Shuger's *Political Theologies in Shakespeare's England: The Sacred and State in Measure for Measure*, p. 117. Shakespeare also employs this exact language in *Coriolanus*, when Sicinius, discussing Coriolanus, states, "He's a disease that must be cut away," and Menenius responds, "O, he's a limb that has but a disease" (3.1.296-297). Shakespeare's use of this language is related to the state, in contrast with Vittoria's representation of herself, alone, with the diseased limb.

¹⁹⁶ For an extended discussion of this diseased imagery in *The White Devil*, see Ralph Berry's *The Art of John Webster*, pp. 85-89. He writes, "Vittoria herself is presented as a disease. Her corrupting potential is stressed by Monticelso throughout the trial scene...She is the focus of the theme of moral disease" (87).

their mother Cornelia exclaims, “The God of heaven forgive thee! Dost not wonder / I pray for thee?...mayst thou live / To fill an hourglass with his mouldered ashes, / To tell how thou shouldst spend the time to come / In blest repentance” (5.2.53-60). The great need for long and sorrowful repentance is readily expressed by Cornelia, but the corruption in the community, church, and family throughout the play precludes social reconciliation. This corruption is finally evident in the faux last rites that are administered to the poisoned and dying Duke Bracciano. Lodovico and Gasparo, disguised as Capuchins, come to the dying Duke’s bedside, holding a crucifix and candle and speaking in Latin. They ask the others in the room to depart, “and let us only whisper in his ears / Some private meditations, which our order / Permits you not to hear” (5.3.151-153). When alone with him, however, they reveal themselves and declare, “Devil Bracciano! Thou art damned” (5.3.154), followed by a description of the poison that they have infected him with. The scene is a perfect inversion, or perversion, or the sacrament of last rites.¹⁹⁷ Rather than the unburdening of sins in confession, the reception of absolution and anointing, and the consolation of holy readings and meditations, Bracciano receives assurance that he is damned, watches as his death is gloated over, and is told of the way in which he has been killed. This inversion of last rites, with its mockery of deathbed penitential practices, is a fitting conclusion to the moral imperative of the corrupt community throughout *The White Devil*; no true sacraments can be

¹⁹⁷ James R. Hurt argues that *The White Devil* contains the inversion of three sacraments—marriage, confession, and extreme unction—as an example of the witchcraft images that run throughout the play. He writes, “the lost souls of *The White Devil* invert the ceremonies of marriage, confession, and extreme unction as symbols of their worship of the Devil. In each case the approximate form of the ritual is retained, while the significance is completely inverted, marriage becoming divorce, confession becoming a spy’s report, and extreme unction a curse upon a dying man” (“Inverted Rituals in Webster’s *The White Devil*,” 47).

enacted, and instead the community, feeding upon itself, destroys many of the people within it.

As Larry S. Champion has broadly asserted,

Tragedy, in the full Jacobean sense, is an indictment of the individual and of his society, emphasizing both the flaw of the protagonist and of those in his society who have used him to serve their own ends. Webster's particular contribution in *The White Devil* lies in the intensity of this societal tragic perspective.¹⁹⁸

Champion's point is important, for Webster's powerful presentation of a *social* tragedy—one that not only destroys nearly all of the characters, but destroys them when fraught with vice—also depicts the deep problems associated with repentance on the post-Reformation English stage. In *The White Devil*, repentance is never sincere; it is a tool that one can use to manipulate a corrupt society. Repentance is disassociated from honest spiritual resolutions and becomes both a means of punishment (the house of convertites) and a façade that an individual can assume. In a society as corrupt as that in *The White Devil*, there is no proper or true way that an individual can become reconciled with the community; repentance, at least in its social aspects, ceases to be an option. But without the social elements of penance, can individuals accomplish meaningful, private repentance? No character in *The White Devil* does.

Conclusion

Scholars have long noted that *The Jew of Malta* was greatly influential on the development of early modern drama. Douglas Cole observes that one such development

¹⁹⁸ Larry S. Champion, "Webster's *The White Devil* and the Jacobean Tragic Perspective," 461.

was “a mode of tragedy that indulged in caricature and satire, which blended traits of sensationalistic violence and emotional rant.”¹⁹⁹ He goes on to observe, “*The Revenger’s Tragedy* and John Webster’s *The White Devil* stand out in this line, both using a central figure to comment on the moral depravity of their worlds while engaged in actions that contribute to that depravity.”²⁰⁰ The parallels among *The Jew of Malta*, *The Revenger’s Tragedy*, and *The White Devil* extend beyond that point, however. As this chapter has shown, all three works present deeply corrupt communities that circumvent, abuse, and manipulate forms of penance. The important relationship between community and repentance, whereby both the individual and the society are made better and conflicts are resolved, is perverted in each of these tragedies. The corruption of the community not only hinders repentance in its individual members but pushes them, inexorably, towards both temporal and spiritual destruction. In *Paradise Lost*, Satan is deeply, truly impenitent, declaring “Evil be thou my good” (IV.110), and he strives to destroy the virtuous community in Eden; so too, in these tragedies, the destructive power of the impenitent characters—Barabas, Vindice, Lodovico, and Flamineo—reflects the corruption of the general community in each play, and the impossibility of meaningful penitential reconciliation. Noting the Machiavellian elements of Milton’s Satan, Barbara Riebling argues,

“Milton deliberately evokes Machiavelli’s prince in his portrayal of Satan, and in doing so repudiates princely rule and the idea that *virtu* can be sustained without Christian virtue...Milton constructs a heavenly republic and a hellish principality, expanding upon Machiavelli’s assertion that the

¹⁹⁹ Douglas Cole, *Christopher Marlowe and the Renaissance of Tragedy*, 97.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 97.

isolation of power and civic virtue in the prince is a corrupting and destabilizing force in political life.²⁰¹

Satan's dedication to evil is utterly destructive to communal life, and his corrupted community of fallen angels prevents repentance. In *The Jew of Malta*, *The Revenger's Tragedy*, and *The White Devil*, similarly Machiavellian characters emerge, and their vice and manipulations destroy their communities and pervert and abuse repentance. Inverting the traditional conception of the virtuous community of Christians exhorting and edifying one another through repentance, Marlowe, Middleton, and Webster construct communities of vice that are particularly destructive to and intolerant of sincere efforts to repent.

²⁰¹ Barbara Riebling, "Milton on Machiavelli: Representations of the State in *Paradise Lost*," 574.

**Chapter V: The True Penitent in the Corrupt Community: *The Maid's Tragedy*,
Women Beware Women, and *'Tis Pity She's a Whore***

This is the fruit of my Confessions, not of what I have been, but of what I am: namely, to confess this not before thee only, in a secret rejoicing mixed with trembling, and in a secret sorrowfulness mixed with hope: but in the ears also of the believing sons of men, sharers of my joy, and partners in mortality with me; my fellow citizens, and fellow pilgrims: both those that are gone before, and those that are to follow after me, and those too that accompany me along in this life. These are thy servants, my brethren; those whom thou hast willed to be thy sons; my masters whom thou hast commanded me to serve, if I would live with thee and of thee. But this thy saying were little, did it give the command only by speaking, and not go before me in performing. This therefore I now do both in deed and word.

Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, Book X²⁰²

Saint Augustine's influence during the Reformation, both among Protestants and Catholics, was profound, and part of this influence related to the debates over the nature of penance during the period. In the passage above, taken from the influential *Confessions*, Augustine expresses an understanding of penance that includes not only his relationship with God, but also his place within the human community. He secretly, or privately, both rejoices and sorrows regarding the forgiveness of his sins and the truth of his confessions, and this builds upon the rhetorical situation of the *Confessions*: the sinner is speaking directly to God. Augustine acknowledges, however, that his writings, while addressed to God directly, also have a human, public audience. Having considered the fact that God knows the depths of his heart, and that in God alone is the forgiveness of

²⁰² Vol. II, p. 83.

sins found, Augustine questions, “What therefore have I to do with men, that they should hear my confessions, as if they would cure all my infirmities?” (77). He then suggests that since charity binds him to other people as well as to God, his confessions might be a cause of joy not only to God and himself, but also to his fellow pilgrims in this world. Notably, Augustine perceives his human community as the entirety of Christians: “my fellow citizens, and fellow pilgrims: both those that are gone before, and those that are to follow after me, and those too that accompany me along in this life” (83). This community might be edified by Augustine’s conversion, but it also potentially serves another role, as he writes, “Let the brotherly mind love that in me, which thou teachest is to be loved: and lament in me, what thou teachest is to be lamented. . . .to such will I discover myself” (81-83). Augustine implies that this virtuous community of Christians helps its members by loving good and shunning evil. His confessions allow for this community to support him in their love, and to encourage him on the path of virtue.

Augustine’s understanding of the private and public nature of his *Confessions* reflects the Church’s acknowledgement of the importance of penance—particularly the sacrament of penance—as essential for an individual’s relationship with God and his community. Augustine reiterates this understanding in several of his other works, and Reformation theologians recognized the dual roles that penance played in the medieval Church. As Ashley Null writes when examining the Reformers’ use of the Church Fathers,

Augustine had described two parts of *poenitentia* in the church: private repentance for daily sins of human frailty, and public penance by those excommunicated for serious offenses so that they might be worthy of

reconciliation to the community. The purpose of alms, fasting, and prayer in private repentance was to heal the sin... In the case of public penance, satisfactions imposed on the excommunicated had an additional role, to assure the church that the offender was truly penitent.²⁰³

Null observes that Calvin and fellow Anglican reformers tended to cite and follow the second role of penance in Augustine's understanding, since the first was accomplished solely by Christ's sacrifice upon the cross. A robust and reformed church would still exercise the keys by excommunicating grievous sinners, but that reconciliation with the church involved a more public, dramatic role. However, the assurance of true penitence, symbolized by publicly performed acts of contrition and sacrifice, could not be an entirely reliable measure for the sinner's true attitude; indeed, as Augustine was all too aware, "how know they whenas they hear myself confessing myself, whether I say true or no; seeing none knows what is in man, but the spirit of man which is in himself?"²⁰⁴

Augustine raises a question that is also explored by Reformation thinkers and playwrights: how can the Church, as an institution, have any assurance of the sincerity of a sinner's repentance? This is a particularly important question in the political, historical context of the Reformation, for the Church was not simply a religious authority, but functioned in the particular as an essential *locus* of community life, identity, and authority. As Eamon Duffy argues, "the overwhelming impression left by the sources for late medieval religion in England is that of a Christianity resolutely and enthusiastically orientated towards the public and the corporate, and of a continuing sense of the value of

²⁰³ Ashley Null, *Thomas Cranmer's Doctrine of Repentance : Renewing the Power to Love*, 151.

²⁰⁴ Augustine, *Confessions*, Vol. II, pp. 77-79.

cooperation and mutuality in seeking salvation.”²⁰⁵ If the late medieval Church played such an important role in the public life as well as the private, spiritual life of Englishmen, the basis upon which the Church admitted or expelled members from the community was profoundly important. But as Augustine acknowledges, the sincerity of a sinner’s repentance and resolution to a reformed life of virtue is a very difficult thing to determine. As important as penance was for the maintenance of a peaceful and harmonious society, it included elements that depended, finally, upon the sincerity of the people involved, and even the best intentioned penitents or confessors might be misled or directed towards improper ends through manipulations or misunderstanding.

In his 1660 catechetical work *The Christian Religion*, the influential Puritan church leader Richard Baxter followed Augustine in discussing the communal aspects of penance, while noting its inherent challenges as well. Discussing the ways in which the church and community ought to deal with obstinate sinners, he wrote,

And if they hear not the Church, but remain impenitent and unreformed, after sufficient reproof and patience, put away such persons from among us, declaring against them the threatnings of the Lord, and requiring them to forbear Communion with the Church, and requiring the Church to avoid them, and have no familiarity or communion with them, as persons unmeet for the communion of Saints. And those that credibly profess Repentance, we are to Absolve Ministerially in the name of Christ, and comfort with the promises of Grace; receiving them, and

²⁰⁵ Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars*, 131. See chapter 4, “Corporate Christians,” for a detailed historical account of the very tangible and practical ways in which the Church united the community in late medieval England.

requiring the people to receive them, as Brethren, into their Communion:
but warning them to watch and sin so no more, lest worse befall them.²⁰⁶

Baxter's instructions illustrate the deep connection between repentance and community that was still held to be vitally important after the Reformation. Unrepentant sinners are not simply banned from their church, but shunned and ostracized by believers as unfit to participate in community life in general. Just Satan is cast out of heaven in *Paradise Lost*, so the impenitent ought to be thrust from general society. Repentance, credibly performed, was the means of rectifying one's relationship with the community, and Baxter further indicates that upon reentering societal life, the repentant sinner would receive support and help in avoiding further sins. Augustine had emphasized the fact that his community could assist him and be assisted by his confessions, and Baxter describes the ways in which the community can facilitate a penitential spirit. However, if a virtuous community had such influence that it could accomplish such ends, an ominous possibility is that a vicious community might be similarly influential, and effective in preventing repentance and communal reconciliation.

As was shown in the last chapter, one of the problematic elements of the relationship between penance and the community that was addressed by Renaissance playwrights is that, to use Baxter's language, it is very difficult to discern whether someone is "credibly" penitent. Furthermore, if the society itself is deeply corrupt, like the satanic community in *Paradise Lost*, it will not fulfill the encouraging, regenerative, supportive role to which Baxter alludes. Instead, the community will manipulate penitential forms, encourage vice, and effectively prevent the fostering of a truly penitential spirit in individuals. Hence, in *The Jew of Malta*, *The Revenger's Tragedy*,

²⁰⁶ Richard Baxter, *The Christian Religion*, 18-19.

and *The White Devil*, Marlowe, Middleton, and Webster present deeply corrupt communities that encourage abuses of repentance by individuals and authorities, by sinners and Church representatives. This chapter, however, will follow a similar but distinct theme that appears in other Jacobean tragedies: in corrupt societies, individuals do at times sincerely attempt to repent, but the corruption of the community, as well as the gravity of the sinner's deeds, still results in destruction and violence, rather than purgative, cathartic renewal. Milton's Satan states that one of the barriers to his possible repentance is the shame he would feel before his corrupt community (IV.81-89). As Satan knows, a society predicated upon vice cannot tolerate repentance, and in some Jacobean tragedies, a similar barrier to repentance is staged. In Beaumont and Fletcher's *The Maid's Tragedy*, Middleton's *Women Beware Women*, and Ford's *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*, characters sincerely and credibly repent, but the influence of the community and the far-reaching effects of their sins push, nearly inexorably, to tragic conclusions despite some characters' penitential spirits.

The Maid's Tragedy

Beaumont and Fletcher's *The Maid's Tragedy* begins by immediately presenting an abuse of the sacrament of marriage, though the extent of the abuse only eventually becomes apparent. Though Amintor was betrothed to Aspatia, the King forbade the marriage and ordered Amintor to marry Evadne. This essential violation of consent within the sacrament of marriage is not only an overreach on the King's part, but troubles Amintor's conscience as well. While he resolves to make the best of his life with his new

wife, Amintor worries about his broken troth: “It was the King first moved me to’t, but he / Has not my will in keeping. Why do I / Perplex myself thus? . . . My guilt is not so great as mine own conscience, too sensible, / Would make me think: I only brake a promise / And ‘twas the King that forced me.”²⁰⁷ Despite his troubled conscience, Amintor suggests that he is not responsible for abandoning his betrothed, since the King had ordered it done. But this attempt to evade personal responsibility proves to be the beginning of a series of disasters for Amintor, including Evadne’s subsequent revelation to him that she is the King’s mistress, and that the forced marriage is to keep suspicions away from the King’s amorous affairs. As Evadne says, “Alas, I must have one [husband] / To father children and to bear the name / Of husband to me, that my sin may be / more honorable” (2.1.316-319). Cuckolded before he is even married, Amintor’s new wife mocks him, and all that he can do is beg her to carry on the affair secretly, so that his honor is not damaged: “Be careful of thy credit, and sin close; / ‘Tis all I wish” (2.1.350-351). The violation of consent in the sacrament of marriage at the beginning of the play has become a much graver perversion of marriage; rather than husband and wife seeking each other’s temporal and spiritual good, Amintor and Evadne share nothing but the outward show of marriage, and Evadne’s amorous affairs torture Amintor’s honor and conscience.

Melantius, Evadne’s brother and a close friend of Amintor’s, perceives that Amintor is suffering, and he resolves, “I will find the cause; / I fear his conscience cries he wronged Aspatia” (3.2.44-45). In part fulfilling the role of a confessor, he then presses Amintor to tell him about the source of his discontent. He promises, “Hide nothing, then, from me, / For, when I know the cause of thy distemper, / With mine own armor I’ll

²⁰⁷ Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher, *The Maid’s Tragedy*, 2.1.130-136.

adorn myself, / My resolution, and cut through thy foes / Unto thy quiet, till I place thy heart / As peaceable as spotless innocence” (3.2.114-119). As a confessor would, Melantius promises to provide help and comfort once Amintor’s troubles are revealed. This confessional scene is noteworthy, for it demonstrates the aid that a community might provide to a repentant or morally troubled person. Amintor is unable to cope with his troubles alone, but even the act of admitting them to Melantius brings some salve to his conscience. He leans against Melantius, saying, “Faith, I am sick, / And desperately, I hope; yet, leaning thus, / I feel a kind of ease” (3.2.251-253), indicating in both his physical posture and his language the degree to which he needs external assistance. It is Melantius who urges him that all will be well, and that he should “Be merry, then” (3.2.258). Melantius’s own plan, however, is to revenge himself upon the King and to bring his sister to repent of her lewd behavior and shameful treatment of her husband.

When Melantius finds his sister alone, he begins by softly urging her repentance, saying, “Tis yet in thy repentance, foolish woman, / To make me gentle” (4.1.26-27), but when Evadne acts ignorant of her wrongs, and takes a haughty manner with Melantius, he seizes her, exclaiming

Quench me this mighty humor, and then tell me
Whose whore you are; for you are one, I know it.
Let all mine honors perish but I'll find him,
Though he lie locked up in thy blood. Be sudden;
There is no facing it. And be not flattered;
The burnt air, when the Dog reigns, is not fouler

Than thy contagious name, till thy repentance

(If the gods grant thee any) purge thy sickness. (4.1.53-60)

As he had done with Amintor, Melantius assumes the role of the confessor, seeking to have his sister admit her sins and desiring to bring her to repent of them. However, Melantius also fills the role of the accuser; as her brother and a member of the community, Melantius both accuses and seeks to bring about a deep, spiritual repentance. Evadne proudly argues with him, driving him to the point of drawing his sword and forcing her to her knees (4.1.98). The physical postures again reflect the various roles of the characters: Evadne, kneeling, is the penitent sinner, and Melantius, being knelt to, is the spiritual guide, and with his sword drawn, is also representative of the temporal, social authority.

Melantius' dual role of confessor and accuser is finally embodied in his threat, "Tell, or I'll kill thee; / And, when thou hast told all, thou wilt deserve it... When I have killed thee—as I / Have vowed to do if thou confess not—naked / As thou hast left thine honor will I leave thee, / That on thy branded flesh the world may read / Thy black shame and my justice" (4.1.100-111). Melantius' threats are a further extension of the corruption of the society and parallel the violation of consent in marriage that took place in the opening scene of the play. Threatening to reveal both her physical and spiritual states before the public, Melantius embodies both spiritual and temporal authorities, and in both cases, he goes too far when threatening Evadne's life. Notably, however, these threats are efficacious; not only does Evadne admit to her sins, but she does truly repent and is resolutely changed for the rest of the play. She declares, "I have offended, noble sir. Forgive me!" (4.1.116), echoing the language of a penitent sinner in confession, "Forgive

me father, for I have sinned.” She then confesses that she has been the willing mistress of the King, and the siblings’ conversation proceeds in a manner that clearly reflects a confessor interrogating the penitent, ensuring that this is a credible repentance:

Melantius: How long have you lived thus, Evadne?

Evadne: Too long.

Melantius: Too late you find it. Can you be sorry?

Evadne: Would I were half as blameless!

Melantius: Evadne, thou wilt to thy trade again.

Evadne: First to my grave.

Melantius: Would gods thou hadst been so blest!

Dost thou not hate this King now? Prithee, hate him.
Couldst thou not curse him? I command thee, curse him!
Curse till the gods hear, and deliver him
To thy just wishes. Yet I fear Evadne,
You had rather play your game out.

Evadne: No, I feel
Too many sad confusions here [in my heart] to let in
Any loose flame hereafter.

(4.1.132-143)

Following questions typically asked of penitents in the confessional, Melantius asks about the duration of the sin and assures himself concerning the state of contrition in the penitent. However, the fact that Melantius is not truly a spiritual guide is evident in his insistence upon hate. Rather than speaking of the charity of God that encompasses all sins, Melantius’ encouragement of hate in the penitent signals that he is not, properly, a confessor. Rather, he is a revenger, and he forces Evadne to kneel again and swear to assist him in killing the king (4.1.162-166). The action of kneeling to swear murderous

revenge after kneeling to confess sins serves as a dramatic, bitter comment upon the probable social outcome of such repentance, and raises difficult questions concerning Evadne's moral bearings.

Despite Evadne's willingness to assist her brother in assassinating the King, Beaumont and Fletcher make a point of emphasizing that her repentance is sincere. When Amintor finds her, she kneels again, penitent before her wronged husband. She implores his forgiveness: "My whole life is so leprous it infects / All my repentance. I would buy your pardon, / Though at the highest set, even with my life— / That slight contrition that's no sacrifice / For what I have committed" (4.1.198-202). Evadne reveals her newly found self-knowledge; her sins have infected her whole life, rendering even her repentance a faltering recompense for the wrongs that she has done Amintor. Even more importantly, however, Evadne proceeds to acknowledge that while her sin has greatly harmed her spiritual life, it is Amintor who is most the victim. She begs, "Let not my sins / Perish your noble youth. I do not fall here / To shadow my dissembling with my tears, / As all say women can, or to make less / What my hot will hath done, which heaven and you / Knows to be tougher than the hand of time / Can cut from man's remembrance" (4.1.219-220). Thus, Evadne implicitly acknowledges both the spiritual and social effects of sin, and that her sins are damaging to both herself and the society. Evadne is so troubled by her understanding of the suffering and occasion of sin that she caused for her husband that it is specifically his forgiveness, more so than God's, that she sues for: "I am hell / Till you, my dear lord, shoot your light into me, / The beams of your forgiveness. I am soul-sick, / And wither with the fear of one condemned / Till I have got your pardon" (4.1.231-235). Beaumont and Fletcher emphasize this social element of sin

and repentance, and Evadne's repentance is deepened by Amintor's forgiveness; the society that she has harmed does, in turn, aid her in repenting.

In an article examining the metaphors and language associated with the King in *The Maid's Tragedy*, Jason Denman has described Evadne's confession, contrition, and forgiveness from Amintor as "a strange scene" that in part reflects the action of the masque in Act 1.²⁰⁸ He writes, "for a moment, Beaumont and Fletcher grant the couple a delicately maintained purity as Evadne replaces her allegiance, and in the image of shooting light [4.1.232], grants Amintor a semblance of conjugal gratification and of representative power."²⁰⁹ While the sexual innuendo is possible in Evadne's language, it is more important to recognize that Evadne's pleading for forgiveness reveals her new dependency upon her community, and specifically on her husband. Evadne's contrite prayers specifically identify that she has been alone—"Gods, where have I been all this time? How friended, / That I should lose myself thus desperately, / And none for pity show me how I wandered?" (4.1.179-181)—and her new illumination depends, in part, upon the forgiving grace of her husband. Denman argues that "the scene represents a consummation... The King worries that Evadne has been sexually unfaithful to him. She has not been, but this scene represents an infidelity of another sort."²¹⁰ In fact, Evadne's new infidelity is related to sin; her repentance moves her to be faithful to divine law, and true to her obligations within the community as wife of Amintor and sister of Melantius. The essential problem that arises, however, is that this community is corrupt.

Led by a King devoted to a life of vice, the community in Rhodes is shown to be thoroughly corrupt, and Beaumont and Fletcher emphasize the fact that this corruption

²⁰⁸ Jason Denman, "Anatomizing the Body Politic: Corporeal Rhetoric in *The Maid's Tragedy*," 325.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 326.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 326.

cannot tolerate Evadne's true repentance. Repentance requires satisfaction and an amended life that turns to good works, and Evadne acknowledges this, exclaiming to Amintor, "And never shall you see the foul Evadne / Till she have tried all honored means that may / Set her in rest and wash her stains away" (4.1.280-282). The problem is that Evadne's determination to action follows the advice of her semi-confessor Melantius, who, instead of urging further penitential actions, prayers, or fasting, demands that she agree to assassinate the King when he gives the command. Evadne's repentance is sincere, but the deep corruption of the community, of her brother, husband, and King, leads her, nevertheless, to destruction. Directly before murdering the King, Evadne reveals her still contrite spirit that is being directed towards evil ends. She declares,

Oh, the conscience

Of a lost virgin! Whither wilt thou pull me?

To what things dismal as the depth of hell

Wilt thou provoke me? Let no woman dare

From this hour be disloyal, if her heart

Be flesh, if she have blood and can fear...

'tis so many sins

An age cannot repent 'em, and so great

The gods want mercy for. Yet I must through 'em. (5.1.13-22)

Drawn by her deeply sorrowful conscience to a misdirected end, Evadne seeks to redeem her wrongs through the further, more grievous sin of murder. Evadne presents herself as an example to all women, but in assassinating the head of state and the true, if unjust, authority in her community, Evadne evinces the degree to which the corruption and vice

around her have truly clouded her conscience. While she understands that she is being provoked to something as “dismal as the depths of hell,” she naively thinks that the murder will redeem her infidelity.

Evadne’s eventual suicide when Amintor reacts with horror to her news of the murder is a poetically fitting end for her deeply troubled conscience. While repentant, each step Evadne takes leads to further destruction; the pressures from the community clash with her conscience, and her final desperate action seeks a cathartic cleansing. The bout of deaths at the conclusion of *The Maid’s Tragedy* does indeed eliminate all of the ill-doers in the play, and the community has been essentially destroyed. The new king Lysippus concludes, “May this a fair example be to me / To rule with temper! For on lustful kings / Unlooked-for sudden deaths from God are sent; / But curst is he that is their instrument” (5.3.292-295). This is, certainly, a moral of the story, but in the destruction of the truly repentant Evadne, we can see another dark moral: those who truly repent for their sins may still be led or driven by their corrupt communities to further evils. Beaumont and Fletcher illustrate that feelings of deep penitence and the desire to do good are not enough to overcome the extensive, broad influence that a corrupt society holds over its members.

Women Beware Women

Thomas Middleton’s *Women Beware Women* contains forty-three uses of the word “sin” or its variants (sinner, sinful, sinning). In contrast, it only contains variations of “repent” six times. Nevertheless, the conclusion of *Women Beware Women* focuses upon a sincere effort of repentance and satisfaction that, despite the good intentions,

erupts in bloodshed. As J. B. Batchelor observes, by the fifth act, “the figures of the play have gone too far for the Cardinal to save them.”²¹¹ This is indeed the case, and the overarching corruption and sinfulness that pervade the Florentine community in the play prove to be an irresistible force of destruction from which even the sincerely repentant cannot be saved. The dedication to vice and sin, particularly related to sexual matters, is so extensive that Larry Champion has described the play as “involving both aristocratic and mercantile classes in its web of intrigue, it is one of the most extensively decadent societies in the entire range of Jacobean-Caroline tragedy.”²¹² The question that naturally arises, then, is how an individual in such a community can accomplish repentance, when repentance is so deeply connected to an individual’s spiritual and social situations.

After three acts of morally bankrupt action, including incest, adultery, extensive deceptions and murderous plans, the entrance of the Cardinal to his brother the Duke at the beginning of Act IV is surprising, especially because he begins by immediately excoriating the Duke for having stolen Bianca from her husband Leantio. The Cardinal begins by urging the Duke to meditate upon death, and to consider the consequences of his adulterous and tyrannous sins. He then proceeds to make a further, important argument, declaring

Nay, shall I show you
How more unfortunate you stand in sin
Than the low private man? All his offenses,
Like enclosed grounds, keep but about himself
And seldom stretch beyond his own soul’s bounds...

²¹¹ J. B. Batchelor, “The Pattern of *Women Beware Women*,” 86.

²¹² Larry S. Champion, “Tragic Vision in Middleton’s *Women Beware Women*,” 412.

But, great man,
Every sin thou commit'st shows like a flame
Upon a mountain. 'Tis seen far about,
And with a big wind made of popular breath
The sparkles fly through cities; here one takes,
Another catches there, and in short time
Waste all to cinders.²¹³

Great men set examples when they are doing either good or evil, and the Cardinal warns the Duke that his sins do not affect merely himself and those in his immediate community, but have far-reaching social ramifications.²¹⁴ In adopting the imagery of sin as a flame that is spread through common gossip, the Cardinal not only presents a compelling image of the social detriments of one man's evil actions, but he alludes to the fires of hell and eternal punishment. When the Duke asks him to stop, having heard enough, the Cardinal is more explicit, "How dare you venture on eternal pain, / That cannot bear a minute's reprehension" (4.1.231-232). Notably, in seeking to arouse a penitential spirit in the Duke, the Cardinal appeals to two distinct things: the Duke's responsibility for his own soul, including the possibility of damnation; and the Duke's responsibility as Duke and as a member of society to seek the common good of his people. The Cardinal invokes both the private, spiritual elements of repentance, and the social, communal elements.

²¹³ Thomas Middleton, *Women Beware Women*, 4.1.200-213.

²¹⁴ Albert H. Tricomi expands upon this important theme throughout the play, and he suggests, "As a political tragedy *Women Beware Women* also differs from its forebears in its sophisticated representation of the coercion the court world exerts" ("Middleton's *Women Beware Women* as Anticourt Drama," 65). While my focus is not, strictly speaking, upon the psychological implications of *Women Beware Women*, the broad influence of the court upon the morals of society might be described as somewhat coercive.

The Cardinal proves successful, at least at first. The Duke's response is filled with sorrow, as he exclaims, "let me weep / The first of my repentance in thy bosom, / And show the blest fruits of a thankful spirit; / And if I e'er keep woman more unlawfully, / May I want penitence at my greatest need" (4.1.252-256). This is not a feigning repentance like Barabas' in *The Jew of Malta*, nor is it a sincere repentance to a faulty confessor, like Evadne's in *The Maid's Tragedy*. The Duke swears to reform his life, and even after the Cardinal leaves, he remains firm in this new resolve, meditating, "She lies alone tonight for't, and must still, / Though it be hard to conquer; but I have vowed / Never to know her as a strumpet more, / And I must save my oath" (4.1.267-270). Despite his recognition that it will be difficult to overcome his lustful desires, the Duke expresses an immediate desire to change his future life to a path of virtue, a necessary indication of the sincerity of his repentance. This resolution is admirable, until he fastens upon his resolve to have Bianca's husband Leantio killed, at which point the Duke hopes to marry her.²¹⁵ Just as Evadne's true penance is turned by Melantius to the improper end of killing the King, so too the Duke's sincere repentance for his sexual sins is directed towards a murderous solution. Both Evadne in *The Maid's Tragedy* and the Duke in *Women Beware Women* evince a deeply penitential spirit with respect to their lust, but then seek

²¹⁵ While the Duke's violation of Bianca and Leantio's marriage is an obvious sign of the corruption of the community, Ann Christensen has made a compelling argument about the problems with the community being related to the "settling" of a house for a newly married couple. She writes "The tragedy of the main plot in *Women Beware Women* stems from Leantio's failure to observe the rites not only of marriage but specifically those of the inauguration of the household. The off-stage elopement, the equally stealthy return to Florence (sans threshold rites), his (at first) unwarranted seclusion of his wife and pointed refusal to allot her the keys (I.i.175-76), and his neglect of and trepidation about work show that Leantio's domestic establishment is shaky from the start, lacking both the public, communal sanction fundamental to an occasion as important as a wedding and the solid economic foundation necessary to the family's continuation" ("*Settling House in Middleton's Women Beware Women*," 495).

to correct the wrongs they have done through murder. The Duke's repentance, while sincere, requires further guidance.²¹⁶

Leantio is murdered, and the Duke does marry Bianca, but not without further moral comment from the Cardinal. Interrupting a solemn wedding procession, the Cardinal bursts onstage, declaring, "Cease, cease! Religious honors done to sin / Disparage virtue's reverence, and will pull / Heaven's thunder upon Florence. Holy ceremonies / Were made for sacred uses, not for sinful. / Are these the fruits of your repentance, brother?" (4.3.1-5) Again, the Cardinal refers to both the individual, spiritual elements of repentance and the broader social reach of sin and penance. Heaven's thunder might fall upon Florence not simply because it is the Duke that is thus sinning, but because it is a perversion of the Church's holy ceremonies. Abusing the sacrament of marriage just as he had perverted the ends of his repentance, the Duke is no longer moved by the Cardinal's exhortations. The Duke convinces himself that he is no longer doing wrong: "The path now / I tread is honest, leads to lawful love, / Which Virtue in her strictness would not check" (4.3.28-30), but he ignores the fact that all of this depends upon the lustful, scheming, and murderous elements in his community that effectuated the death of Bianca's husband. The Duke thinks that his course is now virtuous, but having gained his new wife through sin, he has only added to the pervasive evils that fill Florence.

²¹⁶ This is a significant problem in the play. If the Cardinal was really seeking the Duke's reformation, why does he leave without counseling the Duke further, and assuring himself of the Duke's future actions? One possible answer has been suggested by Richard A. Levin, who argues that the Cardinal is a machiavel. Since the Cardinal is the Duke's brother, he is next in line to rule, and Levin argues that he not only wanted to the throne, but Bianca as well. He writes, "It can be argued that our reevaluation of the cardinal supports the notion that *Women Beware Women* is a play structured to render a damning verdict on a society. The cardinal, in this view, represents his society" ("The Dark Color of a Cardinal's Discontentment: The Political Plot of *Women Beware Women*," 214). I do not find this argument convincing for a number of reasons—most especially because the Cardinal's language is truly compelling regarding both communal and spiritual repentance—but it is a provocative explanation of the Cardinal's odd departure.

In Act V, Bianca attempts to murder the Cardinal at their wedding celebrations, but in the ensuing, astonishing violence that concludes *Women Beware Women*, every major character except the Cardinal is killed. As Champion argues, “The fifth act...projects an even more startling vision of human depravity through a calculated exercise in violence which seems to prefigure the total annihilation of society by unrestrained passion.”²¹⁷ The destruction of the community accompanies the Duke’s faulty remedy for his sincere repentance, and the Duke himself seems to recognize the connection shortly before he dies, when he states, “Upon the first night of our nuptial honors, / Destruction plays her triumph, and great mischiefs / Mask in expected pleasures” (5.2.171-173). These lines are full of dramatic irony, as the Duke has already sipped from a poisoned cup of wine that Bianca had intended for the Cardinal; he is, indeed, finding destruction hidden in his nuptial honors. This marriage, the direct result of his sincere but misdirected repentance, is the occasion of the final destruction of the society. Delivering the closing lines of the play, the Cardinal muses, “Sin, what thou art these ruins show too piteously. / Two kings in one throne cannot sit together, / But one must needs down, for his title’s wrong; / So where lust reigns, that prince cannot reign long” (5.2.225-228).²¹⁸ In a community as vicious and dedicated to sin as that in *Women Beware Women*, the Duke’s repentance is not only misdirected, but the proximate cause of the destruction of the community.

²¹⁷ Larry S. Champion, “Tragic Vision in Middleton’s *Women Beware Women*,” 418.

²¹⁸ Champion argues, convincingly in my opinion, that this moral coda from the Cardinal, “is so limited in its focus that it seems both inappropriate and insufficient...Providing no view which would lend some degree of coherence to the multiple strands of action, the comment simply attests to the pitiful inability of that society to come to grips with the cancer which vitiates its moral structure” (Ibid, 420).

Thomas Middleton is generally regarded to have held Calvinist convictions on many important religious questions.²¹⁹ However, the presentation of repentance in *Women Beware Women* is not, strictly speaking, Calvinist. The Cardinal insists that the Duke will suffer in hell unless he repents and that his actions do have a direct bearing upon whether he will be saved. Now, since this play is situated in Catholic Florence, and since it is a Cardinal speaking, it is easy to conjecture that Middleton was simply striving for religious accuracy given the geographic setting of the tragedy. Yet regardless of the degree to which Middleton was trying to portray a specifically Catholic discussion of repentance, the important point for the purposes of this argument is that he falls squarely within the traditional understanding of the close relationship between repentance and community. The Duke's penitence is deeply tied to his relationship to his community; rather than effectuating a true break from his sins, the murderous nature of his court encourages him to seek a remedy for his repented lust through other sinful avenues. As Albert Tricomi has argued, in *Women Beware Women* we see "Middleton's belief in the efficacy and portentousness of moral choice, whatever the extenuations of circumstance. This is the ineluctable message of the Medieval cycle plays and the moralities, from which Middleton drew."²²⁰ This efficacy of choice centers around the Duke's repentance and the course of action that he chooses to take in an attempt to justify himself and free himself from a damning adulterous relationship. The fact that his choice is not only bounded by the context of his community, but encouraged by it, demonstrates the extent to which Middleton desired to illustrate the dangerous influence that a corrupt society can

²¹⁹ For example, see Irving Ribner's *Jacobean Tragedy: The Quest for Moral Order*, 123-52, and John Stachniewski's article "Calvinist Psychology in Middleton's Tragedies," in *Three Jacobean Revenge Tragedies: A Casebook*, pp. 226-247.

²²⁰ Albert Tricomi, "Middleton's *Women Beware Women* as Anticourt Drama," 75.

have, even upon one who is sincerely attempting to repent and reform his life. As Tricomi concludes,

Modem as his understanding of character reveals itself to be, Middleton retains a set of metaphysical assumptions that enables him to affirm the immanence of a divine order that can and does assert itself against the arrogance of a debased court world, whose beguiling ceremonies perpetuate the myth of the court's beneficence, concealing all the while the corrupting "courtesies" that wreck lives and betray the commonwealth.²²¹

Through corruptly founded marriages, misdirected but sincere penance, and a host of vices, *Women Beware Women*, like *The Maid's Tragedy*, demonstrates that sincere repentance is no assurance that one's relationship with society or God will be entirely corrected.

'Tis Pity She's a Whore

In Middleton's *Women Beware Women*, the incestuous relationship between Hippolito and Isabella is a subplot that further illustrates the pervasive corruption of society. When Livia reveals to Isabella that she has tricked her niece into incest, Isabella responds, "Oh, shame and horror! / In that small distance from yon man to me / Lies sin enough to make a whole world perish" (4.2.130-132). Isabella tells her uncle that they should never see one another again, since "nothing can be worse / To hurt repentance" (4.2.134-135). Like the Duke's more emphasized repentance, however, Isabella's penitential response to her adulterous and incestuous relationship is to plot revenge upon her aunt. She avoids her uncle, but seeks to justify herself through bloodshed. This

²²¹ Ibid, 75.

secondary plot is important for mirroring the larger story in *Women Beware Women*, but incest, a corrupt community, and repentance take the very center of the stage in John Ford's *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*.²²²

When discussing the deep connection between the corrupt society in *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* and the incestuous relationship that is the central focus of Ford's plot, Susannah B. Mintz writes, "Giovanni and Annabella's affair troubles the society that produces it, exaggerating...the private sphere (both the newly defined interior space of Calvin and Descartes and the physical domain of the Protestant household) that shifted the contours of early seventeenth-century English life."²²³ Repentance, of course, stood at this threshold between the public and private spheres; in private, it was an essential element of man's wholly personal relationship with God, but in public, it was an essential element for rectifying communal relationships, and through satisfaction, good works, or a reformed life, it strengthened societal bonds. But, as Mintz suggests, the liminal space between the public and private becomes exceedingly vexed when the public is deeply corrupt. In that case, disordered private relationships are increasingly the result of disordered public life, and by their very nature, such relationships cannot then be rectified with respect to community through sincere repentance. As I will show, Ford's *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* is deeply invested in tracing the repercussions that social vice has upon private repentance, and the play includes several instances of failed attempts at

²²² Adrian Street acknowledges this thematic similarity between the works, arguing that both *Women Beware Women* and *'Tis Pity She's A Whore* are deeply vested in questioning Calvinist theology about grace, damnation, and free will. See *Protestantism and Drama in Early Modern England*, 219-222.

²²³ Susannah B. Mintz, "The Power of "Parity" in Ford's *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*," 269-270.

repentance, and one notably sincere repentance and reformation that, nevertheless, leads to destruction.²²⁴

The opening scene of *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* presents Giovanni having confessed his love for his sister Annabella to the Friar Bonaventura, and arguing with the priest about whether it is truly wrong for him to love her.²²⁵ The Friar does not brook Giovanni's arguments, and in response to the question, "Tell me, holy man, / What cure shall give me ease in these extremes,"²²⁶ the priest states, "Repentance, son, and sorrow for this sin" (1.1.42). Just as *Everyman* depicts the hero finding solace in repentance, so Friar Bonaventura indicates that Giovanni's much needed penance will "ease" him in his struggles. Acting in his capacity as a spiritual counselor, the Friar exhorts Giovanni to abandon his lust, encouraging him to think of his studies, and declaring that there are many other beautiful women in the world. When Giovanni still insists that he cannot be distracted from his sister, Friar Bonaventura advises the following course of action:

Hie to thy father's house. There lock thee fast
Alone within thy chamber, then fall down
On both thy knees, and grovel on the ground.
Cry to thy heart; wash every word thou utter'st
In tears, and, if't be possible, of blood.
Beg heaven to cleanse the leprosy of lust

²²⁴ Gilles D. Monsarrat traces the similar treatment of repentance in *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* and Ford's religious poem *Christ's Bloody Sweat*, and she argues that "repentance, and mock repentance, is central" to both works ("The Unity of John Ford: *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* and *Christ's Bloody Sweat*," 256).

²²⁵ The friar's intimacy with the young and troubled couple is often compared with Friar Lawrence's relationship with the hero and heroine of *Romeo and Juliet* (see, for example, Emily C. Bartel's "'Tis Pity She's a Whore: The Play of Intertextuality" in *The Cambridge Companion to English Renaissance Tragedy*, 249-260). The friar's role in the tragedy should also be contrasted with Duke Vincentio's disguise in *Measure for Measure*, which I discuss in chapter 6.

²²⁶ John Ford, *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*, 1.1.41-42.

That rots thy soul; acknowledge what thou art,
A wretch, a worm, a nothing. Weep, sigh, pray
Three times a day, and three times every night.
For seven days' space do this. Then, if thou find'st
No change in thy desires, return to me;
I'll think on remedy. Pray for thyself
At home, whilst I pray for thee here. Away!
My blessing with thee! We have need to pray. (1.1.69-82)

The Friar's spiritual advice includes solitude, sorrow, and penitential postures, and the frequent repetition of the word "pray" in the final three lines emphasizes Giovanni's need for substantial spiritual growth and aid. This extended description of penitential practices in the first scene of *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* foregrounds the theme of repentance that will be sustained through to the tragic conclusion of the work. Ford does not simply have the Friar encourage prayer or separation from Annabella, and the presence of such substantial spiritual counseling itself indicates both the importance and difficulty of accomplishing repentance. As the play continues, this importance and difficulty is repeatedly emphasized.

Encouraging Giovanni to carry out this penitential practice for a week, the Friar offers sound advice that moves the lustful brother to declare, "All this I'll do, to free me from the rod / Of vengeance; else, I'll swear, my fate's my god" (1.1.83-84). Yet in the next scene in which Giovanni appears, he has abandoned his penitential plan, instead embracing his lustful desires and seducing his sister.²²⁷ After the brother and sister

²²⁷ Bruce Boehrer's article "'Nice Philosophy': *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* and the Two Books of God" makes the argument that in failing to accomplish repentance, Giovanni turns from the Christian belief to a religion

consummate their love, Giovanni again meets with Friar Bonaventura, who soundly rebukes him, “Thou hast told a tale whose every word / Threatens eternal slaughter to the soul...I day and night have waked my aged eyes, / Above my strength, to weep on thy behalf” (2.5.1-8). As a sincere and caring confessor, the Friar has attempted to assist Giovanni not only by giving advice, but by praying for him. But his attempts to reform Giovanni are overwhelmed not only by Annabella’s willingness to enter the incestuous relationship, but by the encouragement that they receive from Putana. The Friar’s advice, difficult to follow and against Giovanni’s inclinations, is not as persuasive as the generally corrupt example that the lovers find in their community, and particularly in Putana’s facilitating efforts. Nevertheless, Friar Bonaventura still asks Giovanni to take him to Annabella, saying, “give me leave / To shrive her, lest she should die unabsolved” (2.5.43-44). As becomes apparent, the Friar attempts to save the couple by encouraging repentance in Annabella, since Giovanni proves intractable.²²⁸

When Friar Bonaventura meets with Annabella, Ford gives explicit stage directions to construct a scene of confession: “*Enter the Friar in his study, sitting in a chair, Annabella kneeling and whispering to him, a table before them and wax lights. She weeps and wrings her hands*” (3.6). Reinforcing the central theme of repentance in *’Tis Pity She’s a Whore*, Ford for a second time makes explicit reference to the Catholic

of nature. In this new belief in his natural impulses, Boehrer argues that Giovanni is remarkably consistent, even when he murders Annabella. He writes, “This decision to die for incestuous love, already made in the second scene of the first act, transforms the play from what it would otherwise be, a drama of unfortunate circumstance, into an open and prolonged meditation upon the fact and conditions of death” (370).

²²⁸ John S. Wilks has characterized Giovanni’s failure to repent after the opening scene of *’Tis Pity She’s a Whore* as a deeply Calvinist response: “Giovanni’s attempt to [repent] leads directly to the Satanic conviction of his own reprobation, releasing him in turn to that deciduous euphoria which is the mark of the benumbed and secure conscience” (*The Idea of Conscience in Renaissance Tragedy*, 257-258).

sacrament of auricular confession.²²⁹ Annabella's penitent and troubled spirit here is not only due to the Friar's efforts, since she had recently discovered that she was pregnant with her brother's child, but the priest nevertheless attempts to offer her advice after her confession. He states, "I am glad to see this penance; for believe me, / You have unripped a soul so foul and guilty / As, I must tell you true, I marvel how / The earth hath borne you up. But weep, weep on; / These tears may do you good. Weep faster yet, / Whiles I do read a lecture" (3.6.1-6). Bonaventura echoes the advice that he had given to Giovanni without success, encouraging prayer, weeping, and meditation upon death and judgment. As he proceeds, Annabella's sorrows increase, and she finally begs him, "Is there no way left to redeem my miseries" (3.6.33). As a kneeling penitent before a priest, Annabella receives counsel that speaks to both her spiritual and social difficulties: "There is. Despair not. Heaven is merciful, / And offers grace even now. 'Tis thus agreed: / First, for your honor's safety that you marry / The lord Soranzo; next, to save your soul, / Leave off this life, and henceforth live to him [Soranzo]" (3.6.34-38). The Friar cares deeply about the state of Annabella's soul, but he emphatically fulfills his role of also seeking to reconcile her with her community. In urging marriage, Bonaventura is not only attempting to save her honor, but is trying to place her in a situation that would remove her from temptations and give her communal assistance in avoiding further incestuous

²²⁹ Gilles D. Monsarrat maintains that while the avaricious Cardinal in the play is representative of Catholicism, "the Friar (in the sober color of one of the mendicant orders, probably the grey of the Franciscans, St. Bonaventure's order) is simply a Christian rather than, more specifically, a Roman Catholic and this is a way of insuring that the audience does not react unfavorably to him" ("The Unity of John Ford: *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* and *Christ's Bloody Sweat*," 251). In Note 11, Monsarrat goes on to say that there are only four references to Catholicism, whereas the uses of "penance" are in a generally Protestant manner. I think that this is hardly apparent; in the stage directions which place Annabella on her knees before an explicitly monastic priest, "whispering" her sins to him, we have a very direct staging of the Catholic sacrament of auricular confession.

love²³⁰. The essential problem that arises, however, is that the community that Annabella is being set at right with, is in fact deeply corrupt, and her husband Soranzo, through the manipulations of Vasques, seeks murderous revenge when he finds that she is pregnant.

While Annabella does follow the Friar's advice in choosing to be married, she only finally becomes truly penitent after she realizes the degree to which her pregnancy has hurt and abused her new husband's love (4.3.128-146). The Friar overhears Annabella as she writes a letter ending her relationship with Giovanni, and she admits to herself, "My conscience now stands up against my lust / With depositions characterized in guilt / And tells me I am lost. Now I confess" (5.1.9-11). Annabella does not know she is being overheard, but her in her penitence she acknowledges both the spiritual and social ramifications of her sins. She wishes that the effects of sin might fall only upon herself (5.1.17-23), rather than upon Giovanni, and she concludes to herself, "here I sadly vow / Repentance and a leaving of that life / I long have died in" (5.1.35-37). After several discussions and attempts at repentance in *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*, Annabella finally, sincerely, repents of her sins and resolves to change her ways.²³¹ Indeed, her sorrow regarding her sins leads her to ask that the Friar take her letter to her brother and "bid him read it and repent. / Tell him that I—imprisoned in my chamber, / Barred of all company, even of my guardian, / Who gives me cause of much suspect—have time / To blush at what hath passed" (5.1.47-51). This is an important passage, for Annabella reveals that

²³⁰ For a contrasting view, which sees the Friar as shallow and unresponsive to the actual needs of Giovanni and Annabella, see Irving Ribner's *Jacobean Tragedy: The Quest for Moral Order*, 163-174. Mark Stavig disagrees with Ribner, arguing that the Friar is a positive influence and representative of the helpful influences of Christianity (*John Ford and the Traditional Moral Order*, 95-121).

²³¹ Mark Stavig observes, "The sincerity of this repentance after the falseness or at least shallowness of her repentance in Act III is certain because she is alone, and the friar discovers her penitence only by overhearing... Incidentally, the friar's genuine surprise and happiness at the change in her are further rebukes to those who claim that the friar himself has been somewhat Machiavellian in his methods" (*John Ford and the Traditional Moral Order*, 115).

she has come to repentance through her isolation and prayer—essentially following the advice that the Friar had given to Giovanni at the opening of the play but which he did not follow. Annabella not only blushes at her sins, but hopes that Giovanni might also be led to repentance, revealing her understanding that the sin has harmed more than just herself, and revealing a charitable disposition towards her accomplice in sin.

As also happens in *The Maid's Tragedy* and *Women Beware Women*, the sincere repentance of Annabella in *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* nevertheless ends in destruction. The complex web of incest, adultery, murder, and avarice brings all of the characters together for an explosively violent conclusion that destroys most of the community, including Annabella. Notably, when the Friar finds Giovanni and, for the last time, fails in his attempt to arouse a penitential spirit, he resolves to flee:

Go where thou wilt. I see
The wildness of thy fate draws to an end,
To a bad, fearful end. I must not stay
To know thy fall. Back to Bononia I
With speed will haste, and shun this coming blow.
Parma, farewell! Would I had never known thee,
Or aught of thine! Well, young man, since no prayer
Can make thee safe, I leave thee to despair. (5.3.62-69)

With intimate knowledge of the sins and passions that rage in Giovanni, Friar Bonaventura demonstrates his deep understanding of the relationship between sin, repentance, and community. The violently disordered passions in Giovanni, matched with a generally vicious community, were careening towards a “bad, fearful end,” and the

Friar understands that while Annabella has repented, Giovanni would remain on his destructive course. As Mark Stavig argues, “The moral chaos of the last scenes is symbolized by the friar’s departure after his final warning to Giovanni. The friar has stood for religion’s promise of repentance and regeneration...His physical departure serves a double function: it prepares us for the tragedy of the final act and it suggests that the entire society of Parma has been corrupted beyond hope of restoration.”²³² Indeed, after the bleak farewell from Bonaventura, Giovanni responds, “Despair, or tortures of a thousand hells, / All’s one to me” (5.3.70-71). When Giovanni consequently murders Annabella and places her heart on his dagger, the natural course of his destructive passions meets its logical conclusion in death. Annabella’s final words are the prayer, “Forgive him, heaven—and me my sins! Farewell, / Brother unkind, unkind—mercy, great heaven!—Oh—Oh!” (5.5.92-93). Maintaining her repentant spirit that is governed both by charity towards those she has wronged as well as a desire for mercy from God, Annabella meets a gruesome end that illustrates the profound corruption in the Parmesan community. Repentance, in this case, howsoever sincere, does not purge all of society of its ills, and cannot save the penitent person from a violent death in the midst of that corrupt community.

When discussing the overall coherence of the moral structure in *’Tis Pity She’s a Whore*, A.P. Hogan has concluded about the play’s characters that “while every individual occupies a private place and views every other as part of *his* universe, all men together occupy an objective universe where their atomistic desires are in constant turbulence, constant tension.”²³³ While Friar Bonaventura stands as an exception to this

²³² Ibid, 115.

²³³ A. P. Hogan, “*’Tis Pity She’s a Whore: The Overall Design*,” 316.

description, it nevertheless encapsulates the tension between the private and public that, in the case of this play, is largely focused upon repentance. In the case of Annabella's sincere repentance, she is faced with the trouble of changing her life, and this cannot be accomplished without clashing with Giovanni's disordered passions and "atomistic" desires. Hogan goes on to write, "Ford's achievement is an integration of the public and private which produces an analysis of human behavior that is shot through with the lurid illumination of an uncompromising irony."²³⁴ This summary is correct, but as I have made clear, this integration of public and private centers around the various councils and efforts to repent. And this theme itself demonstrates the extent of Ford's own conception of human behavior and the need for repentance but the difficulty of accomplishing it within a truly corrupt or vicious community.

Conclusion

In his article "Ignorance in Knowledge": Marlowe's Faustus and Ford's Giovanni," Cyrus Hoy argued that *Doctor Faustus* and *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* are deeply similar plays. For example,

Ford's Giovanni is a young Faustus, dabbling in forbidden love as Marlowe's hero has dabbled in forbidden knowledge. Both are persuaded to their several presumptions by a fatal intellectual pride; and, however different the implications of their respective fates might be, the careers of both have this in common: both provide spectacular examples of the

²³⁴ Ibid, 316.

catastrophe attendant upon the misuse of the divinely given powers of reason.²³⁵

That the plays share a certain level of similarity is certainly true, and in no respect more than in the centrality of repentance in both plays. An essential distinction, however, must be made: whereas Faustus' sins separate him from his community, as discussed in Chapter 1, Giovanni's sins are very much in kind with his community. The final moments of each character is telling, as Faustus leaves the scholars to be in his room alone, whereas Giovanni interrupts a feast. Faustus has no community that might assist him in his moments of penitential thought, whereas Giovanni is encouraged in vice by his community. Both fail in expressing anything close to a truly repentant prayer, but their relationships to their communities are quite distinct.

The difference between *Doctor Faustus* and *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* with respect to community is important, for it becomes evident that the latter play shares significant themes with *The Maid's Tragedy* and *Women Beware Women*. Ford, Middleton, and Beaumont and Fletcher are like Marlowe in their focus upon the theme of repentance in these plays, but they resemble one another more in depicting moments of sincere repentance that do not bring about reconciliation with the community because of the extensive corruption and vice within society. As stated at the beginning of this chapter, these corrupt communities are the antithesis of the proper Christian community that Richard Baxter describes as so helpful to the repentant sinner. In another of his works, *A Christian Directory: Or a Summ of Practical Theologie and Cases of Conscience*, Baxter again addresses the important relationship between repentance and community. Giving advice to sinners who are seeking to change their ways and reform their lives, he writes

²³⁵ Cyrus Hoy, "Ignorance in Knowledge": Marlowe's Faustus and Ford's Giovanni," 146.

that they should seek “the *familiar company*, and *holy converse* with *humble, sincere, experienced Christians*: The Spirit that is in them, and breatheth, and acteth by them, will kindle the like holy flames in you.”²³⁶ Understandably, one wishing to be good should seek good companions, and will find inspiration and example in them. However, he goes on to warn of “idle, prating, sensual men” (21) who are only concerned with worldly matters, and directly points out that they will inhibit penitential thoughts or sentiments. Concerning such an evil community, he writes,

The one sort, if you have any thoughts of Repentance, would stifle them, and laugh you out of the use of your reason, into their own distracted mirth and dotage: And if you have any serious thoughts of your salvation, or any inclinations to repent and be wise, they will do much to divert them, and hold you in the power and snares of Satan, till it be too late: If you have any zeal or heavenly mindedness, they will do much to quench it, and fetch down your minds to earth again. (21).

This is, precisely, what occurs with Evadne in *The Maid’s Tragedy* and the Duke in *Women Beware Women*. Both characters are penitentially moved to “zeal and heavenly mindedness,” but both are grasped by the vicious tendencies of their communities, and consequently act upon their sincere repentance with murderous outcomes. In *’Tis Pity She’s a Whore*, both Giovanni and Annabella are initially drawn away from their repentant thoughts, and when Annabella does finally and truly repent, she is quickly murdered. In all three plays, sinners cannot make amends or come to peace with their communities. And those communities, while destroying their repentant members, simultaneously destroy themselves. Repentance, in these cases, does not rectify wrongs

²³⁶ Richard Baxter, *A Christian Directory*, 21.

within society, but is an intolerable violation of a code of vice, and results in widespread destruction.

Chapter VI: Private Conscience and Public Reform in *The Malcontent* and *Measure for*

Measure

Duke: Repent you, fair one, of the sin you carry?

Juliet: I do, and bear the same most patiently.

Duke: I'll teach you how you shall arraign your conscience,
And try your penitence if it be sound.
Or hollowly put on.

-*Measure for Measure*, 2.3.20-25.

Pietro: Oh, I am changed; for here, 'fore the dread power,
In true contrition I do dedicate
My breath to solitary holiness,
My lips to prayer, and my breast's care shall be
Restoring Altofronto to regency.

Malevole: Thy vows are heard, and we accept thy faith.

-*The Malcontent*, 4.5.128-133.

When Malevole, the titular character of John Marston's *The Malcontent* (1604), is first introduced on the stage, Duke Pietro describes him by praising his function as a discontented critic of the court and worldly life:

a man, or rather a monster, more discontent than Lucifer when he was thrust out of the presence...his highest delight is to procure others' vexation, and therein he thinks he truly serves heaven; for 'tis his position,

whoseoever in this earth can be contented is a slave and damned; therefore
does he afflict all in that to which they are most affected.²³⁷

Fulfilling the traditional role of the discontented melancholic, Malevole is presented as one whom the Duke likes because he “makes me understand those weaknesses which others’ flattery palliates” (1.2.28-29). In this respect, Malevole might remind audiences of another famous melancholic discontent, Jaques, in *As You Like It*, who refuses to flatter anyone, and who “can suck melancholy out of a song as a weasel sucks eggs.”²³⁸ Marston’s Malevole, however, is soon revealed to be the disguised Duke Altofronto, who had been deposed by the reigning Duke Pietro, and had assumed the guise of a malcontent as a means of observing and working within the corrupt court. In this respect, then, Malevole is much closer to another of Shakespeare’s characters, the disguised Duke Vincentio in *Measure for Measure* (1604). As this chapter will demonstrate, the remarkable similarities between these works—both first performed in the same year—are particularly pertinent when considering the role of repentance in early modern English drama.²³⁹ Both Duke Vincentio and Duke Altofronto use their disguises to correct the ills of their Italian states, and both lead other characters to repent of past wrongs, combining in the penance that they encourage both the private and social aspects of repentance. The differences between the forms of repentance in these similar works, then, become all the more notable, and they allow for particular insight into the difficulties surrounding repentance on the early modern stage.²⁴⁰ Specifically, both *Measure for Measure* and *The*

²³⁷ John Marston, *The Malcontent*, (1.2.18-25).

²³⁸ William Shakespeare, *As You Like It*, 2.5.11-12.

²³⁹ The earliest time in which *The Malcontent* is thought to have been written is 1602, and it was entered into the Stationer’s Register on July 5, 1604 (see *The Malcontent*, ed. George J. Hunter, p. xli)

²⁴⁰ For a helpful examination of Marston’s use of *Hamlet* in *The Malcontent*, see Charles Cathcart’s “John Marston, *The Malcontent*, and the King’s Men,” 43-63. Cathcart observes that *The Malcontent* made “persistent verbal recourse to *Hamlet* and...mirrored *Hamlet* in its structure and its concerns” (62). While

Malcontent investigate the effect of a state's intrusion into the realm of private conscience through the subjugation of religious authority to the government. Similarly, both plays are deeply invested in demonstrating the extensive negative effects of sin upon the community, and the need for repentance to include both private reconciliation with God and the correction of a sinner's relationship with his community. In contrast with the revenge tragedies examined in the preceding chapters, in which the deep connection between penance and the community is shown to be vulnerable to extensive political and spiritual corruption, *The Malcontent* and *Measure for Measure* depict penance being encouraged by figures that combine spiritual and political authority. As shown in the last two chapters, the "revenger" character takes upon himself God's declaration "Vengeance is mine" (Romans 12:19), and though, as in the case of Vindice in *The Revenger's Tragedy*, he does encourage repentance in some characters, the revenger is finally a destructive and impenitent force that embodies the vice of the community. In *Measure for Measure* and *The Malcontent*, however, this role is transformed into the sincere confessor who encourages penance and also wields temporal authority. The combination of these powers explores, in part, the concept of the "King's Two Bodies." As Ernst Kantorowicz writes,

"The king a *gemina persona*, human by nature and divine by grace: this was the high-mediaeval equivalent of the later vision of the King's Two Bodies, and also its foreshadowing... The king, by his consecration, was bound to the altar as "King" and not only—we may think of later

he does not specifically address the element of repentance, the congruence between these plays, as well as *Measure for Measure*, is significant particularly for the various presentations of the problems of repentance. See chapter 3 for an extended consideration of repentance in *Hamlet*.

centuries—as a private person. He was “liturgical” as a king because, and in so far as, he represented and imitated the image of the living Christ.²⁴¹

Within this political theology, which was particularly stressed by James I, the king was thought to possess considerable religious authority as well as temporal, secular authority. Though this combination of political and ecclesiastical power is presented as somewhat problematic in *Measure for Measure*, it also stresses the importance of penance as a means of leading to the well-being of the individual and the larger community.

In Duke Pietro’s initial description of Malevole, he speaks of the malcontent’s particular relish in mocking and rebuking those most attached to worldly matters, and he describes Malevole’s sharp tongue as one that “truly serves heaven” (1.2.22-23). This, as it turns out, is more accurate than Duke Pietro realizes, as at the conclusion of *The Malcontent*, Malevole encourages Pietro to true repentance rather than seeking revenge. In this initial encounter, however, the religious language persists, as Pietro inquires where Malevole had been, receiving the answer, “From the public place of much dissimulation, the church” (1.3.4-5). The conversation continues:

Pietro: I wonder what religion thou art of?

Malevole: Of a soldier’s religion.

Pietro: And what dost thou think makes most infidels now?

Malevole: Sects, sects. I have seen seeming Piety change her robe so oft
that sure none but some archdevil can shape her a new
petticoat.

Pietro: Oh, a religious policy!

Malevole: But damnation on a politic religion! (1.3.8-15)

²⁴¹ Ernst H. Kantorowicz, *The King’s Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology*, 87.

Aside from revealing Malevole's deep suspicion of changing religions and feigned piety, this exchange is also important because of the topical reference to sects and religious dissention in the state; when *The Malcontent* was first performed in 1604, there was considerable religious uncertainty and contention surrounding James I's assumption of the English throne (1603). In fact, Duke Pietro's question "I wonder what religion thou art of" is echoed several times throughout *The Malcontent*. In Act 2, Malevole asks Pietro, "What religion wilt thou be of next?" (2.3.12), and again in Act 4, Malevole asks the now fallen Pietro, "Of what faith art now?" (4.4.15). Finally, in the most historically pointed reference, Malevole also asks Bilioso, a flattering courtier, "What religion will you be of now?" and receives the answer, "Of the Duke's religion, when I know what it is" (4.5.94-5). Except for the final exchange with Bilioso, these references to religious affiliation are, in their specific contexts, general questions about political or personal loyalty, rather than confessional questions pertaining to one's religious denomination. Nevertheless, the repetition of this question throughout the play evokes a sense of religious uncertainty, and the fact that the question is most commonly asked by Malevole is particularly telling. The disguised Duke is not simply seeking to rail at the world and defeat his usurpers; rather, he is intimately concerned with, and vested in, the virtuous well-being of his subjects. He recognizes that the correction of his state includes both the public institution of justice and the encouragement of personal virtue among his citizens. To accomplish this, his citizens must repent before both God and the community that had been corrupted by their sins.

In his work *John Marston of the Middle Temple: An Elizabethan Dramatist in His Social Setting*, Philip Finkelpearl argues that Malevole's actions in *The Malcontent* are a

combination or synthesis of Christianity and Machiavellianism. His argument is appealing, as Duke Altofronto resorts to disguise, deception, and intrigue to regain power. However, William Slights maintains that Finkelpearl incorrectly emphasizes the overall impact of Altofronto's disguise as Malevole, since "our memories of the play are dominated by Malevole's scurrilous but eloquent and morally impassioned denunciations of the evil which permeates his world, not by the shrewdness of his schemes to reacquire the dukedom."²⁴² In this respect, both Altofronto and his assumed identity Malevole share this essential trait of disgust with his community's corruption and vice; Altofronto's disguise is only of the outward appearance, as his assumed character truly expresses his sentiments.²⁴³ The use of disguise, however, does illustrate Altofronto's recognition that virtuous anger is not enough to correct the society.²⁴⁴ Rather, as other critics have acknowledged, Altofronto realizes the performative elements of ruling, since "a ruler must present to his people the 'outward shows' of power...yet the ruler must recognize that those 'outward shows' are only theatrical, that his identity as king is only as a persona for God, a part he must play by 'heaven's imposed conditions.'"²⁴⁵ But rather than merely attempt to master theatricality and disguise for the sake of power, Altofronto truly seeks to reform any characters he can.

Similar charges of Machiavellianism can be leveled at Duke Vincentio in *Measure for Measure*. Recent scholarship has focused upon the play's combination of the secular and religious, finding extensive allusions and similarities in Angelo's method of

²⁴² William Slights, "Elder in a Deform'd Church': The Function of Marston's Malcontent," 361.

²⁴³ Slights suggests the same interpretation, writing, "what we know of Altofronto is consistent with Malevole's contempt for the sordid struggle for transitory, worldly rewards" (Ibid, 364-365).

²⁴⁴ Ibid, 366.

²⁴⁵ Douglas Lanier, "Satire, Self Concealment, and Statecraft: The Game of Identity in John Marston's 'The Malcontent'," 40.

ruling to the positions advocated by Puritans in early seventeenth-century England. Peter Lake has argued that “in *Measure for Measure*, the familiar figure of the absent/disguised magistrate, gone walkabout, is directly linked to a puritanically inspired campaign of moral reformation to be brought about through a newly rigorous enforcement of the law.”²⁴⁶ Lake offers a compelling account of the historical situation of Puritan attitudes that, he suggests, Shakespeare was responding to, and he further argues that in critiquing contemporary Puritan attitudes, *Measure for Measure* is also “potentially at least, an anti-Calvinist work” (669).²⁴⁷ Deborah Shuger similarly argues that the Duke is a positive representative of orthodox Anglicanism and, in part, of James I, whereas Angelo embodies the unflinching puritan attitudes, particularly in the desire to have the state regulate sexual matters.²⁴⁸ Jonathan Goossen, on the other hand, has maintained that both Duke Vincentio and Angelo are guilty of conflating the temporal and spiritual law, and that the Duke is fairly ineffective as a spiritual guide: “the Duke's benevolence is not in question here, only his consistent inability to effect the *cura animarum* while disguised as a friar. By virtue of his actual identity as a magistrate, his methods are consistently mingled with those of the state.”²⁴⁹ The true model, Goossen contends, is Isabella, who, “offers instead the precise but sensible political theology that the medievals arrived at by centuries-long experience, a common sense that refuses any heady idealism about the

²⁴⁶ Peter Lake, with Michael Questier. *The Antichrist's Lewd Hat: Protestants, Papists, and Players in Post-Reformation England*, 622.

²⁴⁷ Lake leaves this critique of Calvinism as a whole as a qualified possibility, admitting that “the evidence is too equivocal to allow a definitive answer” (Ibid, 672). He makes the interesting conclusion that “what seems to be happening here is that out of the ideological, theological and moral materials lying around post-reformation England (many of which, as both Christopher Haigh and Eamon Duffy have pointed out, were decidedly ‘catholic’), the play constructs a militantly anti-puritan, possibly even anti-Calvinist, but definitively not Roman catholic, post-reformation synthesis” (676).

²⁴⁸ Deborah Shuger, *Political Theologies in Shakespeare's England: The Sacred and the State in Measure for Measure*.

²⁴⁹ Jonathan Goossen, “‘Tis set down so in heaven, but not in earth’: Reconsidering Political Theology in Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*,” 230.

likelihood of the kingdom of God being set up on earth, either by ridding it of sinners or treating them as parishioners” (237).

These debates address, to varying degrees, the question of whether Duke Vincentio ought to be regarded as a model of appropriate state action or as a reprehensible abuser of religious authority, and these same questions can be raised concerning Duke Altonfronto in *The Malcontent*. Examining the forms and methods of repentance as they are portrayed in both plays is an important step in answering this question, since it is the Dukes themselves who most consistently encourage other characters to repent of both public and private sins. It should be noted, however, that in *Measure for Measure*, the Duke not only encourages his subjects to repent of their failings, but repeatedly tests the appearance of virtue from the beginning of the play. Vincentio allows Angelo to assume the rule of Vienna both because the current laws are mocked by the public—“Liberty plucks Justice by the nose” (1.3.29)—and as a means of testing the new ruler: “Lord Angelo is precise; / Stands at a guard with envy, scarce confesses / That his blood flows, or that his appetite / Is more to bread than stone. Hence we shall see / If power change purpose, what our seemers be” (1.3.50-54). The Duke presents himself to Friar Peter as a concerned ruler, seeking to test one of his important magistrates, but as is eventually revealed to the audience, Vincentio has long known at least some of Angelo’s past sins. He tells Isabella in Act 3 of Angelo’s breaking of his engagement with Mariana due to her loss of her dowry, and this raises important questions. Given his knowledge of Angelo’s dishonorable and grasping character, is his abjuration of power to Angelo actually seeking the reform of Vienna, or creating a situation in which it is not only possible, but quite likely, that justice will miscarry?

Furthermore, Vincentio seems to have placed Angelo in the occasion of sin. Angelo's vicious character would, naturally, be exacerbated by being given uncontrolled power in a situation in which he would be seemingly unaccountable. Duke Vincentio also tests Isabella by lying to her about Claudio's execution, explaining his plan, "She's come to know / If yet her brother's pardon be come hither; / But I will keep her ignorant of her good, / To make her heavenly comforts of despair / When it is least expected" (4.3.99-103), and he allows her to be further tested in kneeling to pray for mercy for her brother's seeming murderer in the final scene of *Measure for Measure*.

In *The Malcontent*, Altofronto's efforts at reforming both his state as a political entity and the individual souls within it mirror Duke Vincentio's efforts, and involve significant exhortations to repent. When, for example, the courtier Ferneze is caught in the Duchess Aurelia's chamber and nearly killed, Malevole helps him away, while encouraging him to abandon a life of lust:

Thy shame, more than thy wounds, do grieve me far.
Thy wounds but leave upon thy flesh some scar,
But fame ne'er heals, still rankles worse and worse;
Such is of uncontrolled lust the curse.
This what it is in lawless sheets to lie,
But, oh, Ferneze, what in lust to die!
With women's eyes and lispings wantonness!
Stick candles 'gainst a virgin wall's white back;
If they not burn, yet at the least they'll black. (2.5.149-154)

Malevole's exhortation is rhetorically sophisticated; he begins by appealing to that to which Ferneze is most sensitive, reputation, and proceeds to emphasize the spiritual damage that transcends the loss of reputation: "what in lust to die!" Disparaging the eyes and wantonness that Ferneze endangered his soul for, Malevole concludes with thinly veiled references to the burning of hell and the blackening of one's soul with sin. Notably, in exhorting Ferneze to abandon his lustful ways and to live away from court (2.5.160), Malevole has nothing to gain, and in no way furthers his political plans. Rather, the disguised duke is simply seeking the betterment of one of his subjects and the good of his community.²⁵⁰

Malevole undertakes a similarly altruistic endeavor for the spiritual good of his people when he encourages the courtier Bilioso to take his wife with him on his upcoming trip to Florence. Bilioso, notable for being utterly feckless and having already angered Malevole, nevertheless receives wise advice from the disguised duke:

Keep thy wife in the state of grace. Heart o'truth, I would sooner leave my
lady singled in a bordello than in the Genoa palace...
Surfeit would choke intemperate appetite,
Make the soul scent the rotten breath of lust;
When in an Italian lascivious palace,
A lady guardianless,
Left to the push of all allurements,
The strongest incitements to immodesty— (3.2.27-37)

²⁵⁰ Ira Clark analyzes Malevole's diction and use of aphorisms throughout *The Malcontent*, arguing that "Malevole is characterized most by using aphorisms to drive the sinners of the play to repent so they might be saved" ("Character and Cosmos in Marston's 'Malcontent'," 93). This linguistic evidence supports my contention that he is motivated not only by the desire to recover his dukedom, but also to rectify the morality of individuals within his state.

Just as he urged Ferneze to avoid the vicious life of the court, so too he warns Bilioso against leaving his wife alone amidst the temptations and seductions of the Genoese society. Malevole exhibits an intimate knowledge of the spiritual dangers that fill courtly life. Though Bilioso, upon his return from Florence, tells Malevole that he would “rather stand with wrong than fall with right” (4.5.936), and throughout *The Malcontent* embodies all that is wrong with courtiers’ flattery and immorality, he nevertheless takes Malevole’s advice to heart, swearing, “Mass, I’ll think on’t. Farewell” (3.2.52). Again, Altofronto has nothing to gain from the survival or destruction of Bilioso’s marriage, but urges this action out of a regard for the couple’s spiritual well-being.

Both Duke Vincentio and Duke Altofronto, then, make conscious efforts to reform the moral life of their subjects while restoring the political life of the community. However, their disguises also raise certain challenging questions. If Duke Vincentio’s handing of power to Angelo in *Measure for Measure* betrays a duplicitousness that goes further than merely the use of disguise, his adoption of a religious habit is similarly questionable. Indeed, this is one of the fundamental differences between the plays that are otherwise remarkably similar in their general situations. In Marston’s *The Malcontent*, the disguised Duke Altofronto works to regain his dukedom of Genoa while also seeking the spiritual betterment of his subjects. In Shakespeare’s *Measure for Measure*, written during the same period of 1602-04, and first performed the same year as *The Malcontent*, Duke Vincentio temporarily abdicates his rule and, in disguise, seeks to correct the many ills—both political and spiritual—in Vienna. But while Altofronto seeks to lead his subjects to virtue through his disguise as a malcontented cynic, Vincentio assumes the more striking habit of a friar. Shakespeare made use of friars in several of his plays, most

notably in *Romeo and Juliet* and *Much Ado About Nothing*, but the ruler's adoption of the religious habit renders *Measure for Measure* unique in its presentation of the priestly office being performed by an imposter.²⁵¹ Indeed, in an era during which the English monarchs asserted that they were also heads of the church, Duke Vincentio's assumption of a disguise that confers religious authority is rife with topical implications.

Acting as a priest, Duke Vincentio visits the prison, asking the provost to "make me know / The nature of their crimes, that I may minister / To them accordingly" (2.3.6-8). He then encounters the pregnant Juliet, encouraging her to repent:

Duke: Repent you, fair one, of the sin you carry?

Juliet: I do, and bear the shame most patiently.

Duke: I'll teach you how you shall arraign your conscience,

And try your penitence if it be sound

Or hollowly put on. (2.3.20-24)

The Duke questions her understanding of her sin, and warns her against repenting for the wrong reasons, urging her to be contrite for the spiritual wrong, not merely for the temporal shame that her pregnancy brings. Juliet interrupts his speech, declaring, "I do repent me as it is an evil, / And take the shame with joy" (2.3.37-38). In this situation, Duke Vincentio appears to be successful in his role as father confessor, and he continues to urge such repentance in several of the following scenes.

²⁵¹ Sarah Beckwith notes that "the friars in Shakespeare generally help the young to marry or engage in providential frictions; above all, they are not busy manipulators but the trusters of time...In transforming his prior treatment of the figure of the friar to the Duke as friar in *Measure for Measure*, Shakespeare reverses the import of Protestant theatre's deployment of this figure. Against this background it becomes clear that the figure of the Duke-friar is now directed not at the "theatricality of the church" but at the theatricality of the crown/dukedom/monarchy; it is precisely an inversion of anti-Catholic theatre using its own techniques. The wolf in sheep's clothing is not the friar but Duke" (*Shakespeare and the Grammar of Forgiveness*, 76).

Most famously, the Duke ministers to Claudio on the eve of his scheduled execution, urging him to “be absolute for death” (3.1.5). Much like Duke Altfronto in *The Malcontent*, Duke Vincentio disparages the things of this world and encourages Claudio to embrace death as a means of freeing himself from life’s woes: “What’s in this / That bears the name of life? Yet, in this life / Lie hid more thousand deaths; yet death we fear / That makes these odds all even” (3.1.38-41). The Duke’s powerful rhetoric seems to be effective, as Claudio responds, “To sue to live, I find I seek to die, / And seeking death, find life. Let it come on.” (3.1.42-43). This conversion, however, is short lived, as Claudio changes his mind when learning of the possibility of his pardon from Isabella. Notably, when Claudio speaks with Isabella and utters his powerful worries, “Ah, but to die, and go we know not where” (3.1.118), the Duke eavesdrops on their conversation; he is made privy both to the thoughts and sins that are revealed to him through confession, and to those that he discovers by other means. In fact, when the Duke later assures Claudio that Angelo was only testing Isabella, he says, “I am confessor to Angelo, and I know this to be true” (3.1.168), not only using his assumed role as confessor as a means of deceiving Claudio, but also seemingly violating the seal of the confessional.²⁵² He similarly treats his confessional knowledge loosely in the final scene, when he speaks of Mariana, saying, “Love her, Angelo. / I have confessed her, and I know her virtue” (5.1.519-20). The Duke also solicits a confession from the unrepentant prisoner Bernardine, telling the Provost “I will give him a present shrift” (4.2.189), and having failed to encourage a true spirit of repentance, he arranges to have Bernardine’s

²⁵² The secrecy of the confessional was reaffirmed even in the Church of England in the canons of 1604. See Sarah Beckwith, *Shakespeare and the Grammar of Forgiveness*, 75.

execution delayed.²⁵³ Indeed, after seeing Bernardine's recalcitrance, he says, "A creature unprepared, unmeet for death; / And to transport him in the mind he is / Were damnable" (4.3.59-61). The Duke's sincerity towards Bernardine is unquestionable, though one must wonder about the efficaciousness of having the criminal confess to a man who only is disguised as a friar. Since the Duke is not ordained, what profit would Bernardine's "shrift" accomplish?

Repentance also takes the foreground in the latter part of *The Malcontent*. Having been commissioned by Mendoza to murder Pietro, Malevole saves him, telling him of his wife Aurelia's unfaithfulness and disguising him as a holy hermit. When Aurelia is banished by her erstwhile lover Duke Mendoza, Pietro and Malevole encounter her, and Pietro urges her to repent by greeting her with the words, "Lady, the blessedness of repentance to you" (4.5.2-3). Aurelia's response is utterly despairing:

Why? Why? I can desire nothing but death,

Nor deserve anything but hell.

If heaven should give sufficiency of grace

To clear my soul, it would make heaven graceless;

My sins would make the stock of mercy poor.

Oh, they would tire heaven's goodness to reclaim them. (4.5.4-9)

Aurelia, echoing the despairing repentance of Faustus and Claudius, is filled with contrition for the wrongs done to her husband, but her despair precludes true repentance.

²⁵³ Debora Shuger argues that Bernardine is an important character, since he does not exist in the source material for *Measure for Measure*, and he represents a focal point of debate between Puritans and Anglicans over what to do with the unregenerate and unrepentant sinners. Bernardine represents the "conflict between penitential and penal models: between, that is, the view that justice, or at least Christian justice, aimed at the offender's repentance and restoration into the community and the view that its purpose was rather to cut off the diseased limb lest it corrupt the social body" (*Political Theologies in Shakespeare's England: The Sacred and State in Measure for Measure*, 117).

Pietro's response to this outburst, however, delineates the proper spiritual path that his wife must take. He describes his hermit's cell as an austere, small place, in which "the rheumy vault will force your eyes to weep / Whilst you behold true desolation" (4.5.19-20), and Aurelia understands that she must perform actual penance: "Behold me worthily most miserable! / Oh, let the anguish of my contrite spirit / Entreat some reconciliation" (4.5.26-28). Aurelia's tortured spirit finds solace in embracing her suffering as a form of reconciliation, and, prodded by Pietro, she makes a full confession of her past sins, exclaiming,

I, like to a wretch given o'er to hell,
Brake all the sacred rites of marriage
To clip a base, ungentle, faithless villain,
Oh, God, a very pagan reprobate!—
What should I say?—Ungrateful, throws me out,
For whom I lost soul, body, fame, and honor. (4.5.36-41)

Aurelia's recognition that she broke the sacred rites of marriage is important, for it indicates the extent to which she acknowledged her wrongdoing. She had not simply wronged a husband who "as the soul loves the body, so loved he" (4.5.33), but she had violated divine laws. Her adultery was a transgression that hurt her husband, but also lost her "soul." Her sin was both spiritually deadly and damaging to the community, and when she recognizes that she has lost fame and honor, as well as her soul, she recognizes that repentance will include penitence with respect to God, her husband, and her community. She continues,

But 'tis most fit; why should a better fate

Attend on any who forsake chaste sheets,
Fly the embrace of a devoted heart,
Joined by a solemn vow 'fore God and man,
To taste the brackish blood of beastly lust
In an adulterous touch?...

Joy to thy ghost, sweet lord: pardon to me! (4.5.42-51)

This final line, addressed to her husband who is disguised as a hermit, is a clear reference to Aurelia's desire for absolution from a priestly figure. Pietro is not a priest, however, and is notably silent in response to Aurelia's impetration. His disguise, moreover, prevents him from forgiving her as her wronged husband. This situation parallels Duke Vincetion's questionable use of confession in *Measure for Measure*, since he too is not a true confessor but only disguised as one.

Pietro, as a new follower of Malevole, encourages repentance in his wayward wife, but he himself performs the most striking repentance in *The Malcontent* directly following his wife's exit from the stage. Malevole, still disguised and unknown as Altofronto, encourages a deeper penitence in Pietro, taking the loss of his wife and dukedom as an opportunity for exhortation. Malevole famously expostulates in his Golgotha speech,

Come, be not confounded; thou'rt but in danger to lose a dukedom. Think this: this earth is the only grave and Golgotha wherein all things that live must rot; 'tis but the draught wherein the heavenly bodies discharge their corruption, the very muckhill on which the sublunary orbs cast their excrements. Man is the slime of this dung-pit, and princes are the

governors of these men. For, for our souls, they are as free as emperors', all of one piece; there goes but a pair of shears betwixt an emperor and the son of a bagpiper—only the dyeing, dressing, pressing, glossing, makes the difference. Now, what art thou like to lose? (4.5.109-120)

Echoing Hamlet's reflections that "your fat king and your lean beggar is but variable service" (*Hamlet*, 4.3.23-24), Malevole's depredation of humanity and life is also strikingly similar to Duke Vincentio's "be absolute for death" speech in *Measure for Measure* (3.1.5-41), which I will discuss below. Malevole's striking rhetoric not only disparages life and the desire for power, but through the references to Golgotha and the heavens, directs Pietro to a spiritual, and not simply material, repentance.

Malevole is effective; Pietro responds by thinking back to the duke that he himself had unthroned, and his speech incorporates the three traditional parts of penance: contrition, confession, and satisfaction. He states,

I here renounce forever regency.
O, Altofront, I wrong thee to supplant thy right,
To trip thy heels up with a devilish sleight,
For which I now from throne am thrown; world tricks abjure.
For vengeance, though't comes slow, yet it comes sure.
Oh, I am changed; for here, 'fore the dread power,
In true contrition I do dedicate
My breath to solitary holiness,
My lips to prayer, and my breast's care shall be
Restoring Altofront to regency. (4.5.123-132)

Pietro begins by acknowledging and confessing his sin of supplanting Duke Altofronto, and he emphasizes his contrition, which looks back on past wrongs and looks forward to a changed life. Finally, in resolving to make his material care the restoration of Altofronto's rule, he demonstrates his resolve to make satisfaction for his sins.²⁵⁴ This satisfaction is explicitly related to making restoration to his community, and just as in the morality play *Everyman*, the performance of penance raises Good Deeds, so also does Pietro's repentance lead to satisfaction through good works for his society.

This dramatic situation is important: Aurelia, not knowing that she was speaking to her husband, confessed her sin to him as a ghostly father, and this is directly followed by Pietro, not knowing he is speaking to Altofronto, confessing his sins to him and resolving upon a changed life. The paralleled repentances and confessions of Aurelia and Pietro are both made, unknowingly, to the person whom they have wronged. But while the disguised Pietro is silent in response to his wife's confession, Malevole responds to Pietro's by declaring "Thy vows are heard, and we accept thy faith" (4.5.133), while throwing off his disguise. Much like Duke Vincentio at the conclusion of *Measure for Measure*, Altofronto amazes Pietro with his true identity, and then confirms Pietro's dedication to his new resolve. Pietro declares, "My vows stand fixed in heaven, and from hence / I crave all love and pardon" (4.5.141-42). Pietro does remain true to his new vows, and fulfills the satisfaction that he had promised, assisting Altofronto's efforts to take the dukedom back from Mendoza. Similarly, in the final scene, Pietro reveals himself to Aurelia while dancing with her, urging her to "be once from sorrow free" (5.6.84). When she realizes that her husband is not dead, the repentant Aurelia exclaims

²⁵⁴ William Slights also observes the three parts of penance in this speech in his article "'Elder in a Deform'd Church': The Function of Marston's Malcontent," (369).

that her heart “doth humbly fall / Low as the earth to thee” (5.6.109-110). It is also important to note that while Pietro and Aurelia are shown to be truly penitent, the courtier Ferneze, who had been helped by Altofronto when he was wounded for his adulterous affair, returns to his old ways in the final scene. Rather than abjure the Genoan court, Ferneze returns and propositions Bianca while dancing with her (5.6.86-93). Altofronto, like Duke Vincentio with the impenitent Bernardine, is not always successful in his efforts to reform his subjects.

In both *Measure for Measure* and *The Malcontent*, the Dukes’ disguises allow them to enter into the full life of the city in a manner not available to them as the rulers. Like Shakespeare’s Henry V, who disguises himself as a common soldier on the eve of Agincourt (*Henry V*, 4.1) and consequently learns the true feelings of his soldiers, so too Vincentio’s and Altofronto’s disguises allows them to learn the details of the prisons, of the courts, and of the spiritual states of many of their subjects. Notably, however, Vincentio’s easy mobility in society in the guise of a friar was in keeping with the social role of Franciscans in late-Medieval Europe. Describing the social status of friars in a manner deeply reminiscent of Vincentio’s actions in *Measure for Measure*, Joseph Ziegler writes,

The urban environment in which the friars lived together with their pastoral ideology inevitably created many opportunities for encounters with the faithful beyond the Sunday sermon or the schoolroom. Friars were invited to dine, traveled in the company of others, sat by the hearth; and they socialized with the faithful, visited the sick, and comforted the dying and the mourners. This was part of the practical religion, which

mingled teaching, preaching, and humane relationship. On all these occasions the friar appears as a teacher and a spiritual guide, but also as a compassionate friend and even as an entertainer; not as an austere guardian of moral mores remote from the society in which he lived.²⁵⁵

This description might be entirely applied to Vincentio, who socializes, consoles, and exhorts his subjects through his role as friar. His easy, fluid movement from prison to aristocratic houses to the edge of the city to greet the returning duke demonstrates the mobility and deep connection to the life of the community that was available to a friar. Before Shakespeare's audience, then, Vincentio acts as both the head and the heart of the community; he is the corporeal leader, and his symbolic assumption of the friar's robes indicate his essential connection to the life of the community.

Vincetio's deep relationship to the community involves the important role of confessor. In all of the situations in which the Duke encourages repentance and solicits confessions, he demonstrates sincere concern for his subjects' well-being, and a sincere desire to help them. Like Alfronto in *The Malcontent*, Duke Vincentio does not simply seek to rectify his state, but seeks the spiritual good of his subjects as well. The important difference, as I have said, is in the disguises and roles that each duke assumes, and the consequences of authority being vested in those roles. Alfronto remains a cynic concerning worldly power, though also aware of his need to be attentive to public perception; Duke Vincentio operates as a priest, assuming authority in the private, confessional realm as well as the public, political realm. In the final scenes of both plays, the true duke is unmasked, assumes his rightful position of power, and rectifies the

²⁵⁵ Joseph Ziegler, "Fourteenth Century Instructions for Bedside Pastoral Care." In *Medieval Christianity in Practice*, 107.

injustices that had been occurring. In both final scenes, characters sue for pardon, though the repentant tone in *Measure for Measure* is more persistent and emphasized. In Act 5, Scene 1 of Shakespeare's play, the word "pardon" is uttered eleven times; "confess" is said nine times; "mercy" is spoken four times, and "justice" is mentioned twelve times (though four times directly in a row by Isabella, 5.1.25).²⁵⁶ Characters also kneel at least four different times, and quite possibly much more often. The Duke, revealed as the disguised friar, issues judgments that stem both from his arrangement of affairs and from his knowledge and authority gained as spiritual confessor of his people. In his very person, he combines the spiritual and social elements of repentance.

In her recent work *Shakespeare and the Grammar of Forgiveness*, Sarah Beckwith makes a substantial critique of Duke Vincentio's use of the confessional and priestly status in *Measure for Measure*. She argues that "the play works concertedly to violate the very principle of consent in the confessional and in marriage, two areas where the voluntary movements of the heart were historically regarded as completely central."²⁵⁷ Indeed, the play concludes with the forced marriages of Lucio and a prostitute, Angelo and Mariana, the proposed marriage between the Duke and Isabella, and the rectifying marriage between Claudio and Juliet. Similarly, the fact that the authority of the state makes use of information learned in the confessional renders it "a form of effective espionage, a useful means of surveillance" (75). Beckwith argues that it is as a confessor, not as the Duke, that Vincetio gains Isabella's trust, and that her willingness to follow his plan is dependent upon her willingness to trust a priest.

²⁵⁶ In the entire play, "pardon" is mentioned twenty-eight times, "confess" is spoken fourteen times, "mercy" seventeen times, and "justice" thirty-three times. The repetitive frequency of these words in the final scene is striking.

²⁵⁷ Sarah Beckwith, *Shakespeare and the Grammar of Forgiveness*, 60.

Isabella's silence in response to the Duke's marriage proposal might be read, she suggests, as "shock and betrayal...despair and entrapment" (74) on finding that the man whom she trusted as a spiritual authority and guide was the Duke. Furthermore, the Duke's use of the confessional reflects the loss of confession in English religious practices. Observing the historical context surrounding *Measure for Measure*, Beckwith writes,

The abolition of auricular confession paradoxically had the effect of separating the internal from the external forum of confession...Precisely because after the abolition of compulsory auricular confession there was no regular mandated recourse to the priestly admonitions and the penances that might result from such private confessions, penance became more punitive, public, and juridical in ways that could have been neither intended nor anticipated.²⁵⁸

Indeed, the penance at the conclusion of *Measure for Measure* is publicly doled out, and vice is revealed and dealt with in the open forum of a political hearing. This reflects, Beckwith suggests, part of the problems that England was struggling with after the abolition of auricular confession. She concludes that *Measure for Measure* presents "a society which had lost the institutions, understandings, and capacities for confession...the sort of state and the sort of theatre that occur when interiority is hollowed out, when the consent of the heart is vitiated both in contrition in the confessional, and in marriage" (80).

²⁵⁸ Ibid, 68. By "internal" and "external" forums of confession, Beckwith is following the distinction between confession of private or minor sins that were moderated by the priest, and the larger issues that were dealt with in pre-Reformation ecclesiastical courts. See Part 1 of *Shakespeare and the Grammar of Forgiveness* for a helpful analysis of this shift during the Reformation.

Beckwith makes a compelling argument concerning Shakespeare's topical representations, and, when placed in comparison to *The Malcontent*, *Measure for Measure* even more clearly presents the problems with the state's assumption of religious authority, and the rendering of both private conscience and public action as within the proper purview of the monarch's reach.²⁵⁹ It is important, however, to also acknowledge a variable understanding of Duke Vincentio's actions throughout the play. If, when read within the political and religious contexts of the play's composition, *Measure for Measure* stands as a critique of the loss of auricular confession to the expansion of state authority, it can also be understood, when viewed allegorically, as a work representing an apocalyptic final judgment. The Duke does, in certain respects, act the figure of God; he knows all, arranges all, and operates as the supreme authority in both the political and spiritual realms. When he is finally unveiled in the fifth act, he takes a seat of judgment, and Angelo, awed by his majesty, declares,

O my dread lord,
I should be guiltier than my guiltiness
To think I can be indiscernible
When I perceive your grace, like power divine
Hath looked upon my passes. Then, good prince,
No longer session hold upon my shame,
But let my trial be mine own confession.
Immediate sentence then, and sequent death,

²⁵⁹ As observed above, thoughts concerning a ruler's considerable religious authority were not new in the early modern period, as they developed from the medieval political theology that understood the king as a principal figure in the life of the Church. See Kantorowicz's *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Medieval Political Theology*.

Is all the grace I beg. (5.1.358-366).

Angelo speaks of the Duke as if he is omniscient, knowing all his guiltiness, and he is abject in his admission. The Duke condemns him to marry Mariana immediately, and when they return, the Duke sentences Angelo to death, citing the Sermon on the Mount: “The very mercy of the law cries out / Most audible, even from his proper tongue, / ‘An Angelo for Claudio, death for death’. / Haste still pays haste, and leisure answers leisure; / Like doth quit like, and measure still for measure” (5.1.399-403). It is notable, here, that the Duke renders judgment while referring to Christ’s strictures against judging others. The 1599 Geneva Bible translates the passage, “Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged, and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured unto you again” (Matthew 7:1-2). Now, clearly, state authority must to some degree render judgment, but not only is Duke Vincentio’s invocation of this particular passage fitting in its applicability to Angelo’s hypocrisy, but it further reinforces the impression of divine judgment issuing from the duke himself. As God declares in Romans 12:19, “Vengeance is mine,” and Vincentio’s institution of punishments in the final act is corrective for both the private, spiritual failings of his subjects and their wrongs against the community. In contrast to the revenger character on the early modern stage, Vincentio is a figure that combines penance and judgment, justice and mercy. This apocalyptic sentiment of persists throughout the scene, as the Duke remits and inflicts punishments, and is knelt to by Isabella and Mariana.

Without overly stressing this allegorical interpretation, it is useful to bear in mind when considering the role of penance and repentance in *Measure for Measure*. Repentance occurs in the play in an apparently Catholic manner, with a father confessor

ministering to the souls.²⁶⁰ However, as Beckwith argues, the story represents the incorporation of this Catholic confession into the public, political realm during the Reformation in England. In this sense, then, the play presents Anglican forms of repentance, in which sin and one's conscience fall within the state's authority. Similarly, as Peter Lake has argued, the play can be understood as a critique of Puritanism and even Calvinism. What to make of it then?

A similar difficulty arises when looking closely at repentance in *The Malcontent*. If, as I have shown, the spiritual reformation and well-being of Genoa are of paramount importance to Altofronto, and if repentance becomes the predominating spiritual subject in the latter part of the play, what remains to be considered is the degree to which penance in *The Malcontent* follows or challenges a particular theological formulation. In "The Theological Basis of Imagery and Structure in *The Malcontent*," Brownell Salomon argues that *The Malcontent* presents a coherent understanding of the world, human beings, and sin within a Calvinist framework. He writes, "Aurelia's repentance is neither easy nor perfunctory. Indeed, the theological hopelessness of her condition...serves a collateral dramatic function. It creates maximum suspense by stressing the impossibility of her being forgiven through human agencies alone."²⁶¹ Salomon's emphasis upon Aurelia's initial despair is important, though it does not, strictly speaking, connote Calvinism exclusively. In fact, all of the Christian sects during the Reformation would have agreed that "her absolution is utterly contingent upon divine grace" (281); the specific difficulty with repentance is not the degree to which it depends upon grace, but

²⁶⁰ David Beauregard argues that "the play presents a distinct contrast between two types of penitential action: one the public punishment imposed on sinners by the Elizabethan bawdy courts, and the other the private confession of sins characteristic of Catholic pastoral practice" (*Catholic Theology in Shakespeare's Plays*, 70.)

²⁶¹ Brownell Salomon, "The Theological Basis of Imagery and Structure in *The Malcontent*," 281.

rather with the manners and methods of repenting. As I have discussed in chapter 2, Calvin conceived of repentance as a perpetual state, and he vigorously attacked the idea of auricular confession to anyone, let alone someone in the habit of a “ghostly father.” Salomon correctly observes that “Malevole may be said to have assumed the figurative role of a father confessor, who through his mediatorial position between the formerly disjointed worlds of supernature and nature, now enacts their reconciliation in assuring Pietro that his prayers have indeed been answered” (282). But again, the role of a father confessor is not strictly Calvinist.

The several confessions, moments of contrition, and attempts at satisfaction in *The Malcontent* show a degree of inheritance of the Roman Catholic tradition of the sacrament of penance. However, the absence of any true priest complicates and challenges this presentation. Confessions are made to other characters, all of whom are, significantly, presenting a false persona. What, then, of the sincerity or efficacy of the confession? And if the confessions in *The Malcontent* are following a more Lutheran model in which repentance consists of a general spirit of contrition, with an unburdening of the conscience to any fellow believer, why does Marston make the specific point of having Pietro disguised as a hermit? The priest is absent from the stage, but the priestly figure is most apparently there, hearing a confession that concludes with the prayer “Joy to thy ghost, sweet lord: pardon to me!” (4.5.51). Such an allusion to the practice of auricular confession would be unmistakable to Marston’s audiences. I am not suggesting that Marston was sympathetic to the Catholic sacramental framework and understanding of penance, but rather that—in presenting a play that combines allusions to auricular confession, a figure of the state that is the center of religious sentiment, and various

successful and unsuccessful efforts by characters to repent and amend their lives— Marston was purposefully examining the problems of conscience that were so prevalent (and popular) throughout England in this period. Jeremy Taylor, a widely popular and influential casuist, wrote that the question of whether human laws bound one's conscience was the "greatest case of conscience in this whole matter,"²⁶² and when Marston presents a play in which the government itself, in the person of Altofronto, is arranging and settling the matters of conscience in the play, the role and nature of repentance and conscience in *The Malcontent* becomes particularly important. Altofronto corrects his society by encouraging both spiritual and social repentance, and the restitution for past wrongs that he encourages includes private penitential prayer as well as public actions of satisfaction. In *The Malcontent*, penance is presented firmly within the tradition seen in *Everyman*, *Doctor Faustus*, and *The Renegado*.

Furthermore, just as Marston's *The Malcontent* presents a conflation of penitential practices, theologies, and traditions, so too does *Measure for Measure*. Shakespeare's play cannot be read as an endorsement of auricular confession, but it is deeply wary of Calvinist attitudes toward sin and predestination, while also presenting an uncomfortable picture of the state moderating and dealing with matters of private conscience. The imaginative memory of the tradition of auricular confession is manifested in both plays; Marston and Shakespeare both make particular points of showing the difficulties of accomplishing repentance, difficulties that involve questions of assurance, true contrition, the urge to speak of one's sins, and the relationship among the church, the state, and the individual. The Church of England's abandonment of auricular confession and the Catholic sacramental understanding of penance were not minor shifts in religious habits,

²⁶² Jeremy Taylor, *The Whole Work*, Vol. 10, pp. 4.

but a profound reorienting of the ways in which humans relate to God and society. The difficulties that accompanied this shift abound in *The Malcontent* and *Measure for Measure*. In a striking contrast to the violent revenge tragedies like *The Revenger's Tragedy* and *Women Beware Women*, which present corrupt communities that preclude penance or destroy the penitent sinner, both *Measure for Measure* and *The Malcontent* depict the ways in which penance can lead individuals to virtuous paths and simultaneously rectify their relationships with their communities.

Epilogue

In the midst of thunder and lightning in the middle of *The Tempest*, Ariel, in the guise of a harpy, reveals himself to the amazed Alonso, Sebastian, and Antonio, and declares,

You are three men of sin, whom destiny—
That hath to instrument this lower world
And what is in't—the never-surfeited sea
Hath cause to belch up you, and on this island
Where man doth not inhabit, you 'mongst men
Being most unfit to live.²⁶³

These men's sinfulness renders them unfit for human community, and Ariel states that even the sea, with its boundless hunger, would not take them. Their physical situation—desperately cast on an island that separates them from Milan and Naples—mirrors their spiritual disposition, as their devotion to selfish and sinful ways cuts them off from the human community that should be governed by charity. Ariel proceeds to condemn them to a life of suffering as a process of amendment, declaring that

Ling'ring perdition—worse than any death
Can be at once—shall step by step attend
You and your ways; whose wraths to guard you from—

²⁶³ William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, 3.3.53-58.

Which here in this most desolate isle else falls
Upon your heads—is nothing but heart’s sorrow
And a clear life ensuing. (3.3.77-82)²⁶⁴

This is, of course, not really Prospero’s plan; rather, Prospero has Ariel threaten and mislead them to awaken their consciences. His point is not punishment, but the arousal of contrition. As Gonzalo recognizes after Ariel disappears, “Their great guilt, / Like poison given to work a great time after, / Now ‘gins to bite the spirits” (3.3.104-106). Afflicted with loss and troubled consciences, Prospero brings his wrongdoers to an isolated state in which they can reflect and repent of their sins.

Prospero later declares that his intentions go no farther than to awaken penitential feelings in his antagonists. Ariel informs him that all three are “distracted” and that their court is “brimful of sorrow and dismay” (5.1.12-14), and that seeing them would arouse the magician’s pity. Prospero responds,

Though with their high wrongs I am struck to th’ quick,
Yet with my nobler reason ‘gainst my fury
Do I take part. The rarer action is
In virtue than in vengeance. They being penitent,
The sole drift of my purpose doth extend
Not a frown further. (5.1.25-30)

In contrast to the scheming maliciousness of Sebastian and Antonio, Prospero demonstrate a profound, God-like charity. Indeed, Prospero stands as the perfect answer

²⁶⁴ Concerning these lines, Richard Harp observes, “Ariel speaks in another vein at the end of his condemnation... a penitential note that suggests the Boethian framework in which destiny and fate are classical ministers that serve as transparencies to a higher, more merciful intelligence” (“The Consolation of Romance: Providence in Shakespeare’s Late Plays,” in *Shakespeare’s Last Plays: Essays in Literature and Politics*, 28).

to the typical “revenger.” Whereas in *The Revenger’s Tragedy*, Vindice encourages certain characters to repent but persists in seeking justice through violent retribution, Prospero has the power to accomplish his revenge, but chooses the “rarer action” of mercy. Prospero is effective, at least with respect to Alonso who begs his forgiveness (5.1.113-122), and while Sebastian and Antonio are notably silent, Prospero accomplishes the just restoration of his dukedom while showing mercy to all his enemies. As if to emphasize this theme in the epilogue, Prospero declares, “Now I want / Spirits to enforce, art to enchant; / And my ending is despair / Unless I be relieved by prayer, / Which pierces so, that it assaults / Mercy itself, and frees all faults. / As you from crimes would pardoned be, / Let your indulgences set me free” (Epilogue, 13-20). Prospero is asking for applause, but the particular poetic metaphor that he adopts is significant. In the final couplet, he echoes the *Pater Noster*, “forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors” (Matthew 6:12),²⁶⁵ asking the audience to be merciful as they hope to receive mercy. Stressing the importance of prayer and mercy, Prospero asks his community, the audience, to grant him their indulgence. In certain respects, Prospero is commonly understood to represent Shakespeare himself, and it is not an exaggeration to see the playwright speaking to his community of theatergoers, acknowledging his relationship with them, and his dependence upon their indulgence, or charitable disposition. The conclusion of *The Tempest*, then, returns to the common theme of the profound connection between the community and its charitable, or in other cases sinful, elements.

²⁶⁵ It is often ignored that directly following this prayer, Christ expands upon this important element of forgiveness and mercy, stating, “For, as yee forgive me their trespasses, your heavenly father will also forgive you. But, if yee forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your father forgive your trespasses” (Matthew 6:14-15; 1611 King James Version). The *Pater Noster* is clear about the importance of forgiving others, but Christ chose to further emphasize this element, which indicates both its centrality to Christian doctrine, as well as, perhaps, the difficulty of actually accomplishing the forgiveness of those who wrong us.

Prospero, having shown mercy, begs mercy, and by the logic of his language and the prayer that he invokes, he consequently deserves mercy.

This dissertation has examined a variety of scenes of penance that occur on the early modern English stage, and the inseparable relationship between penance and the human community of the sinner. The subject of penance is, by its nature, connected to sin, and thus this work has dwelt upon successful and unsuccessful efforts by characters seeking to free themselves from the attachment to and effects of sin. Yet penance is also, by its nature, connected to mercy, for otherwise repenting would be an inconsequential and pointless action. Within the context of this discussion, moreover, mercy takes two particular forms: there is the universal mercy of God, and also the limited, and sometimes withheld, mercy of individuals towards one another within the context of a community. Prospero, like Shakespeare's Duke Vincentio in *Measure for Measure*, is important for demonstrating the role of mercy in relation to penance. Plays like *Doctor Faustus*, *Hamlet*, and *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* are deeply concerned with penance and its relationship to community, but in none of them is mercy an important theme. Rather, the sinner's struggle to become worthy or accepting of mercy dominates the penitential scenes. In *Measure for Measure*, *The Malcontent*, and *The Tempest*, however, mercy in relation to both sin and the community is of unqualified importance. A vengeful Prospero would be a terrible thing indeed, and a conflicted, wavering Vincentio would render the apocalyptic conclusion of *Measure for Measure* tyrannical instead of finally just. The fact that "mercy seasons justice" (*The Merchant of Venice*, 4.1.192) in certain of these plays is at profound odds with the role of the revenger, the role of the vicious society, and the destruction of the penitent when faced with the false, manipulative confessor.

The playwrights examined in this dissertation take a wide variety of approaches in their responses to the profound changes to penance and the community in early modern England. Nevertheless, in all of these works, the importance of penance and its effects upon the life of the community are evident. Penance, whether presented as a sacrament, a private prayer, an auricular confession, or a changed way of life, is consistently found to be a central theme in the drama from this period, and while these playwrights depart from such an overtly didactic depiction of penance as we find in late medieval morality plays, it remained an important point of investigation on the English stage during and after the religious upheaval of the sixteenth-century.

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Rogers Fellowship, UNLV, 2008-2010.

Phi Beta Kappa, University of Dallas, 2008.

Honors, English Senior Comprehensive Exam, University of Dallas, 2008.

Max Beerbohm Award, University of Dallas, 2008.

Honors Fellow, Intercollegiate Studies Institute, 2007-2008.

Academic Achievement Award, University of Dallas, Due Santi Campus, Rome, Italy. 2005.

Publications

“Private Conscience and Public Reform in *The Malcontent* and *Measure for Measure*.”
Ben Jonson Journal. (Forthcoming, 2013).

Teaching with the Norton Anthology of Western Literature: A Guide for Instructors,
Volumes 1&2. 9th Edition. New York: Norton, Forthcoming 2013.

Teaching with the Norton Anthology of World Literature: A Guide for Instructors,
Volumes 1&2. Shorter 3rd Edition. New York: Norton, 2013.

*The Norton Introduction to Literature Eleventh Edition Instructor's guide for Regular,
Shorter, and Portable Editions*. Co-authored with Dana Milstein and Shaleen
Brawn. New York: Norton, 2013.

Teaching with the Norton Anthology of World Literature: A Guide for Instructors,
Volumes A-C: Beginnings to 1650. 3rd Edition. Co-author with Zander Breitzke,
Scott Hollifield, and Dana Milstein. New York: Norton, 2012.

Teaching with the Norton Anthology of World Literature: A Guide for Instructors,
Volumes D-F: 1650 to the Present. 3rd Edition. Co-author with David Boyles,
Zander Breitzke, Rachel Disney, Dana Milstein, and Andrew Nicholson. New
York: Norton, 2012.

Reviews

The One Thomas More by Travis Curtright. (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of
America Press, 2012) in the *Ben Jonson Journal* 20:2 (Fall, 2013).

The Cambridge Edition of the Worlds of Ben Jonson. Edited by David Bevington, Martin
Butler, and Ian Donaldson (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2012) in *The Ben Jonson
Journal* 20:1 (Fall 2013). Co-authored with Robert Evans, Richard Harp, and
Stanley Stewart.

Shakespeare's Great Stage of Fools by Robert H. Bell (New York: Palgrave Macmillan,
2011) in the *Ben Jonson Journal* 20:1 (Spring 2013): 144-148.

Shakespeare and the Grammar of Forgiveness by Sarah Beckwith (Ithaca, New York:
Cornell UP, 2011) in the *Ben Jonson Journal* 19:1 (Spring 2012): 151-155.

A Tragedy of Cola's Furie, or Lirenda's Miserie, by Henry Burkhead, Edited by
Angelina Lynch (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2009); in *The Sixteenth Century
Journal* 42.1 (2011).

Conferences, Colloquia, and Presentations

- Lumen Christi Institute, University of Chicago. 2013 Graduate Seminars. "Christianity, the Unity of Knowledge, and the Secularized Academy." July 22-26, 2013.
- Guest Lecturer: "Shakespeare, Wonder, and the Desire for Understanding." Glendale Preparatory Academy, Glendale Arizona. Feb. 12, 2013.
- Center for Thomas More Studies Colloquium "Augustine on Education and Citizenship: What *is* Liberal Education?" November 9-10, 2012.
- Intercollegiate Studies Institute and Liberty Fund's colloquium "'The Modern State, Civil Society, and the Future of Freedom in the Thought of Robert Nisbet.'" Russell Kirk Center, Mecosta, Michigan. April 19-22, 2012.
- Witherspoon Institute, Princeton University. Schreyer Summer Seminar: "First Principles: Natural Law in History." July 31-August 13, 2011.
- Center for Thomas More Studies Colloquium: "Augustine's and More's Use of Cicero in the *Cassiciacum Dialogues*, *The City of God*, and *Utopia 1*," University of Dallas, June 17-18, 2011.
- Center for Thomas More Studies Conference: "Shakespeare and Thomas More on Law and Citizenship," University of Dallas, November 5-6, 2010.
- Center for Thomas More Studies Colloquium: "Cicero on Citizenship: His Philosophic Foundations," University of Dallas, June 18-19, 2010.
- Liberty Fund Colloquium, "Religious Liberty, Toleration, and the Reformation" in Philadelphia, March 6-9, 2008.
- Liberty Fund Colloquium, "Liberty and Tyranny and the Responsibility of Citizenship in Shakespeare's Roman Plays," Philadelphia, January 24-27, 2008.
- Intercollegiate Studies Institute Conference, "Law in the Western Tradition: Common, Constitutional, Natural, and Divine", Quebec City, June 25-July 1, 2007.
- Liberty Fund Colloquium, "Liberty and the Roots of Common Law," San Francisco, March 9-11, 2007.

Teaching

- 2013: (Summer) English Composition II (Eng. 102)
- 2013: British Literature I (Eng. 235)
- 2012: Shakespeare's Comedies and Histories (ENG 434-B)
- 2012: World Literature: Themed Course: Place, Localism, Community, and the Human Scale in World Literature (ENG 231)
- 2012 (Summer): Shakespeare's Comedies and Histories (ENG 434-B)
- 2011: English Composition II (Personally designed experimental course modeled on Classical Rhetoric) (ENG 102)
- 2011: English Composition II (ENG 102)

2010: Shakespeare's Comedies and Histories (ENG 434-B)

2010: World Literature (ENG 231)

Selected Professional Service

2011: Composition Textbook Selection Committee, English Department, UNLV.

2009-present: *Ben Jonson Journal* Book Review Editor.

2009-2011: Research Assistant for Dr. Richard Harp, Chair of English, UNLV.

2009 (Fall): Editorial Assistant for Dr. Mustapha Marrouchi, in completing his book *The Delights of Margin: Value, Surplus, and the Management of Subculture* (Amsterdam & New York: Rodopi, 2010).

2006-2008: *University Scholar*, Co-Editor, University of Dallas

2004-2005: Vice President of the Orpheion Society, University of Dallas.