

ABSTRACT

“They being penitent”: Shakespeare’s Embedded Religious Hybridity as
(Re)habilitative for Incarcerated Actors

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Shakespeare prison programs have been thriving for twenty years, yet scholarship is scarce concerning why Shakespeare plays are successful in rehabilitation. The answer lies within the plays. Shakespeare captures early modern questions about how to pay for sin, which are extremely similar to the concerns of American incarcerated individuals. The profundity of this link between Shakespeare’s stage and the study of his plays behind bars deserves further exploration. Examining the tensions within *Othello* surrounding the idea of “satisfaction,” and those surrounding the term “indulgence” in *The Tempest*, offers a powerful lens for Shakespeare’s work. And when those ideas are grounded in the experiences of men whose lives have been altered by seeking personal application from these plays, the influence of the text intensifies. This proves both Shakespeare’s *timelessness* and *timeliness*, and offers possibilities for

how Shakespeare aids in social change, both behind bars and within university classrooms. how Shakespeare aids in social change, both behind bars and within university classrooms.

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(Re)habilitative for Incarcerated Actors

by

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signpost in my academic and my spiritual journey. It's no coincidence, I believe, that Mr. Marrs and I came back to Baylor the same semester, he to teach, I to learn. His participation on my committee is humbling as he represents various stages on my journey to and in this project.

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DEDICATION

To Joshua Brenton Hembree
“I do love nothing in the world so well as you.”

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

I have been studying how I may compare
This prison where I live unto the world:
And for because the world is populous
And here is not a creature but myself,
I cannot do it; yet I'll hammer it out.

--*Richard II*, 5.5.1-4

Shakespeare writes of a man in prison interpreting the world through his cell. Today, people in prison interpret their world through Shakespeare.

In the 1970s, the Robben Island jail in South Africa held leaders of the African National Congress for their fight against apartheid. One of these men, Sonny Venkatrathnam, requested that they be allowed books during their imprisonment. He was told he could have only one. Sonny said, "Eventually I decided the only book that would keep me going for some time would be *The Complete Works of Shakespeare...*" When Sonny received his book, he knew it was likely that it could be taken from him at any point. He disguised the book by masking the cover with Hindu cards. The book became known as the Robben Island Bible, famous because it did not stay in Venkatrathnam's cell: "About six months before my due release date, I circulated *The Complete Works of Shakespeare* and asked my comrades there to select a line or a passage that appealed to them

and sign it. All of them chose lines or passages that inspired them and strengthened the resolve for the struggle." On December 16, 1977, the disguised Robben Island Shakespeare reached Nelson Mandela. He signed his name beside this passage on courage and death from *Julius Caesar*:

CAESAR: Cowards die many times before their deaths:
The valiant never taste of death but once.
Of all the wonders that I yet have heard,
It seems to me most strange that men should fear,
Seeing that death, a necessary end,
Will come when it will come. (2.2.32-37)

According to Neil MacGregor, "The Robben Island Bible resoundingly vindicates the great truth that everyone can see in Shakespeare the mirror of their own predicament" (283-84). This book was called a Bible to protect it from being taken from the prisoners. But this title could also speak to how the prisoners identified the plays of Shakespeare as sacred texts, identified their lives with passages and claimed them as hope, protest, and the ability to speak to the need for change—for justice—in the world.

These men are not the first, nor are they the last, to turn to Shakespeare in prison. Neither are they the first to call his work their "Bible," nor to talk about Shakespeare in sacred language. Today in the United States incarceration system, men and women behind bars are encountering Shakespeare and claiming that his work has played and is still playing a vital role in their rehabilitation, a way of healing that some even say "saved their lives." And this is more than a

humanistic claim: the company Shakespeare Behind Bars (SBB) has a recidivism rate to prove that Shakespeare has indeed deeply impacted the lives of the men who have studied his works as part of an effort to rehabilitate themselves. SBB proudly and confidently states that, while the national recidivism rate—the percentage of incarcerated individuals who return to crime after their release—is 60%, the recidivism rate of SBB is 5.1%, a number nearly unheard of, even in the world of prison rehabilitation programs (Shakespeare Behind Bars).¹ This organization was founded in 1995 by Curt Tofteland, then the Kentucky Shakespeare Festival director. Tofteland began his work in prisons by starting a literature program for inmates at the Luther Lockett Correctional Complex in Lagrange, Kentucky; soon he realized that Shakespeare was, for these individuals, a powerful resource for personal reflection and transformation. The mission of SBB became: “to offer theatrical encounters with personal and social issues to incarcerated and post-incarcerated adults and juveniles, allowing them to develop life skills that will ensure their successful reintegration into society.”

¹ Rob Penalsifini’s complicates these numbers by discussing how the participants in Shakespeare Behind Bars have generally committed more serious violent crimes, which result in a longer prison sentences, and in which upon parole have less likely recidivism rates compared to the rates of drug and property offenses (150). However, I find these the program’s statistics to still carry a great degree of weight, for what the numbers can’t show is how individual men who entered prison as the “worst” kinds of criminals and went through the Shakespeare Behind Bars program are now contributing to society in a way they were not in other rehabilitation programs. Numbers, while helpful, can’t do justice or compare to the weight of individual stories.

At an initial glance, any person with a basic knowledge of Elizabethan theater can look at the Shakespeare Behind Bars program and draw basic similarities between this troupe of actors and Shakespeare's. The SBB company, like Shakespeare's, is all male. These men are, of course, considered outcasts and dangerous, as was the stereotype of actors in Shakespeare's day. The King's Men played parts specifically written for them—Shakespeare and his collaborators knew the strengths of their company. Shakespeare did not know the men in SBB, but these men know his work more intimately than many Shakespeare scholars do.² These men choose which roles they will play, they self-cast, because they know Shakespeare and they know what roles he has written for them and why they need to play specific parts. These men know Shakespeare, I argue, in a more uniquely intimate way than do any other contemporary performers of his works. While they are encountering Shakespeare centuries after his time, the early modern questions and tensions surrounding questions of forgiveness resonates

² Amy Scott-Douglass in her account of her time interviewing and watching rehearsals with the Shakespeare Behind Bars participants, "they can reel off lines and characters from every single Shakespeare play. The Shakespeare Behind Bars participants know Shakespeare better than many academics do" (11). This is most likely because of another conversation Scott-Douglass recounts, one that discussed professional Shakespeare actors, but that I believe is applicable to Shakespeare scholars, as well. Scott-Douglass talked with Karen Heath, the Kentucky Shakespeare Festival for SBB. Heath responded to Scott-Douglass belief that the SBB actors' performances were more moving than a professional performance she and Heath watched: "'Well,' she says, 'you know the reason for that. The Shakespeare in the Park actors do Shakespeare in order to make a living. The Shakespeare Behind Bars actors do Shakespeare in order to live'" (54).

with them deeply. They, too, feel the weight of Protestant conceptions and the complications regarding mercy, grace, merit, justice, and satisfaction for sin. They, like Shakespeare's playgoers, hear the questions Shakespeare's characters ask as speaking real questions within their daily lives and pertaining to their very identity.

Shakespeare brings a sense of salvation to inmates because as Shakespeare wrote his plays, he and his audience lived in the afterbirth of a theological upheaval concerning the ideas and practices about the forgiveness of sin and what makes one right with God and society. The Protestant Reformation caused England to encounter the questions: How can a person find forgiveness? How can a person who has committed a wrong be made right with society? How much does a person have to do to have achieved "enough," to have paid for a wrong committed? What must a person do to be saved? Because these questions are "embedded" within Shakespeare's text, incarcerated individuals find a love and a need for Shakespeare because they have an understanding for his work that parallels in powerful ways the understanding of Shakespeare's original audience.

Through connecting the early modern reception of Shakespeare's plays to the experience of inmates who encounter these same plays today behind bars, I offer three major claims: 1) These plays impacted both Shakespeare's original

audience and impact his prison audience today because Shakespeare's hybridity allows a form of moderation for playgoers unsure of how to navigate dangerous and fearful religious terrain. He denies the polarity of Protestantism and Catholicism and does not offer religious dogma; rather, he offers his playgoers and actors a space in the midst of this spectrum, allowing them to explore just how complex and difficult forgiveness and redemption in action truly is. 2) The ideas of "satisfaction" and "indulgence" allow for specific examples of these complexities. These words were religiously explosive for Shakespeare's audience, causing them to question foundational principles of salvation, the foremost being forgiveness. The debate between forgiveness based on merit and forgiveness based on human penitence before God came down to the basic question, "What must I do to be saved?" This question is faced daily by incarcerated individuals who are expected to "pay" for their crimes, but are considered deprived in regards to human merit to live in society. These individuals desire ways to work toward their reintegration into society, but struggle with the complexity not just of the penal system, but with the human heart regarding forgiveness for wrongdoing. 3) The ultimate result of forgiveness, I argue, is habilitation, the ability to live well within the world. Habilitation is what Shakespeare's characters seek, and it is what his students behind bars crave. Through studying this search for habilitation through

Shakespeare's plays in prison, literary studies gain a fertile context concerning concepts in Shakespeare. Literary pedagogy gains, as well, a new context for how we teach Shakespeare in the classroom: his "embedded" religious hybridity becomes embodied in contemporary individuals encountering his works behind bars. They give us "ocular proof," as Othello would say, of the innate power of Shakespeare's work.

Astoundingly, as scholarly interest in the religious questions of Shakespeare's day has been re-legitimized, at the same time prison Shakespeare has begun to capture the attention of academic research. These two "camps" of Shakespeare have been growing simultaneously alongside each other for the last thirty years: while publications have multiplied concerning Shakespeare and religion, the practice of studying and performing Shakespeare in prison has flourished. In this project I seek to synthesize these two rapidly growing fields in Shakespeare studies, and to do so not only to show that the fields are parallel, but that they intersect; and this intersection offers scholars of Shakespeare a minefield of resources both in understanding Shakespeare, and in teaching his works. While religious studies in Shakespeare deepens traditional scholarship, prison Shakespeare thus far has appeared to be an outlier, an interesting concept to the academy, but not one taken completely seriously as worthy of scholarly attention. I hope to change that perspective through this project.

Concerning literary studies, my driving question is two-fold: what can we as scholars of Shakespeare *do with* his works, and what can his works *do for* us? My argument lies at the juncture of these questions: by studying how Shakespeare has become an incredibly effective avenue for rehabilitation in prisons, literary scholars receive an invaluable tool: when we say Shakespeare is worth studying because his works are powerful and transformative, we don't only believe it historically, but we can prove it contemporarily.

We spend the majority of our time doing things *with* Shakespeare—applying our theories, investigating historical records, speculating about the gaps in his biography. There is no author more diversely studied, researched, published, or taught in the university and high school classroom. He has given us much to work with. Yet, what does Shakespeare *do for* us? The classic answer is, he makes us more human. He teaches us how to better live in the world. This is what we write, and this is what we teach our students. But how does using prison Shakespeare enable us to do this? What does prison Shakespeare specifically *do for* us? I propose that, by examining the rehabilitative work of Shakespeare in prison, we do not lose focus on scholarly integrity in attempt to make our work “relatable”; rather, studying Shakespeare in prison emphasizes the truths achieved through the scholarly pursuit of Shakespeare's works. Many of the ideas written by scholars of Shakespeare religious studies are embodied in

Shakespeare study and performance in prison. These incarcerated students of Shakespeare prove that, on a broad level, the historical “we” of 400 years of Shakespeare scholars are right: Shakespeare is powerful. Shakespeare is different. Shakespeare is life-changing. And on a much more particular level, Shakespeare in prison specifically explores and affirms questions, as Niehls Herold says, are “embedded” in the text (1). By studying prison Shakespeare, we find a living context for the history, especially the religious history, of his plays.

Through a close reading of *Othello and The Tempest*, I fuse early modern concepts and perceptions with the experiences and testimonies of prison Shakespeare members. By doing this, the early modern stage explains prison Shakespeare, and prison Shakespeare illuminates, deepens, and intensifies the reality of the early modern stage.

Critical Foundation

Before I outline my arguments on these two plays, I will identify the critical conversations informing my readings. This project lies at a crossroads, where multiple realms of scholarship converge. I will begin with early modern religious studies, specifically those focusing on Shakespeare’s work. Because this project relies on a degree of interdisciplinary pursuit, I will also briefly outline important principles from theater studies, and then move on to a vital theory that the Protestant Reformation forms our current prison practices. I will conclude

with an overview of my second foundational sphere: prison Shakespeare. I will survey the work that has already been done, and then explain how my work both draws upon the existing (which, at this point, is very little) work published, as well as what I offer to the field of prison Shakespeare studies.

Concerning early modern literary studies, I have gleaned from new historicist readings of Shakespeare, specifically affirming the potency of Shakespeare's plays by appreciating the religious literacy of his time. Stephen Greenblatt, the founding scholar of new historicism, once said in an interview: "My deep, ongoing interest is in the relation between literature and history, the process through which certain remarkable works of art are at once embedded in a highly specific life-world and seem to pull free of that life-world. I am constantly struck by the strangeness of reading works that seem addressed, personally and intimately, to me, and yet were written by people who crumbled to dust long ago" (*Harvard Gazette*). Greenblatt's work lives up to his statement, for he and new historicists influenced by him engage in the historical, political, and religious, and lives of the authors they study. Indeed, Greenblatt's work blurs the lines in these categories, for literature has a context vital to our understanding of any literary work. Early modern literature was one discourse amongst other discourses, but all of which engaged each other. Early modern Englishmen and women experienced life where religion and government were

intertwined, and where their literature explored the nature and consequences of the changes taking place throughout their nation. By knowing the circumstances informing and inciting Shakespeare's mind, we can better grasp the depth of his art.

Greenblatt allows for another blurring of lines, not between Shakespeare's historical discourses, but between historical and personal contexts. Literary works are not restricted to their own time and context; Greenblatt exemplifies this in *Hamlet in Purgatory*. He opens the book situating *Hamlet*, a play about a son grieving his father's death, his concern for his father's soul, and his attempt to honor his father's command, in Greenblatt's own story of the loss of his father. His father's will left money to an organization in request that they say the kaddish for him, the Aramaic prayer for the dead. This prayer is traditionally said by a deceased man's sons, and by his own father apparently not trusting him and his brother to do so, Greenblatt finds a "blend of love and spite" (7). He, too, must wonder how his father viewed him, and how to honor the dead. Greenblatt, at the end of his "Prologue," states that he has used this story as "the personal starting point" for the rest of his book. Paul Coleman, in his review of this book, notes how Greenblatt "projects" and "connects" himself to the questions he asks about Purgatory, questions that go beyond politics and theology, but into "personal fear, sorrow, and guilt." Coleman says that

Greenblatt truly shows empathy in his work, not just in this book, but in multiple others. Because of this, “Greenblatt constructs a kind of literary and historical sentimentality which may or may not be the natural, final orientation of his new historicism” (174). This this is more than a possible end, as Coleman suggests, of new historicism: I believe it can be the pinnacle of such work. Shakespeare has a context in which he wrote; and we have a context in which we read his works.

This idea of empathy indeed blurs lines between historical and contemporary time, and this allows readers to care on a personal level about the literature before them. This concept is vital for my argument: prisoners do not have to know the multiple historical discourses present within Shakespeare’s plays to empathize with his characters, to feel with them and like them. Yet, for Greenblatt and scholars like him, the more we understand Shakespeare’s context, the more we can experience empathy in our own time. I argue we can add another level of empathy, of understanding available to the literary scholar: knowing these historical contexts and simultaneously recognizing the powerful contemporary context of prison Shakespeare allows for a doubly powerful experience of Shakespeare’s text.

For my readings of Shakespeare’s plays, empathy concerning questions of sin and forgiveness allow us to empathize with Shakespeare’s characters, but also with his audience—real people living in a historical, political, and religious

context. Such readings are available because new historicism now allows for theological categories and considerations in Shakespeare to be once again taken seriously. Ken Jackson and Arthur Marotti chart in their 2004 essay “The Turn to Religion in Early Modern English Studies” that, in the 1980s and 1990s, new historicists, along with cultural materialists, did not treat religion as a category, but rather allowed the categories of political, social, economic, to subsume religion within them. They chart how certain scholars, such as Deborah Shuger³ in the 90s, produced work that religitized religious studies as a category in itself, one that Greenblatt would join in *Hamlet in Purgatory*. They also make claims that separate early modern religious studies from new historicism: they criticize Greenblatt’s book because, they argue, Greenblatt’s new historicism “organizes itself around a claim to respect alterity, otherness, and difference...” (175-176). This means that Greenblatt “tries to define the center from the margins,” and they say he “does not really take religious culture seriously, but rather approaches it as a cabinet of curiosities” (175). Religious studies focuses on traditions and practices engrained into culture from the center, and not from the margins. Yet religious studies and new criticism are still linked, to some degree.

³ See Shuger’s *Habits of Thought in the English Renaissance: Religion, Politics, and the Dominant Culture*. (Volume 13 of *New Historicism: Studies in Cultural Poetics*) (1990); *The Renaissance Bible: Scholarship, Sacrifice, and Subjectivity* (1994); and edited with Claire McEachern, *Religion and Culture in Renaissance England* (1997).

Jackson and Mariotti write: "The turn to religion can be understood as part of an ongoing dialectic that generated New Historicism itself" (176). Both result from similar considerations, seeking to place works in context and defining the categories within those context. Therefore, while new historicism is not responsible for the rise of religious studies, it does offer insight because the two critical fields will connect at points; one starting from the outside and working its way inward, the other starting in the center and moving out to the margins.

In 2011, Jackson and Marotti edited *Shakespeare and Religion: Early Modern and Postmodern Perspectives*, a collection that proves the diversity and depth of Shakespeare religious studies. Their book is only one example of a growing field. Trends are evolving within religious studies, one being a focus on the idea of Shakespeare and religious ritual. Near the time of this "turn to religious studies," Greenblatt's *Hamlet in Purgatory* claims that Shakespeare took the broken and illegal rituals of the church and reappropriated them through the theater, integrating them into a new kind of culture outside of the church. Sarah Beckwith, alternatively, finds the effects of these redesigned rituals to be what Shakespeare explores in his plays. Regina M. Schwartz examines the imagery of the Eucharist in Shakespeare's plays, believing the theater took on what the church no longer could: sacramental justice. While Schwartz focuses on what was lost in this transition, Jeffrey Knapp and Huston Diehl consider what was

gained; they argue that Shakespeare took the church's former rituals and reworked them in order for them to fit into a reformed aesthetic that fit with Protestantism. Knapp specifically suggests that the theater became a space where religious tolerance was possible, unlike the world outside the theater, specifically because of its refusal to take a religious side. Anthony B. Dawson also recognizes that the "secular theater" did not mean the intentional evasion of religious representation or consideration. Instead, the audience was given a space where they could struggle with the idea of what it meant to be a Christian. The theater, then, became a place of personal growth.

The undercurrent of these conversations revolves around the question as to Shakespeare's involvement in secularization, of rituals and of the theater as a whole. Brian Cummings masterfully shows how the transformation of the understanding and of the self in Renaissance culture, and specifically in Shakespeare, shows how the religious and the secular are not always mutually exclusive Shakespeare's time. Understanding this idea of selfhood does not have to be secular, but rather is richer if understood inside its religiously influenced framework. Daniel Swift adds to this conversation by stating that, if new historicism allows for us to examine the religious and political framework of Shakespeare's plays, the vital text for this study in the *Book of Common Prayer*. He argues that a tendency within new historicism is to focus on the "feints and

gestures of theater, so their readings treat church rites only as dramatic symbols, constantly gesturing elsewhere: to large, abstract questions about the nation or the idea of the individual" (60-61). He critiques that by focusing on the "drama," the focus stays broad idea rather than specifics: "There is little attention to the particulars of language, to the specific phrases of theological debate" (61).⁴ While each of these discussions informs my argument, I am most closely accepting Swift's challenge to focus on the "particulars of language" and "specific phrases" within early modern studies. I will read two plays and focus on two specific words in my discussion of Shakespeare's religious hybridity through engaging the embedded tensions underneath these words. In my chapters, I conduct close readings of *Othello* and *The Tempest*, making connections between early modern conflict surrounding religious practices imagined on the stage, and specific accounts of prisoners performing Shakespeare and encountering those very tensions. I ground my readings in specific words: "satisfaction" in *Othello*, and "indulgence" in *The Tempest*. These words create a cacophony of meanings, only

⁴ See Stephen Greenblatt, "Towards a Poetics of Culture" (1987), Greenblatt and Catherine Gallagher, *Practicing New Historicism* (2000); Sarah Beckwith, *Shakespeare and the Grammar of Forgiveness* (2011); Regina M. Schwartz, *Sacramental Poetics at the Dawn of Secularism: When God Left the World* (2008); Huston Diehl, *Staging Reform, Reforming the Stage: Protestantism and Popular Theater in Early Modern England* (1997); Anthony B. Dawson, "The Secular Theater" (2009); Brian Cummings, *Mortal Thoughts: Religion, Secularity & Identity in Shakespeare and Early Modern Culture* (2013).

possible through the new historicist and religious studies surrounding Shakespeare.

Before discussing my next critical sphere, I must also align myself with scholars who deny seeking for Shakespeare's religious identity and rather focus upon how Shakespeare navigates, questions, and complicates the tension between Catholicism and Protestantism. Heather Hirschfeld, Maurice Hunt, Gillian Woods, and Sarah Beckwith all inform my theory that Shakespeare is not promoting a specific religious dogma, but is rather complicating the world of Christianity in England and questioning how individuals might live in an ideologically taut world.

Having surveyed the core thinkers influencing my readings of Shakespeare, I move here to a different sphere of thinking: theater and certain theories surrounding it. Any Shakespeare scholar must value the early modern stage; here I want to value contemporary stage practices in order to connect them to how Shakespeare's text comes to life for individuals in prison. The words "prison" and "theater" connected in the same sentence necessitate recognition of Augusto Boal's *Theatre of the Oppressed*. Boal, influenced by fellow Brazilian Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* published in 1968, began working in Brazil in the 1960s and 70s and later in Europe through theater workshops that allowed participants to not only receive meaning, but create it through transforming the

possibilities of the plays they would experience. His seminal text, written to explore how to break repression between classes, is helpful for prison Shakespeare in three ways: 1) The idea of the Spect-actor. Boal's theater practices recognized the power of the spectator, who was also an actor. This is significant for Shakespeare, whose characters often addressed the audience, and in his later plays, enabled the audience. I will later discuss this idea specifically regarding Prospero's epilogue. 2) Boal's interpretation of catharsis. He recognizes that in order to be purged from something, that "thing" has to begin in acceptance. This is helpful for prison theater in understanding how a person reached his or her crime, and why change is necessary. 3) The ability to break oppression. Boal's theater allowed audience intervention (the Spect-actor) to stop the play in oppressive moments and suggest what could have been different. This is vital for rehabilitation in prisons—the realization that people always have choices, and to recognize not only what one did wrong, but what one could have done right in order to make better decisions in the future.

Boal's techniques, while important for helping prison actors process, may appear to create issues for the value of prison Shakespeare for literary studies: we can't change the text, recognizing what would be lost in the process of

“rewriting Shakespeare.”⁵ While certain prison acting programs do rewrite Shakespeare, Shakespeare Behind Bars works with First Folio editions of the plays, and the actors memorize the plays word-for-word, with no alterations. This is far from Boal’s theater, but his techniques when combined with the acting theory of David Mamet can offer powerful possibilities for prison Shakespeare.

Mamet wrote the controversial text *True and False: Heresy and Common Sense for the Actor*. In it, he fights against Constantin Stanislavski’s system of acting. Where Stanislavski encouraged the actor to create the character outside the text, pursuing the character’s possible biography, Mamet says that it is the role of the playwright to create the character, and actors are to work with the text they have been given. In Shakespeare Behind Bars, director Curt Tofteland employs similar methods. He lets the text do the work, allowing it to make connections to the lives of the actors without forcing them to create fictional

⁵ Some groups do rewrite the works, and there is value in this, as well. Laura Bates and her program Shakespeare in Shackles encourages inmates who have studied Shakespeare with her to rewrite plays in order to focus their productions on audiences comprised of juvenile offenders. One group of her students (all of whom were men serving double or triple life sentences) re-worked *Romeo and Juliet* and condensed the play to a time span that would allow an entire performance to fit into tight prison schedules. Instead of highlighting the love story between *Romeo and Juliet*, these men focused on the gang violence within the play. For them, rewriting the script and placing the words in to contemporary language allowed them to communicate ideas they found vital to rehabilitation for young men and women who, if not aware of their need for change, will likely end up serving sentences like the men in Laura Bates’s class (see Bates, TedTalk). I acknowledge that revising and reworking Shakespeare has great potential for prison Shakespeare, but for my purposes here for connecting Shakespeare to early modern studies, preservation of Shakespeare’s text is vital.

biographies of their characters, which would situate them outside of the text.

Rather, Tofteland helps to ground them inside the text, and to trust that the roles will resonate with them at a personal level within the power of the plays themselves. I include Boal and Mamet here for two reasons: one, because Shakespeare wrote his work to be performed, and therefore each performance will work through a certain type of interpretation. For Boal, he interprets theater as a possibility for social change. However, he approach requires alteration of the text. Mamet, however, holds the text as the driving force for the actor. Scholars of literature need not fear that the texts we devote ourselves to study have to change in theater rehabilitation work. Rather, by looking at certain principles in theater practice, we can better understand the possibilities of Shakespeare's texts through examining how individuals who inhabit marginal space create meaning through his works.

Shakespeare did not argue for or against Protestantism, but he did interact with its complications (as he did with Catholicism). Some of these very complications remain with us today not only in theological discourse, but in the philosophy of American prisons. The American incarceration system is punitive, retributive, and vast, and comes from a legacy of the Protestant Reformation. For my argument, I cannot avoid the connection between the tension Shakespeare engaged surrounding Protestant theology and its effect on American prisoners.

The difficulties we are encountering in our prison systems today are linked to and stem from the issues early modern Englishmen and women were encountering in their understanding of Protestant theology.

Richard M. Snyder, professor of theology and ethics at New York Theological Seminary, once ascribed to reformed theology, yet now believes that this same theology present at the founding of our prisons is responsible for its retributive rather than rehabilitative spirit. In *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Punishment*, Snyder argues that the Protestant ethic—where grace is meritless and humanity is depraved—has fueled a system where people are punished, not rehabilitated, and therefore the cycles of violence and hatred connected to crime are perpetuated and multiplied rather than healed through rehabilitative measures. This Protestant ethic lacks humane ethics, according to Snyder, and is a corruption of a four-hundred year-old theology that sought religious freedom for the individual, but has resulted in crossing an ocean and deepening the prison of those already in physical chains, but now placed in spiritual ones. Those who are hopeless have no possibility for healing. Prison is a site of punishment, not of social progression. And in the 300 years of American prisons, we have yet to change our philosophy of incarceration. The statistics echo Snyder's assertion that prison is punishing, but it is not working to create a better society.

Larry Chandler, the warden at the time the *Shakespeare Behind Bars* documentary was filmed, offered his perception of prison. He shared with Amy Scott-Douglass: "I'm a prison warden who doesn't believe in prison...We've got over two million people in prison, and it's not working" (101). At the time, Luther Lockett Correctional Complex, built for 485, held 1100 men. Warden stated on the documentary that he believes education is key for inmates: "That is the way to change people's lives." He views *Shakespeare Behind Bars* as one of the most successful education programs in his time at Luther Lockett. It is "a method of turning on a light-bulb." And, similar to what he tells Scott-Douglass, "I'm a warden who hates prison."

Chandler's dismal outlook on the United States incarceration system holds merit beyond Luther Lockett. Bryan Stevenson, a criminal justice defense attorney, writes in 2014 that while the US prison population in the early 1970s was around 300,000 people, the 2010s showed the number 2.3 million. Nearly six million people are paroled or on probation, and it is estimated that, with the numbers increasing as they have, "one in every fifteen people born in the United States in 2001 is expected to go to jail or prison; one in every three black male babies born in this century is expected to be incarcerated" (15). Concerning women, in the last thirty years the number of female incarceration has increased 640 percent (17). The government spent \$6.9 billion in 1980; now they spend

nearly \$80 billion (16). Michelle Alexander's work, published in 2011, confirms that the United States has the highest incarceration rate in the world. She compares the US statistics to other developing countries: in Germany, 93 people are incarcerated for every 100,000 adults and children. In the United States, 750 people per 100,000 are incarcerated, a rate nearly eight times that of Germany (6). Yet Stevenson's account of personal encounters with prisoners is perhaps even more haunting than the statistics he and Alexander offer: he tells stories of children tried as adults, children condemned to life in prison, and of children who would face the death penalty. American prisons punish even the youngest of us in extreme ways.⁶ Snyder argues that this is true because of our theological legacy: "there is a connection between the punitive ethos in our society and Christian theology as it is popularly understood....the theology by which we live

⁶ Bryan Stevenson founded the non-profit organization, Equal Justice Initiative, which he has led to help legally represent innocent men and women, people with mental disabilities, and children. Stevenson has received national recognition for his role in the US Supreme Court's decision to alter law concerning incarcerated children. *Roper v. Simmons* brought the decision of the Court in 2005 that the death penalty for juveniles is unconstitutional. Before this ruling, in the United States, 365 children had been given capital punishment, 22 of them since 1985. In March of 2012, Stevenson and his team argued before the Supreme Court that the Eighth Amendment was violated by allowing children in prison to be sentenced to life without parole because of their "unique immaturity, impulsiveness, vulnerability, and capacity for redemption and rehabilitation are not crime-specific." The cases *Miller v. Alabama* and *Jackson v. Hobbs* came before the court on June 25, 2012, the Court ruled that mandatory life sentences without parole for seventeen-year-olds or younger convicted of homicide are unconstitutional. While the Court did not remove all possibility for life-without-parole for all juveniles, the ruling wrote that sentencers were required to consider "children's diminished culpability, and heightened capacity for change" should make such sentences "uncommon" (Equal Justice Initiative).

has wittingly or unwittingly played into the hands of such a spirit—in what ways, if any, the heritage of a largely Protestant ethic and theology gives rise to or provides support for the spirit of punishment” (11). This leads to the thesis of his work: “the dominant understanding of the nature and grace within popular religion today, especially in its more Protestant form, makes room for and sometimes even gives rise to a spirit of punishment...a distortion of the understanding of grace feeds into a punitive culture that builds upon and is reinforced by the distortion” (11). Through Snyder’s theology and philosophy of prison, we circle back to the early modern questions of Shakespeare’s playgoers: what is “enough” payment for sin? How can a person find satisfaction for wrongdoing, whether committed or received?

The only person to have written on the connection between the tumultuous English acceptance of Protestant theology and Shakespeare in prison is Niehls Herold. While prison Shakespeare has thrived for thirty years, it has only recently come into focus of literary scholars. Many literature scholars and teachers have taught Shakespeare in prison or attended prison performances of Shakespeare, yet few have shared these experiences. Herold broke the ground; I seek to help plow it.

Herold’s thesis of his book *Prison Shakespeare and the Purpose of Performance: Early Modern Rituals in the Early Modern* is: “transforming inmates

through Shakespeare performance depends not only upon the therapizing effects of a theatrical process, but upon a post-Reformational English theology embedded in the play-texts themselves” (1). I affirm this claim, and Herold supports it by looking at Shakespeare Behind Bars and what he calls “echoes” of the early modern resounding within the rehearsals, performances, and individual lives of these men. Herold’s use of the term anachronicity helps him determine how the purpose of studying early modern ideas and the contemporary prison experiences side-by-side aids in our understanding of Shakespeare. He defines his term, saying anachronicity is:

a model of temporal relationship recently developed by art historians, who are using a conceptual vocabulary of *anachronicity* to theorize the ways in which past and present are folded into each other and resist the linear lucidity of historical narrative. Instead of insisting on reading Shakespeare historically (historicizing), or reading historical Shakespeare in ways that would confer upon his past something of value to the present (presentizing), the anachronism project discovers that the past invasively intermingles with the present...In thinking about the anachronistic connections between the early modern stage and the habilitation of prison actors, therefore, it may be possible to show that what we think of as the secular practice of repentance—using literature to produce a reflective, inward looking, atoning subject—is actually much closer to sacred/religious practices than we might think. (6)

This allows Herold to use a religious term to discuss the participants of Shakespeare Behind Bars. He calls them a “penitential community,” men who are exploring questions which would have also affected the early moderns and their concept of forgiveness. These connections allow Herold to craft a

framework as to why Shakespeare works in prison, and his approach is valid and important for Shakespeare scholars. However, I believe Daniel Swift's criticism of new historians can also be applied to Herold's work: Herold offers breadth and theory, but lacks "attention to the particulars of language, to the specific phrases of theological debate" (Swift 61). I agree with Herold's concept of anachronicity, finding it similar to the blurring of the lines between historical and present personal contexts, as Greenblatt does. But I intend to support Herold's work by specifying taking the theoretical foundation Herold has built and bringing Shakespeare's play texts themselves to the forefront. Rather than discussing Shakespeare in prison as a principle, I will explore it in the personal accounts of two individual men and how they have experienced particular words, ideas, questions, and resolutions, and the intricate layers behind them, through the study and performance of Shakespeare's texts.

The only other published scholarly work to date on Shakespeare in prison is Rob Pensalfini's *Prison Shakespeare: For These Deep Shames and Great Indignities*, published in 2016. Pensalfini, senior lecturer in Linguistics and Drama and the University of Queensland, Australia, is also the Artistic Director of the Queensland Shakespeare Ensemble, began in 2011 the Shakespeare Prison Project, the only current prison program that involves Shakespeare in Australia. Pensalfini's book is a survey of the current work in Shakespeare in prisons

around the world, the various practices, the possible issues, and reasons why Shakespeare in prison works. His final chapter “What’s So Special about Shakespeare” is the only portion of his book that engages Shakespeare’s actual text, and the majority of the focus on Shakespeare’s text is spent talking about how Shakespeare’s English is accessible and compelling, and that he allows for complexity in his works unlike any playwright preceding him. Pensalfini does focus momentarily on how Shakespeare allows people to explore multiple perspectives in one play, and allows individual characters to work through morally complex and difficult ideas. These are beneficial for any student of Shakespeare, and especially for one who has failed to learn the skills to process difficult decisions and therefore chose violence or crime. Yet Pensalfini’s engagement with Shakespeare’s actual text ends here. This book is helpful, especially to a newcomer to prison Shakespeare, for it provides a broad scope of possibility while still focusing on individual practitioners and participants. Yet this book, while perhaps inspiring for Shakespeare scholars, does little to advance Shakespeare studies by providing specific claims about Shakespeare and his text and by offering readings of his text that bring us into a deeper understanding of his ideas, words, and their impact both on his society, and our own. While Herold comes closer, both he and Pensalfini place Shakespeare’s text in the background and theories of why it works in the forefront. In this project, I

will place Shakespeare's text at the heart of the question as to why his plays are causing change, personally and communally, behind bars. Shakespeare answers his own question, if we unpack specific moments of his text and particular individuals' encounters with that text.

There are more than "echoes" of the early modern in the lives of these men; there are incredible parallels. Othello and Prospero's experiences resound in the lives of Sammie Byron and Hal Cobb; and in their similarities to, and in their differences from, Shakespeare's characters, these men have found a path to rehabilitation and hope. This reality in their lives is possible because Shakespeare helps them navigate the tension between questions of sin, justice, violence, rituals, repentance, satisfaction.

I cannot go further into any form of discourse concerning United States incarceration without recognizing the political, sociological, and economic factors causing immense complexity and the need for recognition of and sympathy for these complexities. Heavy and hard work has been done already in order to prove two basic facts concerning United States prisons: of the one in one hundred people who are incarcerated, the majority of people behind bars come from poverty, and the majority are people of color. My purpose here is not to explore why this is true; writers such as Bryan Stevenson and Michelle Alexander have written sobering accounts and narratives concerning both the

history that brought us to this point in our prison systems, and also explaining the culture that sustains them. My intent here is to acknowledge these issues, and to use them to make one claim: the majority of people in United States prisons will not only, upon their release, face extreme disadvantages, but faced immense obstacles in economic, educational, and sociological development. They struggled to inhabit the world in which they lived before ever committing a crime. Yet all people behind bars are there for one reason: they did not properly, according to our courts and therefore to the condemnation of society, live within the world. The word "rehabilitation" surrounds prison theory and practice; but it is impossible to simply return to a place, a state of being, to which one has never been. Curt Tofteland uses the word "habilitate," for he believes that the men in the SBB cast were never habilitated before they came to prison. They were not able to inhabit and thrive in the world around them (Cobb 437; Herold 33). They are not in prison to focus on returning; they are in prison to focus on a new journey towards self-knowledge and responsible action. Snyder's students have echoed this same concept: "Many prisoners in my seminary's Sing Sing program have raised questions about the "re" in restorative and rehabilitative. How can we be rehabilitated, they ask, when we have never been habilitated? The basic issue for them is habilitation. To habilitate means to enable, having to do with the notion of enabling capacity or qualification" (97). From Kentucky to New

York, incarcerated individuals recognize that they are given an opportunity in prison to do something they did not know how to do outside prison walls: understand themselves and the world they inhabited. The very idea of learning what this “habit,” what “habilitation,” means is vital for personal growth.

Not knowing how to habilitate one’s world is not an excuse for crime, for Tofteland or for his cast members. Yet behind every failure to inhabit one’s world, there is a story of successive failures in relationships, interactions, and recognitions of one’s responsibility. And they are all socially conditioned, regardless of economic status or race. Sammie Byron is a man of Mexican and African American parentage. He experienced discrimination and abuse as a child, and he became a perpetrator of the violence he knew. Byron fits the statistics I listed above: a person of color raised in economic difficulty who is serving time behind bars. These factors contributed to his incarceration, but so did familial neglect. Unhealthy familial relationships also affected Hal Cobb, who is in the minority concerning prison statistics. A white male from an economically stable home, Cobb still struggled to habilitate his world due as a result of family tension as a child that carried into his own marital relationships. Both men openly discuss how they did not know how to survive, to inhabit, their own lives before prison. Both men committed acts of violence which led them to prison. And both men learn through Shakespeare how to face their crimes and

themselves in order to rehabilitate themselves in hopes that they can give to the world from which they stole a life.

Chapters

In my first chapter, I focus on *Othello* and the question of the individual's search for satisfaction for sin. The play is full of rituals, many of which are inverted or perverted and would have jarred the early modern mind. The violence of *Othello* is overwhelming because of its ritualistic nature; yet it is this very violence that provides a form of healing ritual for prison inmates. While the inversion of ritual in the play leads to *Othello*'s destruction, the violence of the play for Sammie Byron, who had served twenty years when he played *Othello* in prison, became a confessional and liturgical experience. His performance was his "turning point" in his journey to rehabilitation, allowing his portrayal of violence to cause him to understand his crime and to empathize with his victims. By reenacting his violent action, Byron took vital steps toward self-understanding, the kind of understanding that *Othello* arguably realizes too late by the end of the play. *Othello* confesses, but cannot see how he can live in the world after his crime. For Byron, the violent play brought a redemptive act for himself, allowing him space for rehabilitation through confession, liturgy, and a form of penance that prepared him to face himself and the world he had wronged.

In my second chapter, I move from the idea of individual rehabilitation to the concept of communal rehabilitation. Hal Cobb, a fellow actor of Byron's, has his own confessional journey through playing Prospero in *The Tempest*. Cobb's experience offers insight about Prospero's movement from revenge to forgiveness, and from isolation to community. This community is only possible when Prospero's plan to bring his prisoners to repentance moves from head to his heart. Prospero intellectualizes his scheme, but Ariel teaches him how to experience compassion. And in the shift from conceiving forgiving others to actually feeling the weight of that forgiveness, Prospero recognizes his own need for forgiveness, for the "indulgence" of the audience, for a community of people forgiving because of their need for forgiveness. In the epilogue, Shakespeare shows a Prospero who still cannot forgive perfectly, and who himself needs forgiveness. He transfers his authority to the audience, becoming one of us, allowing us to then explore how we will forgive. While this reading is affirmed in literary scholarship, particularly in Gillian Woods, Cobb's own articulation of his personal development through playing Prospero grounds this interpretation of the play. Prospero comes alive in Cobb's individual experience, and experiences like his bring together the community of Shakespeare Behind Bars, the "brotherhood" Cobb trusts and needs for his own personal rehabilitation.

These men share a common language, a specific way of seeing their own lives and their community, which, I argue, is its own form of Common Prayer.

I will conclude this introduction, and later this project, with a third question. I have already asked, what do we as literary scholars of Shakespeare do with his work? I hope to have given at this point of introduction, even in a brief form, an indication of what scholars are doing with studies about Shakespeare and the religious questions of his day. I have also asked, what does Shakespeare do to us? For the men in SBB, many of them give answers close to this: "it saved my life." And for my final question: what do we as scholars and teachers of Shakespeare in the university do with this knowledge that on the outskirts of society, in truly liminal space, Shakespeare is revolutionizing incarcerated individuals' lives? I seek to offer possibilities for Shakespeare studies, and for Shakespeare pedagogy, concerning how we might bring the Shakespeare behind the bars into the pages of our scholarship and the walls of our classrooms. I am willing enough to say that doing so could revolutionize how we research, how we teach, and how students view the purpose of Shakespeare, in his time and in ours.

CHAPTER TWO

Liturgy as Rehabilitation: The Early Modern Desire for Satisfaction and Redemptive Ritualistic Violence in Sammie Byron's *Othello*

The lives of people in early modern England, while decades after the initial wave of religious upheaval, still circulated around questions about *satis*, the Latin word for “enough” and the root of *satisfaction*. The search for satisfaction permeated culture within and without the church walls of Shakespeare's time. In this chapter, I am specifically focusing on the tensions surrounding ritual, violence, justice, and the need for satisfaction Shakespeare's audience experienced. *Othello* investigates each of these concepts while simultaneously convoluting them. Multiple scholars have read this tragedy as a play showing the complications, and others, the affirmation, of Protestantism. I agree with Regina M. Schwartz that, rather than affirming or denying Catholicism or Protestantism, the play shows the deep desire for justice that was underlying the religious turmoil of the time. I also support Heather Hirschfeld's argument that these religious tensions made their way into other aspects of early modern life in the search for satisfaction. Because of this desire for justice and satisfaction and Shakespeare's exploration of them in the play, *Othello* resonates

with contemporary prison actors. Theater in prison has long been considered a cathartic experience, but I seek here to pursue the idea of catharsis as more than ridding a person of emotions or ideas (s)he does not want to embody. Rather, catharsis, when understood as recognition rather than purgation, allows for individuals a deeper agency in personal growth, in (re)habilitaion. By understanding these concepts and how they connect to *satis*, I will argue three things in this chapter: 1) *Othello* is not simply a chance for people who have done violent crimes to relive that violence as an escape from their lingering violent tendencies. Rather, the individuals in Shakespeare Behind Bars see this play as a chance to relive their violent acts as a discovery, a form of *anagnorisis*; 2) For Sammie Byron, playing Othello became a form of liturgy, a process of rehabilitation. Acting out Desdemona's death scene was more than catharsis because Byron did not desire to revisit his crime — rather, he chose to do so because of the confessional steps towards his own self-knowing and growth. Byron's experience with Othello shows how tensions within Shakespeare's plays resound with contemporary prison actors, who, like the early moderns, are deeply concerned with a desire for justice, for satisfaction for wrongdoing, for knowing how to do or make *enough*.

Othello is permeated with rituals, which I define as outward performances that carry sacred and/or symbolic meaning. A ritual must be *done*.¹ When Iago begins to suggest to Othello that Desdemona is an adulteress, Othello needs to see in order to believe: "Make me to see't, or at least so prove it / That the probation bear no hinge nor loop / To hang a doubt on, or woe upon thy life!" (3.3. 368-370).² Later in the scene, he demands: "Be sure of it, give me the ocular proof" (l. 363), and "Give me a living reason she's disloyal" (l. 412), demonstrating his need for visual confirmation of what Iago says. As Othello seeks to interpret Iago's words by seeking ocular proof, so does the audience attempt to interpret the play through visual actions, many of which were rituals recognized by Shakespeare's original audience. Yet the rituals performed in *Othello* are perverted by Shakespeare, for they are never as they should be or as

¹ I believe, too, that the play also explores ritualistic language. Cassio uses Marian imagery to describe Desdemona when she arrives at Cyprus (3.4.115-118). R. Chris Hassel, Jr., notes allusions to Mary throughout the play, and argues that while Desdemona is unaware of these connections, she still attempts to fit Mary's role as intercessor when she pleads for Cassio. These multiple allusions would have caused Shakespeare's audience discomfort (48). The ritual of marriage is also perverted in the play. We do not witness Othello and Desdemona make a covenant of marriage, but we do see Iago form what Dennis Austin Bitton calls a "mock marriage" with Othello (41). Michael Neill identifies this scene as "the one real adultery of the play, the seduction of Othello in which Iago is at this very moment engaged" (400). Here we see a distortion of a sacred vow, where Iago moves one step closer to sealing Othello's becoming a murderer and thereby damning his own soul. In a play so focused on seeing (the need for "ocular proof"), Shakespeare offers distorted and perverted rituals, causing his audience to question the reliability of what they see.

² All quotations from *Othello* are taken from the Arden text, edited by E. A. Honigmann, 2013.

the audience knows them. While the rituals are initially familiar, they are twisted and altered in a way that strikes the audience and causes a sense of uneasiness. While the final scene, revealing the bed and the innocent Desdemona slain on it, displays the most evident ritual in *Othello*—that of sacrifice on an altar—Shakespeare has indicated throughout the play that the rituals are wrong: they are not as they should be, which adds to the dread of the final scene of the tragedy. When looking at prison Shakespeare, specifically in the case of Sammie Byron, a deep irony arises: the act of violence that so disturbed Shakespeare’s original audience is the same act Byron revisited and discovered to be rehabilitative. But before exploring how this can be true, I first want to explore what about the violence of *Othello* specifically affected early modern playgoers.

The terror of the final ritual of *Othello* lies in its violence, and this violence lies in questions surrounding justice and satisfaction. Regina M. Schwartz recognizes both the exploration of ritual and of violence in the early modern theater as a desire for justice. She argues that the early modern theater and the church both felt, while not in the same way, and equally powerful need for a “moral order.” While Catholicism was held in question for its false rituals, the theater was simultaneously reaching a new height as “the old Senecan version of revenge tragedy flowered into Elizabethan moral tragedy, that is, into a tragedy of injustice” (45). Shakespeare’s theater, to Schwartz, was not a place where

religious dogma was preached, but where the questions of religion were very much present: "Shakespeare can be understood as 'religious,' then, not because his actors satisfied or did not satisfy longings for magic acts, but because he repeatedly addressed, in his way, the problem that the sacrament also addressed in its way: justice" (45). In her reading of *Othello*, Desdemona's handkerchief becomes a physical symbol of this need for justice. The white handkerchief with red spots on it causes us to think of Desdemona's virginity, to hers and Othello's marriage, and specifically their bed. But this cloth also can remind the audience of an altar cloth, spotted with red, evidence we can see of Christ's body that, through the Eucharist, bleeds and is broken. This is the "ocular proof" of the miracle of transubstantiation (45). This very concept, the idea of how satisfaction was made for sin, was a deep source of conflict in the Reformation and carrying into Shakespeare's day. Satisfaction is a response to the need for justice, and Shakespeare's playgoers would have been sensitive to the idea of God's justice and the need for human sin to be satisfied before him. A simple cloth spotted with red was more than a love token on the stage for Shakespeare's audience; it was the reminder of a question, of a sacrament now considered a dangerous and ungodly ritual.

Yet the handkerchief has another layer of possible interpretation in the desire for justice: not only is it reminiscent of the question of how to satisfy the

justice of God for sin, but also how to satisfy wrongdoing against a husband, a wrong that is actually never committed: “the handkerchief *also* becomes ocular ‘proof’ of a betrayal that never occurred, a piece of false testimony used wrongfully to indict the innocent” (Schwartz 45). Because of this indictment against Desdemona, who is innocent, the most violent act of the play, and for many, the most disturbing scene in Shakespeare, comes to us as a man murdering his wife in pursuit of justice.

Schwartz’s analysis of *Othello* hinges on the question: what is the difference between murder and sacrifice? While she does not quote Othello’s lines, his accusation of Desdemona echoes throughout her reading: “O perjured woman, thou dost stone my heart / And makest me call what I intend to do / A murder, which I thought a sacrifice!” (5.2.63-65).³ Both forms of death revolve around fulfilling some form of justice. Sacrifice is redemptive and substitutive, a gift of life offered on behalf of or in order to appease a wrong. But, Schwartz writes, “Murder is framed very differently: far from *satisfying* the demands of justice, murder *violates* them, and its object does not heroically embrace or

³ While not a part of my argument here, I find it significant to remember that Shakespeare has been asking this question years before *Othello*. In *Julius Caesar*, Brutus, too, wants to make Caesar a sacrifice rather than a murder victim: “And, gentle friends, / Let’s kill him boldly, but not wrathfully. / Let’s carve him as a dish fit for the gods, / Not hew him as a carcass fit for hounds” (2.1. 171-74). Yet soon after we experience a bloody overkill, showing us that the clean, meaningful death Brutus hopes for is not realistic: by killing Caesar, they must take part in murder, not sacrifice.

stoically accept destruction; he is an unwilling victim...murder does not satisfy justice; it cries out for satisfaction" (46). Murder denies satisfaction and simultaneously demands it. Murder, operating in a flawed attempt at justice, is an impossible attempt to achieve the one thing it cannot find: satisfaction for wrongdoing.

Othello, spiraling downward into his desire for revenge against Desdemona, wavers between hatred for her and uncertainty that she could betray him. Caught in this tension, he cries, "Would I were satisfied!" (3.3.393). Iago, nearly immediately after, twists this question, as the Arden text notes, into a picture of satisfaction through voyeurism, creating an visual picture of Desdemona and Cassio in bed together (Honingman n. 393). Iago then asks, "What shall I say? where's satisfaction?" (l. 404). Heather Hirschfeld in *The End of Satisfaction: Drama and Repentance in the Age of Shakespeare*, uses this one word, this idea of satisfaction, to focus her argument surrounding early modern theater and the tumultuous times of Shakespeare's playgoers. She explores how theological shifts occurring within and as a result of the Protestant Reformation affected early modern playgoers. Specifically, *satisfaction* in Shakespeare held explosive connotations and inherent questions, and Shakespeare's use of the word would have caused these tensions to pierce the minds of his audience.

Satisfaction comes from the Latin *satisfacere*, meaning “to do or make enough.” Hirschfeld believes that as a whole, literary scholars have wrongly interpreted this word by placing it within the category of desire, making it “appetitive” or “receptive,” the realm of needs and wants. But for the early modern listener, the word meant far more than the fulfillment of desires, held far more dynamic power:

satisfaction named a special calculus between transgression and atonement; it signified the ‘doing enough’ or the ‘enough done’ that compensated God for human sin...in the process of confessional upheaval we call the Protestant Reformation, the meanings and values of satisfaction were fundamentally shifted, redefined. This redefinition, in turn, put tremendous pressure on the term’s conceptual and experiential viability in the other, seemingly more ‘secular’ realms in which it was active. (2)

These “secular” arenas include marriage and finance, areas where sacred language and ideas infiltrated the practical lives of early modern individuals.

At the heart of satisfaction lies the word *satis*—“enough.” Hirschfeld analyzes multiple characters in early modern theater who are in the position of the debtor/sinner and who, in some way, are seeking how to make enough, how to “balance individual transgression with the appropriate payback” and “acknowledge both the desirability and the impossibility of ‘making enough’ in matters of atonement, whether to God or to intimate others” (3). For Hirschfeld, Othello is a prime example as he openly confesses his inability to find satisfaction. In her chapter, “‘Wooing, Wedding, and Repenting’: The Satisfaction

of Marriage in *Othello* and *Love's Pilgrimage*," she examines how Othello specifically cannot achieve *satis*, specifically in his marriage to Desdemona. The Reformation denied marriage as a sacrament; therefore, the idea of receiving grace through marriage, like receiving grace through the Eucharist, was denied, but not forgotten. Othello captures both layers of these tensions, exposing what Hirschfeld calls the "fault lines" (9) between the idea of satisfaction only achievable through Christ's sacrifice for the faithful, denying human agency in salvation, and the idea that people can receive grace through the grace of God through human action. Nowhere would this be felt so personally than in marriage, the most intimate of human relationships. At the heart of marriage, and throughout the entirety of *Othello*, lies the marriage bed.⁴ Throughout the play, the audience must question whether or not Othello and Desdemona consummate their marriage, or when they did so.⁵ The play consistently

⁴ Brian Cummings writes of *Othello*: "Within this theatre of terror, nothing is confidential, nothing sacred. The incipient voyeurism culminates with the intrusion into the bed-chamber, a social embarrassment which has its visual counterpart in the obtrusiveness of the bed itself, requiring a cumbersome novelty of stage-management in probably the first physical representation of a bed in the English theatre" (157). Shakespeare may not only have used the bed to show multiple layers of shame, but also is likely the first playwright to have required an actual bed on the stage.

⁵ Othello is awakened from his nuptial bed in Venice (1.2) and in Cyprus (2.3). Neill believes both of these scenes have caused the audience to form a "terrible curiosity about the absent scene that dominates so much of the play's action" (390). While we may assume that Othello and Desdemona have consummated their marriage, the consistent interruptions at night raise the possibility that they have not, causing thus to focus on the marriage bed. Neill writes: "Othello persistently goads its audience into speculation about what is happening behind the scenes. This preoccupation with offstage action is unique in Shakespeare...in *Othello*, the real

interrupts the sexual intimacy of husband and wife; not only does their marriage come into question for Othello, but their actual sexual relationship is held in question, too, by the audience witnessing his turmoil and rage. He repents his marriage, which Hirschfeld recognizes becomes common in early modern theater: enforced marriage had long been a tragic thing. Now, repented marriage even more so. The institution of the Church, commanded to encourage people to “be fruitful and multiply,” to provide the grace of God and the extension of the family, now struggles to find its place in the world of satisfaction to God and to each other:

As an institution built on the demand for adequation and increase, marriage in the Reformed tradition opens onto the various crises of ‘making enough’...But as an object of penitence, the repented marriage more specifically smuggles the theological problem of penitential satisfaction into the domestic world of husband and wife. Spouses repent their marriage, and the repented marriage becomes its own kind of sorrowful—but inefficacious—suffering. Put another way, the repented marriage in early Reformation England collapses into itself two desacramentalized sacraments, penance and matrimony, so that the production of conjugal ‘more’ is devoid of satisfaction: of both consolation and of end. (128)

Othello fears Desdemona regrets their marriage. He, then, regrets his marriage to her. He finally kills her, and, after learning his attempt at justice was indeed a murder, he regrets his action to the point that he will take his own life in a final

imaginative focus of the action is always the hidden marriage-bed, an inalienably private location, shielded, until the very last scene, from every gaze” (396).

attempt at justice. The lack of satisfaction and the desire for justice are themselves intimately married in the play, and in the early modern mind. Othello's inner fears culminated in an outward action of violence which he considered just, which he believed would satisfy his inner turmoil. Before he murders Desdemona, he first undertakes an internal struggle. Every outward act begins inwardly; Desdemona's murder began at Othello's doubt. It is this internal state of a person that raises a vital and revolutionary aspect of the theater of its time, and of contemporary prison Shakespeare theater: the concept of interiority.

Interiority, Anagnorisis, Catharsis: Self-knowing and Clarification for the Shakespeare Actor

Before the Protestant Reformation, people confessed their sins orally and therefore externally. They would then receive penance, a way of seeking external assurance of the satisfaction for sin through outward action. But, according to Paul Stegner, after the Reformation, self-examination became vital for confession of sin. But without external confession, there was also no external satisfaction for sin. Stegner says that "[t]he Protestant internalization of confession reflects the Christian tradition's privileging of interiority rather than exteriority in matters of faith" (109). Yet early modern England still, though emphasizing the interiority of confession, also "invited a social component to evince [confession's]

authenticity in order to satisfy both the individual and the community of his or her spiritual state" (111). Assurance came in two "performances": an inward, private confession, and an outward social performance. This outward performance, according to Stegner, "reveals continuity between traditional and reformed penitential practices" (112). This exposes a key tension within post-Reformation England: confession became individual, private, and between God and man, yet a need for action, for ocular proof, of that satisfaction still remained. Still, even with that need, people were told to look inward for the satisfaction that only could come from the works of God, and without involving the works of man.

"Inwardness" or "interiority" have long been recognized as a significant shift in early modern theater. The idea that a character could explore and expose his internal self, his thoughts and processes, was innovative to Shakespeare's stage. The primary way the audience experiences interiority is through soliloquy. Brian Cummings, in *Mortal Thoughts: Religion, Secularity and Identity in Shakespeare and Early Modern Culture*, considers the soliloquy as "the *locus classicus* of the problem of the self" (170). He further defines soliloquy as something that "can be thought of as a literary form which gets at truth through its own process of enquiry." Montaigne's concept of the "essay" is similar: a form of self-exploration rather than "transparent revelation of self," and Cummings

believes that, like Augustine's concept in the *Confessions*, the soliloquy is "rhetorical and experimental" (179). For Augustine, who has been misinterpreted, according to Cummings, the soliloquy is not merely a man telling his audience, God or another person, about himself:

Augustine describes the condition of soliloquy in the *Confessions: et cum ipso me solo coram te* ('with myself all alone in front of you'). It is a paradoxical phrase: all alone with another. The presence of God as a silent but contributory witness is understood as a given throughout the *Confessions*. In that sense, the work has been misinterpreted by a range of commentators throughout the twentieth century as a text of interiority. In a similar way the interiority of Shakespeare's soliloquies has been misunderstood. It was a natural language of the late sixteenth century to think of speech alone as potentially a conversation. (179)

While Augustine was thinking of conversations with God, Cummings says a divine presence is not necessary for Hamlet's soliloquies to be recognized as "rhetorical, unfinished, and meditative" (179). Augustine and Hamlet are both exploring, trying to understand their being, rather than declaring what they already know to a listener. This means, then, "The true meaning of soliloquy, therefore, lies not in some either/or of the actor's head or the audience's consciousness, but in the mediation between the two. This is implicit in all theatre, but it is brought into sharper focus by the convention of the soliloquy. This is a register which is special by virtue of its reception by its auditors as much as by its enunciation by its speaker. The stage is haunted by a voice which has no proper endpoint" (183). Cummings uses Richard II's, "Shall I compare

this prison to the world" (5.5.1-41) to strengthen his argument, specifically focusing on Richard's "hammering out" of his thoughts. Richard is, through his soliloquy, working out metaphors in attempt to make sense of his life in prison. He is exploring, not articulating already achieved concepts of himself. Cummings rejects the soliloquy as merely a portrayal of interiority. However, I do not think this is a necessary denial, nor that interiority must mean an articulation of a completed understanding of oneself to an audience. Rather, I believe that Cumming's definition of soliloquy can instead offer a deeper definition of interiority: a searching of oneself—an understanding that the human heart must be "hammered out." Sometimes it may contain self-awareness, and at other times, it may need to seek for it. Both are exposures of a person's innermost being. Both are part of a journey of knowing oneself. Both are ways to habilitate one's own self, and to navigate and inhabit the world.

Othello, at the beginning of the play, seems confident in himself. Knowing Brabantio is coming in fury to find him, Iago advises him to go inside. But Othello says, "Not I, I must be found / My parts, my title, and my perfect soul / Shall manifest me rightly" (1.2.30-32). He appears humble: he admits his lack of ability with words, yet he ironically describes his struggle with speech eloquently. He seems to, in his seemingly flawless character, break down racial stereotypes of the city; after Othello has defended himself and his marriage to

Desdemona, the Duke says to Brabantio: "If virtue no delighted beauty lack / Your son-in-law is far more fair than black" (1.3.290-91).⁶ While initially sure of himself, Othello's self-understanding breaks down throughout the play. This is significant when considering that Othello, a tragic hero, has only three soliloquies, the spaces with the highest possibility for self-searching available on the Shakespearean stage (3.3. 262; 5.2.1; 5.2.90). The first two of Othello's soliloquies involve self-doubt or doubt concerning his wife; the final one is after he has killed her. Rather than exploring himself, Othello's inwardness is based on a lie, which brings his inner destruction rather than clarity. This is striking when Othello's inwardness is compared to Iago's, who hauntingly sure of himself, his motives, and his actions. Iago's inwardness brings intentional destruction, while Othello's inwardness unintentionally leads him astray.

While Othello seemingly lacks inwardness, he has, like all tragic heroes, a moment of anagnorisis (ἀναγνώρισις). His moment of recognition comes late, when Emilia tells him that Desdemona was innocent, and when he realizes that Iago has deceived him. This deepens the tragedy, for Othello was blind to the truth because he was blind to himself: he did not see himself as Desdemona saw

⁶ Diverse arguments exist concerning Othello's race, many including Othello's affiliation with Islam: Some are: Jennifer Feather's *Feather, Jennifer. "'O blood, blood, blood': Violence and Identity in Shakespeare's *Othello*"* (2013); Meredith Anne Skura's *"Reading Othello's Skin: Contexts and Pretexts"* (2008); and Daniel J. Vitkus's *"Turning Turk in *Othello*: The Conversion and Damnation of the Moor."* (1997).

him, and he did not see her as she truly was. His violence resulted from ignorance, his crime from passion, and he blames himself and destroys himself once he knows himself. Hirschfeld recognizes this: "The most telling anagnorisis of the final scene, then, is Othello's recognition of his inability to make or have enough in multiple dimensions...Whatever he fails to comprehend at the end of the play, he acknowledges both the insufficiency of this deeds and the overabundance of his sins" (137). Othello's self-knowing is a recognition of his failure to achieve justice. He commits murder instead of sacrifice in his search for satisfaction. His realization shows him the violence he has wrought, the violence his audience has known long before he sees the truth of what he has done.

Othello's death could be considered cathartic, if we interpret catharsis as purgation of unwanted and unhealthy emotions. Othello seeks to purify his name by destroying himself, recognizing his darkness and overcoming it. Yet catharsis has more possibilities than the concept of removal, of cleansing something that is bad. Catharsis can, and I argue, should be, understood just as much as recognition of oneself, a kind of intensified consciousness, rather than a self-cleansing.

The early modern audience would have found a renewed interest in the concept of catharsis and would have recognized this possibility in the tragedy of *Othello*. Aristotle seeks to define tragedy in book six of his *Poetics*, and the term

has since been, as R. Darren Gobert says, “the most vexed term in Aristotle’s vexing *Poetics*, the foundation of Western dramatic theory” (109). Attempting to unpack this difficult term, Marissa Greenberg summarizes Aristotle’s definition of catharsis (κάθαρσις) as “a specific type of action—mimetic, complete, and weighty—that has a particular, if ambiguous, emotional impact upon audiences: ‘Tragedy, then, is an imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude . . . through pity and fear effecting the proper purgation [catharsis] of these emotions’” (165). Greenberg recognizes medieval writers did not explore this concept of catharsis, but many sixteenth century writers gave their focus to Aristotle’s idea of tragedy and how it creates catharsis for its audience. Shakespeare’s generation found this concept more meaningful and important than those before him. More reliable translations of the *Poetics* resulted from this study, along with extensive commentary both on the Continent and in England, but the interpretations of catharsis across the waters differed:

Continental writers viewed catharsis in terms of medicinal cleansing; tragedy, they posited, refines debilitating emotions such as sorrow and terror, so as to render the individual physically and mentally ready for civil service. By contrast, English authors privileged a more legalistic interpretation. Catharsis stirs up admissions of guilt, they argued, rather than empties out harmful emotions; it leads to the exposure of vicious offenders, not the creation of virtuous citizens. (165).

Hirschfeld provides a specific example of the early modern English audience experiencing the concept of theater exposing the guilty. She discusses *A Warning*

for *Fair Women*, a play performed by the Chamberlain's Men near the end of the 16th century. In the play a character tells a story of a woman who killed her husband responding to a play in which a woman also kills her husband: "She was so moved with the sight thereof, / As she cryed out, the Play was made by her, / And openly confesst her husbands murder" (qtd. in Hirschfeld 149).

Interestingly, Hirschfeld does not discuss *Hamlet* in conjunction with this example. In possibly the most famous play-within-a-play of Shakespeare's, Hamlet schemes to use theater to prompt Claudius to confess his crime: "The play's the thing / Wherein I'll catch the conscience of the king" (2.2.543-44).

Hamlet wants Claudius to experience catharsis, but not simply a purging of his evil motives; rather, Hamlet desires to expose the king's crime and to use it for revenge. Hamlet does not want Claudio to grow; he wants his uncle's ruin.

This distinction between cleansing from impurity and exposing wrongdoing is significant; the first suggests that simply through experience, people become better. The second, however, and the idea that permeated English early modern theater, means that catharsis itself does not bring any internal change. Catharsis in this interpretation condemns a person as guilty, but does not require that person be purified by the emotions or wrongdoings which lead to the guilt. Catharsis as exposure, as clarification, offers agency to the

individual: whether a person grows from catharsis is determined by what one does after/with the cathartic experience.

For centuries, the question of catharsis excited not only about the state of the audience, but of the actors of tragedy themselves. Gobert, surveying the history of emotion surrounding catharsis and the complexities of its interpretations, identifies three major definitions of the word in the *Liddell-Scott-Jones Greek-English Lexicon*: “a medical katharsis that discharges emotions, or ‘purgation’; a religious, lustratory katharsis, or ‘purification’; and a katharsis of cognitive illumination, or ‘clarification’” (Gobert 110-11). Greenberg’s work shows that the medical and religious ideas of these words would have aligned with the European Continent’s perception of catharsis, but the concept of “clarification” is what would have arisen in the English mind in Shakespeare’s time. Augusto Boal, across centuries and continents from England, also recognizes the central role of catharsis in theater, as well as the complications it brings: “All the unities of tragedy are structured around this concept. It is the center, the essence, the purpose of the tragic system. Unfortunately, it is also the most controversial concept. Catharsis is correction: what does it correct? Catharsis is purification: what does it purify?” (27). The terror of catharsis, for Boal, lies in this: we do not recognize what needs to be purged immediately. Rather, we accept it in the play and in ourselves. The power of tragedy “would

be greatly diminished if the fault were presented from the beginning as despicable, the error as abominable. It is necessary, on the contrary, to show them as acceptable in order to destroy them later on through the theatrical, poetic process" (28). This is in itself a clarification — what we once accepted, we must realize is not acceptable, and therefore we must face the need to rid ourselves of it. We must, like the tragic heroes, change: "Theater is change and not simple presentation of what exists: it is becoming and not being" (Boal 28). Like the soliloquy, catharsis is not static. It is an active process, a series of recognitions, a way of *becoming*. It is this idea of clarification and the following opportunity for change that is vital for prison Shakespeare performance; but before I discuss catharsis in prisons, I want to explore further the role of the actor of tragedy in general before moving to incarcerated actors of Shakespeare.

Those who feared the theater in and after Shakespeare's time did so out of fear of the power of catharsis and the effect it had on the actors of tragedy; they believed that for a person to play a role, the person had to some degree have internalized those emotions, or would be portraying evil already inside him. Gobert explores the reasons for these oppositions: "A well rehearsed antitheatricalist line holds that the conversion wrought by the plaguelike theatre" because of the belief that the "actors are materially altered as a consequence of their dissemblance." He cites Pierre Nicole, a Jansenist who

traced his antithetical beliefs to Augustine. Nicole wrote in 1664 of acting: "It is a profession in which men and women represent the passions of hatred, anger, ambition, vengeance, and especially love. They must express them as naturally and vividly as they can, and they could not do so if they did not in some way excite these passions within themselves; and if these passions are to be expressed through gestures and words, they must be first imprinted on their souls" (114). Gobert also cites theologian Jacques Bénigne Bossuet who wrote in 1695 that actors take on the "spirit" of what they are imitating. This "spirit" then moves beyond the actor to the audience, and "The spectator is carried along in this spirit. . . . In this way the entire device of theater only makes men impassioned" (qtd. in Gobert, 114). In this mind, actors either already have or will grow to have the emotions they are expressing, and these will transfer to their audience. So, in one hundred years of theory surrounding the theater, ideas ranged from early moderns believing catharsis would bring clarification and confession of crimes to later critics of the theater believing those on the stage and off of it will have the very dangerous passions from which Aristotle claimed the theater would bring cleansing.

Few people might be considered to have less dangerous passions than those in prison for violent crimes. The convictions of the men in the Shakespeare Behind Bars program are diverse, but most are guilty of enacting some form of

violence. Amy Scott-Douglass, professor of English and Shakespeare scholar at Marymount University, visited Luther Lockett Correctional Facility in 2004 to watch the men rehearse and perform Shakespeare, and to interview SBB members in order to discover why the program was so successful. She opens her account with her own description of the program:

Tofteland developed the program in order to offer inmates an outlet for artistic expression and as a tool for learning literacy and social skills such as tolerance and conflict resolution. At the same time, the program is meant to function as a safe forum in which violent offenders are able to come to their pasts—a process which frequently involves the inmates acknowledging crimes and abuses they themselves suffered in childhood as taking responsibility for their own violent acts as teenagers and adults—through the experiences of identification, role-playing and catharsis. (1)

In Scott-Douglass' perception of the program, catharsis is a vital part of the rehabilitation of these participants. Yet, before examining process of rehabilitation, it is important to identify some of the plays have performed up to the time of her visit to Luther Lockett: *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* (1996), *Othello* (1999), *Titus Andronicus* (2001), *Hamlet* (2002), *The Tempest* (2003), *Julius Caesar* (2004). Certain scenes within these plays require some of the most violent acts found in Shakespeare, and many of the men in SBB do not have to research how act out violence—many will spend the rest of their lives behind bars for violent crimes.

How then can a group of men locked behind bars for violence be expected to perform violent acts, many of which mirror the ones that brought them to prison, and experience positive effects? Some might wonder if such “acting” is not merely sadistic; could a person who commits violence truly separate himself from violence, even in acting? Curt Tofteland, former director of the Kentucky Shakespeare Festival and founder of Shakespeare Behind Bars, intentionally chose the revenge plays as a starting place for these men. Tofteland believed when he founded the program in 1995 that by experiencing these plays, these men would have an opportunity for growth and “habilitation.” I argue in the following section that Tofteland’s understanding of catharsis is greater than the traditional view of “purging,” making it true to the English understanding of the concept in Shakespeare’s day. Tofteland’s process indeed allows for the clarification which the early moderns would have recognized: the recognition of guilt. Yet the process does not stop there. The antitheatricalists of the seventeenth century would undoubtedly condemn SBB, for they would recognize a group of men who very well might prove their argument: theater allows the worst in us to be true, allows the actors to show what is already inside of them. Here is where the SBB process would prove the opponents of the theater wrong: the theater of Shakespeare in prison allows these men to, as the early moderns believed catharsis could, recognize their guilt. Yet that recognition does not bring

purification from that guilt. Rather, the facing of their crimes through reenacting violent actions in Shakespeare and inhabiting his characters allows them to find anagnorisis, their own self-revelation. This is a turn inward, but they also find a turn outward: they learn to consider the experiences of their victims, to learn empathy. The catharsis, the “clarification,” does not bring an immediate change. The continual revisiting of their crimes through memorizing the entire play, months of rehearsals, and numerous performances, rather than bringing a one-time emotional purge, allows a long-term liturgical confession of wrongdoing and a desire for penance.

Othello commits one of the greatest wrongs in all of Shakespeare, for centuries leaving his audience horrified at a violent, ritualistic act. In Othello’s anagnorisis, in his murderous action, Shakespeare offers his audience a tragedy of a man who fails to find satisfaction in himself, in his marriage, and in finding justice for his crime. Shakespeare also offered one man in particular, Sammie Byron, the opportunity to find rehabilitation through playing Othello. For Byron, the catharsis came not in the purging from unwanted emotion, but in self-recognition and confession of his guilt. Othello caused Byron not to forget and release violence, but to remember, and remember again and again. Tofteland’s direction of Byron and Byron’s response shows a cathartic liturgy, one that brings clarity and an ability not to feel cleansed, but to, through a repetitive

physical act on the stage, act towards his own form of penance and search for satisfaction for his crime.

Sammie Byron: The "Turning Point" as Confession, Repetition in Rehearsal as Liturgy

When the academic Shakespeare world met Sammie Byron in 2005, he had already served twenty years in prison. The documentary *Shakespeare Behind Bars* opens with Byron memorizing Prospero's Act IV Scene 1 monologue. As Byron passionately recites "Our revels now are ended," he is instantly identified as a vital part of both the film and the Shakespeare program. Byron is regarded throughout the film as a leader, one of the "founding members" of the program, considered the "alpha-male" of the group by a fellow Shakespearean, and one of the men most willing to share how Shakespeare can transform a life.

A tall, middle-aged man, Byron's piercing eyes are kind while his body is intimidatingly strong. Perhaps the most physically daunting member of the company—he holds a world record for deadlifting—Byron might surprise many with the emotion he shows not only when he talks about Shakespeare, but when he talks about the crime that sent him to prison for nearly half his life. For Byron, his crime and Shakespeare are not separable because Othello was the space where Byron found what the company calls his "turning point." This moment, which the entire company remembers, was Byron's most drastic step towards

rehabilitation and recognition of his identity both in confronting his past and in facing the future in which he must live with that past.

Othello was not Byron's first Shakespeare experience. In an interview with Mary Wiltenburg, he shared that the first time he found a parallel to his own life in Shakespeare was in his first role: Proteus in *The Two Gentleman of Verona*.

Proteus attempts a rape at the end of the play. Wiltenburg later watched rehearsals where Byron and his fellow SBB actors took part in *Titus Andronicus*. He was playing Aaron, the villainous mastermind behind the ruin of Titus and his family and the cause of much of the extreme violence of Shakespeare's most bloody play. While playing a violent man, Byron had yet to play the most transformative role of his acting career, the role he recognized as the most like himself before he came to prison.

In Amy Scott-Douglass's 2004 interview with Byron, eight years after he played *Othello*, she is at first skeptical of his sincerity when discussing his experience. She asks him, at this point a seasoned prison Shakespeare actor, if *Othello* was the hardest role he had played. Immediately, he begins to cry and answers yes, and not just because it the size of the part:

'It has nothing to do with that.' He looks down at the floor and shakes his head. When he raises his head up again, the tears run down his face. I am more than a little surprised by Sammie's sudden, immediate reaction. As he sits in front of me crying, my first thought is that he's putting on a show, that his sorrow isn't

sincere, only because I've never seen any human being break into tears so quickly. (30)

After she asks him if he would be willing to talk more about his experience as

Othello, Byron agrees, asking her to be patient with him:

And then Sammie wipes tears from both eyes with one sweep of his massive hand, looks straight at me, and speaks. "I can never get over this. And I don't try to fight it or hide it, and although it may look painful it's very liberating. I had to do...I had to do Othello...because it was so like the crime I committed, and it was not so much as to recreate the crime as it was to be sure that I understood it. My close friend Mike Smith played Desdemona. Even though he had his own insecurities to deal with in playing a woman's role. And so I got a chance to...I always wondered...no...it's very difficult to put yourself in the place of your victim, and in exploring Othello, it allowed me to in some sense recreate that moment. Then I was able to see, in the face of someone that I cared about, exactly what was going on with them. Very powerful. I already knew that what I did was not okay, but I needed to really understand the extreme pain that I caused, and that, in essence, motivates me to constantly be aware of how I treat others. People are so special and unique and important, and no matter what's going on, they don't deserve to be hurt in that fashion. Everything can always be worked out. There's always another way. There's no excuse for what I've done. I understand now. Like Brutus, he doesn't take the time to give Caesar a chance, and I will never be like that. Never again. (30-31)

Byron shares his crime with Scott-Douglass, in tears. His response to talking about his crime is a recurring expression for him. For a physically powerful man, these tears can be surprising and initially unsettling, as Scott-Douglass recognizes. Yet Byron's tears are also significant when considering catharsis.

Whether interpreted as purgation or as recognition of guilt, Byron's tears are an

outward symbol of interior action. He cries when he revisits his past, when he recognizes his violence. He cries when he realizes that he does not want to be the man he once was. And he calls this experience “painful,” yet “liberating.”

In *Shakespeare Behind Bars*, released two years before Scott-Douglass’ book, Byron tells the camera early in the film, through tears: “Around the anniversary of my crime, it’s just a very difficult thing to go through. The hardest damn thing I’ve ever had to do is forgive myself. And each year I go through this experience it seems to get harder and harder, and I really have to fight to see the goodness in me.” Byron is in his cell room, with a cross hanging behind him on the wall. He offers more information here than he tells Scott-Douglass. He calls his victim by name—Carol. He says that the two entered a cycle of fighting and having sex after they would fight. On one bleak night, the fear fed the fighting to the point that Byron became uncontrollably angry. And then he says, “I...I took it too far. And I...um...I strangled her.”

Sammie Byron had been in prison twice for assault before his final sentence. Both times he was released for good behavior, and after his second release, he stayed out of prison for a while and took part in founding a wrestling gym. He had affairs with multiple women—Carol was one. He broke up with her, but five years afterwards, reconnected with her. Their relationship was abusive, she constantly threatening him, him constantly enraged at her. Yet the

two would always have sex after arguing. But one night, when Carol threatened to expose Byron for sleeping with his supervisor at work, his anger accelerated. He raped Carol, and then took her life in his rage. Sammie Byron, who would spend over thirty years for killing a woman by strangulation in bed, chose to play Othello in December of 1999.

One of moments the SBB actors and volunteers revisit when asked to share about the power of the program is Byron's "turning point." Warden Larry Chandler of Luther Lockett, while not there for this transformative moment in the program, recognizes its results. When interviewed by Wiltenburg, Chandler stated, "record-wise, Curt's got a couple of the worst guys. It still amazes me. You would run, if you seen 'em in their day." Chandler went on to say that, when thinking of all the actors in SBB when Chandler came to Luther-Lockett, he had the least amount of trust for Byron: "He was a scary guy in those days. It's different now. That light bulb went off for him." This "turning point," this "light bulb" moment, comes up multiple times in Scott-Douglass' interviews with the inmates. Jerry Guenthner, known as "Big G," shares his memory:

"I remember the day when Sammie had his breakthrough up there in the Visitor's Room when we was rehearsing that scene. I mean, that play mirrored his crime to the point where it was just, like, identical, and I get goosebumps right now even just talking about it...we knew there was gonna be a day when Samie was gonna face that monster. And when all of it took place, I mean, Sammie broke down and...'

I interrupt. 'Describe that to me. What does that mean "broke down?"' I ask. 'Because I've seen Sammie cry—I've seen him cry in the play, during the talkbacks—but when Sammie Byron really breaks down, what does that mean?'

'Sammie, or any of us,' says Guenthner. 'You can cry and you can be emotional, but the pain and hurt that we've caused in people's lives and the mistakes that we've made no matter what you do you can't bring that person back and you can't undo the hurt that you did. The line I like best in *Hamlet* is 'to hold as 'twere a mirror up to nature.' And that's what we try to do. And when you look in that mirror and you find it relates really strongly to your past or your crime, that truth, that pain just comes out. And it's almost like a mental breakdown, such an emotional release that it's just, whew, it's a trip to watch.'" (23-24)

Karen Heath, the Kentucky Shakespeare Festival staff liaison for SBB at the time of Scott-Douglass' interview, supervises all rehearsals and performances. She was at *Othello* rehearsals in 1999, and she told Scott-Douglass that she would never forget Byron's "breakdown." It came in Act V, when Othello kills Desdemona: "He finished the scene. And he was sobbing. He was just *sobbing*. Curt said, 'Good. Again.' And I thought to myself, 'Is Curt crazy? Has he totally lost his mind? These guys are going to kill him'" (53). Byron himself told Wiltenburg in 2001 that he started to sob when rehearsing the scene, because it brought back memories of his crime. Wiltenburg writes, "'It really broke me down,' he remembers, crying even now. 'And what was really great was having all my partners there to support me. It's like getting down to the truth, and delivering it. And then, about five minutes after I bawled my head off, Curt said "Okay, let's do it again".'"

Repetition is vital for habilitation, because catharsis as clarification, as recognition of oneself, is not a one-time experience. Byron did not just play Othello once, nor did he rehearse the scene a handful of times. The average SBB production is a nine month process. Comparatively, the average professional Shakespeare performance schedule is sixteen weeks. The SBB process begins, as the documentary film shows, with the inmates reading the entire play together. They then begin to work on their own “translations” of the lines, making sure they understand each word and idea and sharing their thoughts together as a group. They begin to memorize monologues from the play, interiorizing the ideas, language, and meaning of the work as a whole through some of its most significant parts. Then, after the entire group has learned the entire play together, they cast themselves in their roles. Rehearsals begin, culminating in a multi-show run where family, friends, and certain outside parties can come and watch the almost year-long work. It is impossible to know how many times Byron acted Act V Scene 2 of *Othello*. And on the day when he had to face his crime and himself in a way he never had before, Tofteland told him that he had to do the scene “again.” This is more than a tough director of a Shakespeare play. Tofteland, without putting his methods into words, invited Byron to a form of liturgy and of penance. Tofteland’s “again” allows for Byron to keep his promise of “never again.”

Byron did not leave Othello behind after finishing his last performance. Scott-Douglass in her time with the SBB company in 2004 saw the Kentucky Shakespeare Festival production of *Othello* visit Luther Luckett. The inmates, including the SBB actors, came to watch. Many of them were already familiar with the professionals, since Kurt had helped establish the opportunity for relationships between the SBB and KSF companies to grow through the years. Both shared their work with each other. Scott-Douglass writes that, when the professional company came, Byron was the first to show up to the performance space, and he sat in the front-center seat. While others turned their faces or closed their eyes as Othello killed Desdemona, Byron, tears streaming down his face, never stopped watching. He faced his crime, this time as an audience member, again. Acting the scene, watching the scene, talking about the scene and about his “breakdown” when asked to describe it—all these are part of Byron’s liturgy, his consistent confession. He is aware he can never forget his crime or be purged of what he did; but this self-awareness was a long process for Byron, one which allowed him to experience his own type of interiority which he never had before prison, which he never had before Shakespeare.

In *Theatre in Prison: Theory and Practice*, Michael Balfour discusses how rehabilitation programs allow offer those in prison a kind of process that allows them to understand not only what they did in their crime, but why they did it.

He writes, "Probation and prison rehabilitative programmes deal with an offender's belief system and the interpretative frameworks by which they 'make sense' out of sensory perception and direct their behaviour. If offenders are to be directed away from unlawful acts they must learn to recognize and change certain self images, attitudes and beliefs" (9). He continues with the idea that the offender has to find his explanation of his crime and the situation of his crime, and "particularly at the set of justifications and rationalisations that are made" (9). The person is called an "offender" because he broke the requirements of living in society, and before reentering society, he must learn how to gain the social skills he lacked before coming to prison. Balfour then says that prison theater, through role playing, allows the offender to explore first his own self-understanding, and then his need to grow as an individual and a member of society: "The function of the aesthetic experience is therefore to re-engage with the decisions of a criminal act and highlight consequences of actions in order to encourage greater degrees of social responsibility and moral maturation" (9). These principles apply to SBB, and to Sammie Byron's story. He came to prison with a history of sexual abuse as a child, with physical abuse from his father, with issues of how to handle his anger; and his struggle with anger led to his trail of crimes, leading to the crime that brought him to over thirty years behind

bars (Scott-Douglass, Wiltenburg). Byron had to understand himself and how he processed the world before he could see a new way of living.

Byron is not the only individual to experience drastically transformative moments in SBB. While each member of the company's story is unique, they are alike in that many of them have similar turning points. Hal Cobb, a fellow company member, recounts another such instance. It, like Byron's moment, was not captured via film, but rather in the memories of those sharing the rehearsal of

The Tempest:

Rehearsing the scene between Antonio and Sebastian, Curt was pushing the actor portraying Antonio to dig deeper, bring the text down into his body. Antonio is trying to convince Sebastian to take advantage of the shipwreck and usurp his brother to become King of Naples. As the textual assassination plot sank in, he quietly said to himself, 'I didn't have to kill him.' The actor was the only other SBB member who had attended the Impact of Crime on Victims seminar with me. I had been privately astounded at his insistence that his crime had been justified homicide, killing the alleged rapist of someone close to him. He rationalized that his cultural background and military training gave him no other choice. 'I didn't have to kill him', he repeated as the room went silent. I could see the profound shift in him as Antonio's plotting and scheming took root in his personal reality. He may have never come to his conclusion and change of world-view had it not been for the Shakespeare Behind Bars experience. (Tofteland and Cobb 437)

There are more instances than these, more moments where anagnorisis is not simply a literary term used for a Shakespeare character on a stage, but for a real person in real time experiencing a deep clarity and self-recognition he has not

achieved before. And he does so through Shakespeare's plays. These moments happen, again and again.

Byron and his fellow actors, in a prison system very much focused on punishment for crimes committed, are expected to "pay" for what they have done by serving time in prison. Yet he, even after years in prison, was neither finding nor achieving satisfaction for his crime. After years of prison life, he had followed the rules, paying his time, not getting into trouble. Byron was convicted of murder in January of 1986 and sentenced to life with parole. Ten years later, he played Othello. After the prison staff psychologist Julie Barto watched Byron after he performed the role, she came to Curt Tofteland and said to him, "*Now he's ready*" (Scott-Douglass 27). Ten years of prison, of "paying" for his crime, did not prepare Byron to enter the world, did not offer him (re)habilitation, did not give him the opportunity to encounter his own self-awareness not only of what he once was, but of what he should be. Therapy, work, imprisonment—none of these things did for Byron in ten years what Shakespeare did over the course of three. Othello gave Byron the chance to see the horror of his own crime, but to write a different ending to his own story. Othello found no satisfaction for his violence and therefore took his own life. Byron knows he can never really pay for what he has done, but is willing to try to find a life even knowing he can never do enough, can never make satisfaction for Carol's life. Just before the

Titus Andronicus performance, Byron came to Wiltenburg. She writes that he “insists that this newspaper story be told in a way that won't further hurt Carol's family. ‘I don't know that there exists such a way,’ he says. Then, crying: ‘I'm very sorry for what I've done. The tragedy is that I cannot change it. I can change me, but I cannot do anything to help them—to ease their pain.’” Byron lives a life desiring some form of penance, seeking habilitation in the world, even in knowing his actions can never be enough to give his victim life. Yet Byron still lives a life of liturgical-like confession and self-awareness, willing to, through Shakespeare, encounter the worst in him, confess it, accept his guilt, and seek to understand how to live as a part of a penitential community.

Hirschfeld, discussing *A Warning for Fair Women*, says that “This fabulously self-reflexive moment,” when the woman confesses that she killed her husband, “promotes the relatively commonplace idea that the theater could provoke off-stage penitence” (149). The analogous fictional situation that was so prominent in renaissance theater becomes a reality in prison Shakespeare. The performances of Shakespeare prison actors embody the rituals of repentance, creating living examples of repentance through theater. Hirschfeld writes that the theater of Shakespeare's time “consistently recognized the theatricality of repentance: its dynamic, dialogic structure of guilt and confession as well as its dependence upon staging and audience for successful completion” (149). This

“dialogic structure of guilt and confession” is dependent upon self-realization, which Shakespeare explores in his characters through interiority, anagnorisis, and catharsis. The catharsis of acting Othello for Sammie Byron, however, did not purge him of guilt, but rather brought on the early modern English understanding of catharsis—it allowed him “clarification,” to stand face-to-face with a recognition of his crime, to understand how and why he did it, and to act it again and again so that he could face his violence in a confessional, liturgical manner. Yet he, as Hirschfeld says of the early modern theater, required an audience for his liturgy, needed a community to find satisfaction. In my next chapter, I will explore how liturgy exists because of community, and how the satisfaction for sin, while said to be a private matter between man and God, could not be separated from the early modern community of sinners. The *Book of Common Prayer*, England’s liturgy, attempted to give its people a community of which they had been stripped when the sacraments were taken away. By looking at the SBB production of *The Tempest*, I intend to show how, moving from revenge plays to plays about forgiveness, the liturgy of SBB moves from confession of guilt to a search for a form of penance, of satisfaction, of searching for enough, desires Shakespeare’s original audience would have known well. In *prison Shakespeare*, the early modern questions of how a man should live in the world when he is unsure of how to do enough to pay for his wrongs reverberate

behind the bars of Luther Lockett. Shakespeare's lines echo throughout the prison, cries from "Would I were satisfied!" to "Let your indulgence set me free."

CHAPTER THREE

Hal Cobb, Prospero, and “Indulgence”: Communal Rehabilitation through Liturgical Language

The secularization theory surrounding Shakespeare’s plays has dissipated in the last decade. Rather than believing Shakespeare to take the rituals of the church and reshape them for artistic practice, scholars find early modern playwrights did in fact engage with religious ideas. Jane Hwang Degenhardt and Elizabeth Williamson write in their introduction to *Religion and Drama in Early Modern England: The Performance of Religion on the Renaissance Stage*: “a ‘secular theater’ was not one that entirely avoided all engagement with religious faith and its material representations. Rather, such an institution allowed for the reconfiguring of existing discourses from all aspects of contemporary culture and encouraged its audiences to participate in the continual renegotiation of what it meant to be a ‘Christian’” (9). While Degenhardt and Williamson believe that the theater itself allowed for this renegotiation, Maurice Hunt considers Shakespeare the premier playwright to do so. Hunt argues in *Shakespeare’s Religious Allusiveness: Its Play and Tolerance* that Shakespeare did not seek to unify Protestantism and Catholicism, but rather sought tolerance in their midst. He writes: “Shakespeare’s syncretistic method for incorporating Protestant and

Catholic elements into his plays is virtually singular among early modern English playwrights at a time when governmental and social tolerance of Protestantism in the theater was high and criticism of usually stereotyped Catholicism was correspondingly rampant in drama” (ix). *The Tempest* is only possible with Shakespeare because of his unique approach to religion. No other early modern playwright crafted works that rested (or wrestled) in the midst of the tension surrounding the religious questions of early seventeenth-century England as Shakespeare does, and no other play proves this as beautifully as the story of Prospero.

The underlying question of *The Tempest* is, “What does it mean to be human?” Because of this question, literary scholars are not the only readers of Shakespeare to find this play the culmination of his work. In 2002, Curt Tofteland recognized that many of the core members of Shakespeare Behind Bars were nearing parole. At this point, they had performed *Titus Andronicus*, *Othello*, and *Hamlet*—they had explored revenge tragedies. But Tofteland knew that understanding the dangers and tragedy of choosing revenge and violence was only a part of (re)habilitation; the next step was focusing on a play that explored forgiveness. *The Tempest* was the play that, for many seasoned members of the company, would allow them to search what it means to forgive—themselves, those who harmed them and deeply affected their own crimes, and how to seek

forgiveness from the society they have harmed. *The Tempest* production earned the spotlight for the Philomath documentary *Shakespeare Behind Bars*, which sparked the interest of Shakespeare lovers across the world. When the audience hears an incarcerated man recite the final words of the play, “As you from crimes would pardoned be, / Let your indulgence set me free,” they experience a resounding depth and new perspective on the power of the play in performance.¹ Hal Cobb spoke closing words as he played Prospero. While much of the documentary focuses on Cobb, a further examination of his encounter and continued relationship with Prospero since the film illuminates greater intricacies of how Shakespeare portrays forgiveness.

In Chapter Two I focused on the complexities embedded within *Othello* concerning satisfaction for sin for an individual, achieved through a kind of liturgical *action*. In this chapter, I will discuss communal forgiveness made possible through liturgical *language*, specifically in Prospero’s epilogue. I seek to prove: 1) That the most accurate reading of *The Tempest* embraces Shakespeare’s religious “hybridity” (Gillian Woods) rather than a sectarian reading. This hybridity allows for a moral intricacy that creates a complex, yet powerful ending to the play that is only possible through Shakespeare’s exploration of

¹All quotations from *The Tempest* are from the Arden text, edited by Virginia Mason Vaughan and Alden T. Vaughan, 2011.

how to forgive even in the midst of religious controversy on what necessitates forgiveness. 2) Hal Cobb's experience with the play affirms this moral complexity. Cobb empathizes with Prospero and learns from him how to explore forgiving and being forgiven. In Cobb's journey towards forgiveness, he had to accept two shifts, the first from intellectualizing forgiveness to "embodying" forgiveness, and the second from individual authority to communal acknowledgment and confession. Through Prospero and Shakespeare Behind Bars, Cobb enters a penitential community, seeking a form of liturgy that enables growth toward forgiveness and therefore (re)habilitation. 3) The epilogue is the most concentrated location of the theologies of forgiveness at work within the play. In the epilogue, Prospero finally accepts his need for forgiveness, and he recognizes that he cannot give forgiveness without also receiving it. He invites his audience into a penitential community with him, and he uses the word "indulgence" to do so. This word is explosive considering its role in the Reformation of theology, yet here Prospero is not making a statement for or against the Catholic practice of indulgences. Rather, he is recognizing that the idea of human interaction within forgiveness is vital, but cannot look like it once did in Catholic England. Shakespeare uses a convention of the stage to do something nonconventional: to invite his audience into a penitential community sharing in the power of forgiveness.

Prospero's Journey towards Forgiveness

From the second scene of the play, we know that Prospero is responsible for the storm. He has intentionally brought these prisoners to his island. While we know the play ends in Prospero's forgiveness rather than revenge, we are left to wonder at the motives behind his plan: does Prospero plan to forgive all along?

I argue that Prospero's journey is one that begins with the intention to achieve revenge, but ends in Prospero's recognition of not only his need to offer forgiveness, but his need to be forgiven. Revenge does not necessarily mean the destruction of his enemies; Prospero never appears intent to kill. But Prospero does want his prisoners to suffer; his revenge is his desire to bring a similar form of suffering to those who caused him to suffer. But Prospero's journey shifts when Ariel teaches his master compassion. Rather than create parallel suffering, his way of revenge, Prospero realizes his connection to his prisoners: "they being penitent," as he will acknowledge he must be, allows him to forgive his wrongdoers as he simultaneously realizes his own need for forgiveness.

John J. Norton's reading affirms part of my own: humility is a vital step in forgiveness. Norton argues that Prospero's twelve years on the island have taught him humility, which Reformation theology preaches as necessary for redemption. Norton seeks to answer whether a Reformed Protestant audience

would have interpreted Prospero's spiritual standing, for he might appear damnable because of his dark arts. But Norton argues that Prospero's magic does not hold the danger, but rather his "selfish ambition and greed" even in his time in Milan when he neglected his political responsibility for mystical power (396). Prospero brings his captives into a place of humility in order to cure them of their own selfishness because Prospero had to learn humiliation himself. This humiliation offers Prospero growth, and therefore allows him to lead others to a place of "redemptive humiliation" (399). Likening the story to the Joseph narrative, Prospero allows his captives to experience the humiliation he himself has experienced, leading toward their redemption. In this reading, Prospero is merely continuing the growth that has taken place over twelve years. Prospero's intention, for the entire play, is therefore curative. But Norton's reading simplifies the play, assuming intentions of Prospero which the text does not support. While Reformation theology requires humiliation, Prospero's account of his humiliation to Miranda in the opening of the play does suggest he intends to humiliate in order to heal. Rather, it merely emphasizes the injustices done against him, and offers no hint of his desire to forgive. He puts Miranda to sleep while he gives orders to Ariel at how to work out his plot, his motives at this point hidden from the audience and even more so from his daughter. Norton's reading offers us a resolved Prospero, redeemed and set on helping work for

others' redemption. In his reading, Prospero's struggle is over when we meet him, and he calmly and intently plots and prepares the humiliation of his prisoners for their benefit.

Winifred Schleiner offers a variation of Norton's reading: Prospero pretends to harm in order to cure. She claims that it is "evident that vengeance and the mere exertion of magic power are notions too limited to characterize Prospero's purpose: his large design is felt to be moral and curative" (54). Prospero is a master of his art, and his art could not be merely degraded to a desire for revenge. She finds Prospero similar to another form of mastery in the Renaissance medical understanding, a Renaissance therapist, which she defines as: "Someone working on a subject's imagination with all possible means, including shrewd pretenses and subtle ruses" (54). Through "make-believe," Prospero intends to help his enemies by first causing them to encounter their guilt, a necessary step in conversation in Reformation theology (55). Prospero does this by creating scenarios where his ship-wrecked guests must face their wrongs. Alonso is the premier example: he finds himself guilty for the loss of his son. Yet through Alonso, Schleiner complicates her argument. Until this point, her version of Prospero has appeared nearly faultless. But he, even in what she considers a noble attempt to cure, flirts with the possibility of crossing ethical lines. Schleiner acknowledges the danger in Prospero's plot: he must be

untruthful to achieve his curative plan. Prospero's choice of imagination and make-believe means he is "working in a morally ambiguous realm, sometimes on the verge of playing God" (55). I agree with Schleiner that Prospero is entering dangerous territory in his actions, but I take issue with the how she does not complicate Prospero's motives as he enters that territory. Her argument that the desire for vengeance would be "too limited" for Prospero is itself limiting his character. The text in its elusiveness alone concerning Prospero's motives is enough to make the audience question whether or not he plots revenge; but in one of the most powerful scenes of the play, Ariel prompts Prospero to forgive. In Act 5 Scene 1, Ariel gives a report to Prospero, telling him that Alonso, Antonio, and Sebastian are caught "distracted" in his spell, the other crew members are "mourning" because they believe the others to be lost, and that while many are mourning, there is one who weeps more than the rest:

...but chiefly

Him that you termed, sir, the good old Lord Gonzalo.
His tears run down his beard like winter's drops
From eaves of reeds. Your charm so strongly works 'em
That, if you now beheld them, your affections
Would become tender.

PROSPERO: Dost thou think so, spirit?

ARIEL: Mine would, sir, were I human.

PROSPERO: And mine shall.
Hast thou, which art but air, a touch, a feeling
Of their afflictions, and shall not myself

(One of their kind, that relish all as sharply,
Passions as they) be kindlier moved than thou art?
Thou 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. Go, release them, Ariel.
My charms I'll break; their senses I'll restore;
And they shall be themselves. (5.1.14-32)

In Schleiner's reading, "Ariel's account and indirect appeal for mercy induce Prospero to make explicit his purpose, which is not his vengeance, but their [his prisoners'] conversion" (56). This means that the forgiveness *The Tempest* so famously portrays has already taken place before the play even begins: Prospero would have already decided to forgive his enemies, and he is merely biding his time to show his forgiveness ceremonially and publicly in the final act. This makes Prospero a static character whose moral growth has already been accomplished sometime in the twelve years on the island before we meet him. The Prospero we see does not change; he merely pretends. Schleiner's reading undermines the power of Prospero's journey to forgiveness, and denies the choice Prospero himself describes: "virtue" or "vengeance." If vengeance has not been a possibility, and Prospero has merely been pretending, why would he set these two options before us?

Sarah Beckwith notes that, throughout the play, Prospero does not ask questions. He gives orders or gives reminders, but he does not characteristically

ask questions that require an answer. Yet in this scene, “Ariel’s description elicits one of Prospero’s first genuine questions.” Ariel arouses uncertainty in Prospero, enough for him to ask for a second affirmation of what Ariel has said: if Prospero would see his prisoners, he would pity them. Prospero asks, “Dost thou think so, spirit?” Beckwith says that within this question, “Prospero wonders about an appropriate response of tender affections. He is, for the first time, curious and attentive to the workings of another mind...Ariel tutors Prospero in how to be human, how to be kind” (149). In Schleiner’s reading, Prospero already knows this kindness. This exchange with Ariel, to her, is not about Prospero’s needing to be cured, to learn compassion, but rather about “making explicit” his plan to cure others. Beckwith, on the other hand, allows for a Prospero who struggles, who recognizes his own failure, and who chooses to attempt to be different than he has been. This Prospero, I believe, is true to Shakespeare’s text, and offers a greater depth to the play. In this, Prospero is journeying towards habilitation, towards a deeper humanity.

Schleiner finds no fault with the Prospero of the first four acts, believing his consistent desire to cure is evident and honorable. However, while Schleiner does not question Prospero’s motives, the epilogue forces her to question his methods. In her reading of the epilogue, she realizes that Prospero is in fact asking for forgiveness, and she therefore must find something at fault within his

scheme. She determines that, in Prospero's attempt to cure, he taken moral risks in contriving his therapy. She recognizes the appeal for the audience to release Prospero as a possible recognition that he does need forgiveness for the risk he has taken: he has gone too far in his power. He frames this admission by asking for applause, using a theatrical convention, but with an underlying message: "But as is the case so often in Shakespeare, an old convention is filled with new meaning: the request for applause and the act of applauding become actions recalling, paralleling, and possibly even referring to Prospero's relationship with other characters in the play and to the playwright's relationship with his spectators" (59). She sees that Prospero is asking for more than permission to leave. He is asking for pardon, for he knows he has exceeded the degree of power he should have. Schleiner, like Norton, finds tones of Reformation theology in the play: recognition of guilt is necessary for salvation. Yet her interpretation of Prospero throughout the play implies that Prospero is already redeemed, elect, and secure in his forgiveness of the wrongdoers, until the epilogue, where she must complicate her reading. She acknowledges that he goes too far in his plot, and therefore needs to ask forgiveness for himself; yet this is a possibility, and not definite. If Prospero errs, according to Schleiner's reading, he errs in trying to do good. He simply goes too far.

Tom Edmondson also reads Prospero as exceeding the bounds of authority. While Schleiner and Norton identify Protestant theology in Prospero's story, Edmondson reads Prospero's situation as parallel to that of contemporary Catholic priests. Prospero is "a liminal or threshold figure standing between the realm of the natural world and that of the supernatural" (252). This, Edmondson claims, connects Prospero to Roman Catholic priests who, at the time Shakespeare wrote *The Tempest*, were in a state of exile traced, "to some extent, to two crucial issues—temporal power/political influence, and supernatural power/magic" (253). Prospero, too, held political power, and simultaneously sought supernatural power, causing his exile. Edmondson finds the connections between Prospero and Catholic priests so strong that he claims that their journeys are "analogous" (254). *The Tempest* is therefore about the recognition of the misuse of power, and thus learning to navigate the world once one has recognized his failure to use his power responsibly. Prospero can only be redeemed if he surrenders his power that comes through magic—which gives him absolute authority over every other being in his world—and seeks to live communally: "A transition on par with conversion will have to take place in Prospero. He will have to understand that the confession and pardon that he has sought for his enemies also applies to him" (262). After the Reformation, Catholic priests were considered in Protestant England to hold power that did not belong

to them. Only God could offer absolution of sin, without need for a human mediator. If Catholic priests were to remain in Shakespeare's England, they, like Prospero, must learn to navigate a new understanding of their role in the church. Stripped of their political power, they had no choice but to adapt to the effects of Protestantism, serving quietly their community rather than presiding over it. They would be removed from powerful authority and instead become a suffering Christian brother.

Interestingly, Edmondson acknowledges in his consideration of confessional community that the Protestant practice of confession, according to Luther in the 1520 treatise *The Babylon Captivity of the Church*, states that Protestants should not surrender the practice of confession. They should confess sin to each other, as a Christian family, rather than to a priestly authority as the only possible confessor (263). It is within this structure of penitential communities that Catholic priests would learn to surrender their power and better serve their brothers and sisters. Likewise, it is within a new structure, without magic and total authority, that Prospero will return to Milan, having learned the importance of compassion only learned in community. In the epilogue, Prospero, after having just offered forgiveness to his wrongdoers, must now ask forgiveness of another community: his audience.

In this audience, Shakespeare is not speaking to either Catholic or Protestant members, but rather to a penitential community at large. He speaks to people wrestling with the tension residing in the midst of two theologies. Conversely, David Beauregard believes that the epilogue is a weighty moment where Shakespeare indeed speaks to the tension between Protestant and Catholic understandings of forgiveness, but Beauregard finds Shakespeare sympathetic to Catholic audience members. He argues that Shakespeare's Catholic considerations grounded in the actual text of the play. Writing in 1997, Beauregard states that "the full meaning of the epilogue [of *The Tempest*] has never been fully explored" (161). It is in the epilogue that Beauregard finds four specific Roman Catholic doctrines: 1. Uncertainty of salvation; 2) Efficacy of intercessory prayers; 3) Doctrine of justification and the remission of sin; 4) Indulgences. Beauregard claims that these lines could not help but be noticed by the playgoers as suggestive: "Before a theologically sophisticated audience, a non-religious sense of the lines, it seems clear, cannot have been intended as the only meaning...Quite obviously, the double meaning of the lines implies a dual audience, Reformed Protestant and Roman Catholic" (171). While Beauregard recognizes that the audience would have mostly likely held Catholic sympathizers along with Protestants, he affirms that the allusions to Catholicism

show that Shakespeare was a Catholic, or at least empathized strongly with Catholics.

It is Beauregard's fourth point that aids in my argument: the concept of indulgences. This word is directly linked to forgiveness, not concerning whether or not we need forgiveness, but with *how* it comes to us. The beauty of *The Tempest* is its investigation of the meaning of forgiveness; and that is quite the undertaking, considering that Shakespeare wrote Prospero in a time when the understanding of the very nature of forgiveness was in flux. Rather than expect him to embrace one form of theology, Gillian Woods aligns herself with critics who see the "'hybridity' of early modern religious culture," affirming that with Shakespeare's plays, "the drama is found not to advance a denominational message, but rather to engage with the contradictions of the historical situation" (704). Woods, like Beauregard, turns her focus to the word "indulgence" in the epilogue, but rather than interpret it as promoting Catholicism, she sees it as a source of religious tension, claiming that the word "exposed a fault-line between Catholic and Protestant theologies of forgiveness and their alternative accounts of human agency" (705). Indeed, Luther's Ninety-Five Theses, traditionally viewed as the spark that lit the flame of the Protestant Reformation, focus largely on the sale of indulgences, as well as concepts surrounding them. Scott Hendrix writes that Luther's Theses challenged the power of the pope to extend

indulgences to affecting souls in purgatory, which therefore raised the issue of papal jurisdiction and opened a conflict concerning the authority of the church. But Hendrix says that, at their core, “the debate over indulgences themselves bore on the meaning of God’s righteousness and how it effected human salvation” (43). This debate would cause Protestants to abhor the practice of indulgences, and would lead the Catholic Church to reevaluate affirm the place of indulgences within the church. Almost thirty years after Luther’s Theses, the twenty-fifth session of the Council of Trent, on December 3-4, 1563, decreed that while indulgences could not be abused, any person denying their power would be declared “anathema” (O’Malley 244, 281). And thirty years after this, the word “indulgence” still carried significant weight on the English stage. The accounts Woods speaks of resulted from a controversy over how the human soul could find salvation. But Shakespeare did not seek to answer that question theologically; what he does with the word “indulgence” is ask us to consider what forgiveness looks like, and how we can give and receive it.

Woods’ reading relies on the space between the “accounts” of Protestantism and Catholicism, on the fact that Shakespeare writes intentionally to an audience that would have recognized the tensions he appears to embrace. Because of this, she considers Shakespeare to have a “playfulness” in his work. This does not mean that Shakespeare takes the religious tension lightly, but

rather that he used it to create a deeper exploration of forgiveness by acknowledging the complexity of the arguments surrounding it. He is allowing Prospero to rest within these tensions and share them with the audience. Indeed, Prospero, at the end of the play, does not offer us clear solutions, but rather questions and a hope that we will, like he has done, seek the meaning of forgiveness in spite of theological uncertainty.

The uncertainty in the play begins, Woods argues, from the beginning: we're not sure if Prospero intends to bring vengeance or conversion on his prisoners. This forces the audience to immediately encounter questions of ethics and morality: "What is the meaning of Prospero's shows? Does theatrical allusion have a real effect? Can it produce any moral change? *Is it moral to attempt such transformation?*" By not answering these questions, and by hiding Prospero's motives from us, we are forced as Shakespeare's audience into unanswered questions. But, Woods believes, "Uncertainty is central to the play's impact" (707). The uncertainty continues into the play's ending, when Prospero faces his prisoners. In a foundational, yet often contested, reading of the play, Herbert R. Coursen reads this scene as Christ-like; Woods questions this reading, for Prospero is cunning and partially grudging. While this causes her to deny allegory, it does not negate Prospero's journey. Rather, it affirms it, for it investigates forgiveness, "in all its human imperfection," meaning Prospero must

struggle, grow, and learn (709). Prospero is engaging in realistic human difficulties: he is exploring how to forgive someone who is not willing to repent, and also how to forgive those whom he has led to repentance through his cunning rather than through their choice.

I believe that Prospero is aware that he needs forgiveness in the epilogue because of this act of manipulation, of taking on too much authority, of evading the truth. If he has been a Christ-figure, only wounding to forgive, then what need does he have for forgiveness? Woods, like Schleiner, acknowledges the conventionality of Prospero's epilogue, but pursues how Shakespeare uses the convention for the unconventional: to pass power on to the audience. Prospero's final words cause us to wrestle with the final scene, to question his generosity, his hospitality, and the validity of his forgiveness. We wonder if Antonio can really be forgiven when he does not deserve it. And now we determine whether Prospero deserves and will receive the forgiveness he himself requests. Woods writes, "Prospero moves the onstage action of forgiveness offstage, turning the audience into Prosperos and Antonios who should grant pardon because they are in need of it...Now granted to forgive, the audience takes on Prospero's role; but like him, they too will require pardon from a higher power" (710-11). And what will that forgiveness look like? Does releasing Prospero by our "good hands" mean people can play a part in another's person's penance? Is

forgiveness a once-and-for all experience, completely separated from human agency? Or can people help each other reach satisfaction with God through journeying together, communally? Prospero's life, which he may in fact be hinting is coming near its end (his strength is "most faint"), culminates in these questions. He has, to some degree, learned to seek community and therefore forgiveness. And now he draws us in, asking us to become part of a penitential community, offering and receiving forgiveness:

Now my charms are all o'erthrown,
And what strength I have's mine own,
Which is most faint. Now, 'tis true
I must be here confined by you,
Or sent to Naples. Let me not,
Since I have my dukedom got
And pardoned the deceiver, dwell
In this bare island by your spell;
But release me from my bands
With the help of your good hands.
Gentle breath of yours my sails
Must fill, or else my project fails.
Which was to please. 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 indulgence set me free. (Epilogue 1-20)

The editors of the Arden Shakespeare edition of the play write: "The Epilogue is not required for a coherent reading or production because the play's action is complete. Shakespeare may have added it for special performances, perhaps at

court," yet they recognize that "the conventional request for applause also relates to the play's themes of reconciliation and forgiveness" (Vaughan and Vaughan 307, note). They find the epilogue unnecessary, but fitting to these themes. I find the play's concern with forgiveness unfinished without Prospero's appeal to his audience. Here is where we find the heart of the play: being human means needing forgiveness.

Peter Holland writes that Shakespeare had rarely written epilogues at this point in his career, and when he did so, the character delivering the closing speech was still "trapped in the plot." But with *The Tempest*, "reminders of the limits of the fictional world are impossible," for "Shakespeare has emphasized an identity between the stage and the world" (734). Rather than wrapping up his play in a character, he is extending its action into the audience through a man whose human need resonates with us. And in the authority he gives us, we are left to determine his forgiveness as we contemplate our own.

The whole play as a journey not just towards forgiveness, but through the difficulty of forgiveness. Who has the authority to give it? How do we act out the rituals of forgiveness in a world rid of sacrament? What Prospero is asking for is not theological answers, not sectarian divisions, but for compassion. As we would be forgiven, we should forgive. Yet Prospero has proven to us through his journey towards forgiveness that it is not easy, that it is neither required nor

possible outside of community. Prospero's greatest action—the forgiveness he shows at the end of the play—is a human need he learned to activate and offer through learning from others.

Before Ariel's lesson on compassion, Miranda shows us that she is adept in compassion. The first time we see Prospero, he comes on stage with Miranda, who is distraught over the storm. She instantly recognizes Prospero caused it, and she begs him to stop. She shows compassion for those in the tempest:

...O, I have suffered
With those that I saw suffer—a brave vessel
(Who had no doubt some noble creature in her)
Dashed all to pieces. O, the cry did knock
Against my very heart! Poor souls, they perished. (1.2.5-9)

Prospero admonishes her: “Tell your piteous heart / There's no harm done” (l. 12-13). He tells her that no one on the ship was killed as he recognizes her tears: “Wipe thou thine eyes, have comfort,” as he sees that the shipwreck “touched / The very virtue of compassion in thee” (l. 25-27). They sit together, and Prospero, for the first time, tells her their story of exile from Milan. Miranda, hearing of the struggle she doesn't remember, shows concern for her father: “O, my heart bleed / To think o'th' teen that I have turned you to, / Which is from my remembrance” (1.2.63-65). As Prospero continues on, telling of Antonio's betrayal, she says, “Alack, for pity. / I, not rememb'ring how I cried out then, / Will cry it o'er again. It is a hint / That wrings mine eyes to't” (1.2.133-36). From

the beginning of the play, Prospero experiences Miranda's compassion. She is an example of how a person can feel others' suffering, pain, and hardship. She feels this for her father, who admittedly has suffered. Yet he shows no emotion, no feeling of pain upon the remembrance of how they nearly lost their lives at sea. Instead, he shows anger at Antonio and determination in his scheme against his brother and the other courtiers. Yet we are unsure of what his plan actually is. Ariel comes, and we hear of how he has obeyed Prospero in separating the shipwrecked prisoners, and has brought them safely to the island, as Prospero required. Ariel then reminds Prospero that he promised to free Ariel from service after a year. Prospero responds in anger, telling Ariel to remember the suffering at the hands of Sycorax from which Prospero saved him. Ariel cowers, and Prospero tells him he will release him, if he continues to obey, in two days. Prospero, in his first scene, is a master-teller of suffering: he tells his own and Miranda's story to her, and he reminds Ariel of his imprisonment. Yet in his telling of vivid details of pain, he shows anger, not compassion. We know that he wants the prisoners safe, but we are unsure what he will do with or to them. He keeps his plan hidden from us, from Miranda, and even from Ariel. He denies his need for community in his pursuit of control, and he denies emotion. This is because Prospero creates a production initially fueled by his intellect that must instead become anchored in human feeling. This is the driving argument of

Herbert R. Coursen, Jr.'s, close reading of the play in his article "Prospero and the Drama of the Soul." Coursen, twenty years before Schleiner considered Prospero as a therapist, focuses on Prospero's "manipulation" of those shipwrecked on his island, and but this manipulation "redeems the soul" (317). Shakespeare uses religious terms to make this possible. While in the comedies, Coursen says, Shakespeare uses religious terms expose folly and are used as metaphors for change. Yet in *The Tempest*, "religious terms are *symbolic* of change; manipulations have deepened from the rituals which awakened Biron, Beatrice and Benedick, and Orlando to the sacrament which moves Alonso" (317). Shakespeare is not concerned with only self-education in *The Tempest*; here he is focused on redemption of the self. While Coursen, as Wood correctly argues, offers a Christian allegorical reading of the play that results in a moralized interpretation and therefore loses some of its complexity, Coursen does offer a strong interpretation of Prospero's weaknesses: Prospero desires control, not just of his prisoners, but of his own emotions in their captivity to his intellect. While Prospero's inner struggle for control may be more hidden, his outward control over religiously symbolic acts would have been unsettling to Shakespeare's contemporary audience.

Throughout the play, there are images of the sacraments, allusions to acts of redemption, most notably the banquet which Prospero spreads before his

prisoners. Yet for Prospero, sacraments are something he can control, and he denies his prisoners the rite to eat from his table; instead, Ariel reminds them of their sin (3.3.51). Prospero, as Edmondson states, “excommunicates” those who are not worthy to take part in the banquet, as if he is “presider over the Eucharist” (261). Edmondson also reads the opening storm to appear like baptism, Prospero’s teaching of Miranda in Act 1 is like catechism, he controls the courtship of Miranda and Ferdinand as if he holds the sacramental authority over marriage. These images of the sacramental and/or sacred prove one thing: Prospero’s desire for power: “In his movement toward absolute authority over everyone in his life, Prospero has abandoned compassion, humility, and kindness...” (262). Prospero still seeks, in his authority, to bring his prisoners to repentance. Yet he indeed seems unkind in his attempt. While he is justifiably angry with Caliban for attempting to rape Miranda, he is also unjustifiably angry and harsh with Ariel and with Ferdinand. Coursen believes this is because Prospero’s production and his plan to transform his prisoners resides in his head and not in his heart: “His emotions have yet to coincide with his intellectual conception” (322). Prospero thinks, reasons, understands on a high level of intellect. His learning has vastly increased in his twelve years of exile, simultaneously increasing his authority; yet this authority to manipulate is meaningless as long as his intellect drives him. His desire to reside in the power

of his mind originally came from feeling: Prospero, as he tells Miranda at the opening of the play, experienced fear, suffering, and despair. Yet he has distanced himself from the bodily, emotional trauma and encapsulated his power in reason, creating a retributive formula: I suffered, and I will bring you to repent for causing my suffering by making you suffer as I did. This desire drives Prospero; his intellect is his sanctuary, and he allows no other inside, keeping the full vision of his plan hidden. Yet when he experiences compassion, when his fortress is broken by Ariel, he cannot help but share his thoughts, his intentions. And this leads him to change them; Ariel serves Prospero in no better way than in teaching him forgiveness.

Yet even though Prospero begins to walk in forgiveness, he still wrestles within its complexity. I have alluded throughout this chapter to Prospero's lack of community, and his lack of truth-telling, even at the end of the play. He tells us he will "break his staff," signifying a deep turn in his being. Yet he does not rid himself of his magic until after he confronts his prisoners. According to Sarah Beckwith, Prospero's magic allows him to "overcome or supersede the damages and dangers of the past without acknowledgment" (165). Prospero has gained authority and control, allowing him "to imagine that he can be acknowledged on his terms alone. Since acknowledgment must be mutual, this is no acknowledgment at all. He imagines recovering his kingdom with an accusation

only." He expects to be restored to his kingdom, and for his prisoners to show remorse, "But he bypasses the necessity for expression in this endeavor; he bypasses any mutuality of response in his dealing with others" (165). The promise he makes to give up his magic is significant: it means he must make himself the equal of his betrayers, that he must be vulnerable. This, Beckwith argues, is how the play truly is "about the task and difficulty of 'becoming human'" (165). This is not an easy task for Prospero, as we see in the final scene. He speaks to each of the men: Gonzalo, Alonso, Antonio, Sebastian, and he speaks forgiveness to them. Yet they are still under his spell, and they cannot respond. He then tells Ariel to bring his "hat and rapier," clothing himself as the Duke of Milan. His prisoners will see him as he was when they betrayed him, not as who he has become. They will see him in authority, his staff not yet broken. The men will see him in awe, but without the possibility of compassion:

It is as if he can reveal himself in his vulnerability as the one wronged only when they cannot see him, when they cannot therefore acknowledge him as the one they have wronged...And perhaps this is part of the point of this temporal delay. The response will not be simultaneous. This is crucial. Prospero has always tried to protect himself from the responses of others. He wants to see them but not be seen. In this way he withholds himself from any just response. His is a flight from the particularity of relationship, and the doubleness, the essential mutuality of acknowledgment. (169-170).

Beckwith's argument is that Prospero and his prisoners cannot acknowledge each other at the same time. Because of this, she finds the end of the play surprisingly disappointing.

Indeed, if the play were to end here, we would be left wondering if Prospero truly understands and can share in forgiveness. But Shakespeare, uncharacteristically, gives us an epilogue, and one unlike any other he wrote. Prospero, for the first time, speaks without his "charms," and his strength, like all men's, is "faint." He comes before us and passes authority from himself to us, not the authority of magic, but of forgiveness. He recognizes that he has lacked, and that he cannot compensate for his lacking alone. As Beckwith writes, "The words of the actor pass over to the prayers of the audience and the mutual longing for a mercy necessary to all. Pardon comes not from a sovereign will but is granted from sinner to sinner in mutual acknowledgment, forgiving as we are forgiven. Only in this way, without enforcement, without enchantment, can art yield its good works" (172). Prospero becomes one of us. He needs his audience. He freely acknowledges us, and offers us the opportunity to acknowledge him in return. He enters into a penitential community, one of embodied prayer. He is physically bound until we release him. He now feels in his body, rather than abstractly in his mind, the fullness of his need for forgiveness. Beckwith writes: "The ethical reciprocity underwriting the plea for indulgence depends on a

recognition of likeness between self and other, the same recognition that Ariel's compassion prompted in Prospero" (711). She continues, recognizing the weight of what Shakespeare is doing: "It is unusual for a play not openly concerned with religion to allude to religious discord at a moment when dramatists sought communal support (no other extant epilogue that requests pardon draws out the term's sectarian associations by linking it with indulgence)" (711). Yet Shakespeare is not attempting to emphasize a religious sect, nor is he simply noting the religious tension between Catholicism and Protestantism. Beckwith ends her book with a conclusion much like Hunt's, that Shakespeare is teaching us to be tolerant: "The confessional flexibility inherent in the indulgence pun admits to the need for a more inclusive form of forgiveness, which accepts others and otherness... 'Indulgence' is the right word for such forgiveness because the ideological riskiness of the term seems to hint that there is something questionable and uncomfortable about extravagant mercy" (712). By using this term, Shakespeare offers his audience a challenge to navigate the tension, and to overcome it by recognizing a man standing before them, like them, in need of forgiveness. While we may not have solutions to theological intricacies, we are left with the surety that forgiveness is necessary, and we must both give and receive it.

Within the theological complexity of indulgences, even Martin Luther still found one use for them: he believed the only people who still needed them were criminals, people who were held in prison. Leo X's papal bull "*Exsurge Domine*" in 1520 also held this view:

21. Indulgences are necessary only for public crimes, and are properly conceded only to the harsh and impatient.
22. For six kinds of men indulgences are neither necessary nor useful; namely, for the dead and those about to die, the infirm, those legitimately hindered, and those who have not committed crimes, and those who have committed crimes, but not public ones, and those who devote themselves to better things. (Denzinger 241-42).

Criminals needed a different ritual of forgiveness than did those outside the prison walls. One inmate in the Shakespeare Behind Bars cast of *The Tempest* told an interviewer, "Those who deserve mercy the least need it the most." Historically, prison is "where the worst of us are held" (Tofteland, "Darkness"). The need for "indulgences" for crimes is nowhere as evident as behind bars.

Prospero's epilogue, when read through Shakespeare's religious hybridity and attempt to navigate how to forgive in a world wrought with religious tension, has multiple layers of meaning. Yet, through prison Shakespeare, one more layer is possible: when an audience encounters an actor who playing Prospero, and they remember that this actor is a convicted felon, one who has committed crimes, and who, through Prospero, asks for their pardon.

Hal Cobb: Acknowledging Darkness

In *Shakespeare Behind Bars*, Hal Cobb undergoes the most obvious physical transformation as the documentary spans nine months of readings, rehearsals, interviews, and finally, the performance. He starts off clean-shaven with decently long hair, but by performance, he has a pony-tail and a long goatee. His exterior looks like the stereotypical Prospero of the Shakespeare stage. According to Cobb, he *is* like Prospero on a deep, interior level.

Only minutes into the documentary, Cobb says: "I was drawn to Prospero, not because he's the title character or anything, but because he, he is the one who has to work through the forgiveness." Later, Cobb, in tears and struggling for words, tells his crime, and tells what circumstances affected his crime. Cobb has people he must forgive for the wrongs done to him; and he has people he has wronged and whose forgiveness he desperately desires. Prospero's words resonated with him from the beginning; Prospero's words frame the entire documentary. The film opens with Sammie Byron reciting "Our revels now are ended," and nears its conclusion, like the play itself, with Hal Cobb stating before his audience, "As you from crimes would pardoned be / Let your indulgence set me free."

Cobb's journey with the character of Prospero is one that did not end with the documentary. He performed the role in 2003, and parts of his performance

were viewed for the first time outside prison walls through the documentary in 2007. But in 2012, Cobb co-authored an article with Tofteland published in *Shakespeare Survey* titled, "Prospero Behind Bars."² In it, Cobb writes of his continual encounters with Prospero, and anticipates that he will never be "done" with the character who has offered him much in the way of rehabilitation.

Cobb states that while the documentary was a blessing in one way (it helps alter the stereotypes of inmates), it has also been difficult: "seeing yourself stuck in time, stuck in self-pitying sadness, myopically focused on forgiveness (to the detriment of not exploring Prospero's drive for revenge), seeing one's unexamined character flaws glaringly exposed while publicly declaring one's darkest deeds is unsettling" (432). Cobb revisits his desire to play Prospero: "Forgiveness, more specifically my desire to be forgiven, weighed heavily on me" (434). And Cobb's story shows why. Raised in a fundamentalist evangelical Kentucky family and church, Cobb believed at a young age the only way to be good enough was to answer a call to Christian ministry. Yet he simultaneously recognized himself, privately, as a homosexual. But he loved and married a

² Cobb actually write the majority of the article, and the particular piece he contributes has earned multiple awards. I find it significant that, in the article, Tofteland is listed first, and Cobb second. Tofteland writes four pages; Cobb writes thirteen. Perhaps this proves that, even when the Shakespeare studies world is willing to engage with individuals' experience with prison Shakespeare, we still might consider the prisoners as secondary. Perhaps we, in a subconscious way, still hold their voices on the margins. My aim in this project is to help bring their voices to the forefront as unique authorities on Shakespeare's work.

woman named Lisa, and had a daughter with her. He struggled in their marriage, with his identity as a husband and father, with his standing with God (he believed he must be damned), and with his sexuality: he found himself engaging in sexual acts outside of his marriage due to his identity as a gay man. When his daughter was eight months old, Lisa was pregnant with their second child. They were both extremely overwhelmed due to the tension within their marriage, and Cobb, afraid for Lisa to bring another child into the world, afraid that he would destroy her life, killed her in a desperate attempt at, what his psychologically taut mind considered, a mercy kill. It was ruled an accident, and he lived with the secret for ten years. He eventually remarried, but divorced, and retreated to California, where he attended acting school. Yet one day, when he was working with *Carnival* at LA's Group Repertory Theater, he had a breakdown. His director instructed him in rehearsal to strike the ingénue: "The idea of striking a woman, purposefully perpetuating violence against a woman froze me. Bizarrely, I had never considered killing Lisa violent. I rationalized it as saving her from me, that God was rescuing her for eternity." His director also told him he needed to "darken" his tone, but he couldn't: "I resisted my darkness for fear of being swallowed whole. I didn't deal with my darkness, my shadow-self. I ignored it, pretended it wasn't there. I hoped it would go away. But the shadow of my past life was catching up to me" (435). When asked to strike a

woman, even in acting, he couldn't do it. He fled to Hawaii and there studied Reiki, a meditative form of stress and relaxation treatment. One day there, he came to a sudden realization that he could never find peace until he returned to Kentucky, confessed his crime, and bore the repercussions of his actions.

After hearing Cobb's journey into and out of his own "shadow-self," a heavy weight comes with the remembrance that he as Prospero spoke the words, "This thing of darkness I acknowledge mine" (5.5.275-76).

From the Head to the Body

Cobb is the only member of the SBB company to have formally studied acting. He finds this, in many ways, a difficulty he must overcome. He found himself, especially with Prospero, attempting to rely on training rather than on truth-telling. And that is core of SBB, according to Cobb: "Our greatest mantra is 'tell the truth'" (444). After the group has studied the play—at both a holistic and specific level—with great intention and intensity, the men begin putting the words with action: "Once vocal patterns break down, the next task is to bring the text out of our heads and into our bodies...Curt constantly asks the infuriating question, 'Where does that live in your body?...Don't layer on an emotion, find a connection.' 'Just let it drop in'" (436). This initially proved dumfounding for Cobb, who understood Prospero on an intellectual level, but not a real, living, truthful one. He couldn't seem to *feel* Prospero, no matter how much of himself

he devoted to playing the character. In the SBB documentary, Cobb and another actor experience conflict while working through a scene in rehearsal. In the interview following the rehearsal, Cobb says: "I'm frustrated as hell, partly because of what's going on in the group, and partly because of what Prospero is doing to me. I can only seem to access from here up [motions to chest]. Uh...uh... It's not that I'm unwilling to go deeper, don't want to go deeper, don't try to go deeper. It's forty-six years of a tight clamp here [motions to heart]...uh....and I don't know how to unclamp it."

But Prospero himself, in Cobb's later estimation in his article, experiences a similar struggle: "In Prospero's case, focusing on thinking keeps him from feeling. The study of magic and its practice gives a framework for his thinking" (441). Magic gives Prospero power, allows him to use his mind to control his island, and, he thinks, himself. This power residing in Prospero on an intellectual level, but not yet on an emotional level, make a fellow actor's assessment of Cobb after a rehearsal of *The Tempest* all the more telling. Red, playing Miranda, speaks in the documentary of his respect for Cobb, but says: "He's a controlled individual...it's all in his head."

Ariel helps Prospero move from his head to his heart. The spirit tutors Prospero in compassion, which can only be experienced through emotion. Once Prospero allows himself to feel, his decision becomes clear to us what he will do:

forgive. He tells the truth, completely and fully, when he chooses compassion; and he can only feel compassion if he allows himself access to emotion. Cobb's experience with playing Prospero affirms this:

The emotional connection, emotional memory is found in our bodies, not our heads. The problem with intellectualizing the text is the trap of formulating an idea, an emotional response or mood should be rather be than finding an organic connection...Connecting with real emotional memory buried in the body communicates the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. It is the nakedness of that truth that we find emotional development and healing. (442)

We return to SBB's mantra: "Tell the truth."

Prospero does not tell the entire truth in the play, not until the epilogue. Prospero finally stands exposed before his audience, doing the very thing he has schemed and plotted and worked for his prisoners to do the entire play: repent. He acknowledges, now that he has felt compassion, that he desperately needs it. He needs the audience to grant him indulgence—a word for some audience members sacred, for others terrifying, for all, explosive. He asks for them to enter into a sacramental experience with him, one where he is no longer the authority, but the receiver. As Prospero relinquishes his "charms," he also relinquishes his role as priest, as Edmondson suggests. Now he is a member of a community, on equal plane with those he stands before, all made equal because of the mutual need for forgiveness. His confession creates a space for the confession of others: "As you from crimes would pardoned be..." This by default requires those

hearing to ponder their own crimes, their own need for forgiveness. The rite of indulgence, of forgiveness, is no longer received from a higher human authority; now the audience and Prospero share a common need, a common language, and a common authority to grant the need for pardon. While the epilogue of *The Tempest* often gains attention because of the Catholic connotations of indulgence, I believe it deserves equally as much attention on what Shakespeare does with the idea of indulgence: he makes it a common prayer.

Common Prayer and Communal Forgiveness

Daniel Swift writes: “If you wish to understand Shakespeare, then Hampton Court Palace in the winter of 1603 is a good place to start: at the meeting of the great playwright and the revision of the most contested literary work of the age, the *Book of Common Prayer*” (4). Arguing in that there is no other single more influential early modern text, both for the early moderns and for those who study them, Swift holds that Shakespeare could not help but be greatly influenced by this text. Ramie Targoff believes the *Book of Common Prayer* shows the important symbiotic relationship between private and communal devotion. She uses Aristotle’s idea of “habit” in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, which creates a cause and effect between *ethike*, ethics, and *ethos*, habit. By doing something through action, the correct motivations will follow. Targoff reads Hamlet’s appeal to Gertrude—“assume a virtue if you have it not” (4.1.160)—as

indicating Shakespeare's affirmation of this "behaviorist philosophy" of Aristotle's. This view of acting habitually, Targoff argues, explains "how the religious establishment could simultaneously seem uninterested in private belief and yet demonstrate repeatedly its desire to subsume private devotion within the public liturgy of the church." What could appear as a meaningless routine every week "turns out to be a strategy to transform the worshipper's soul" (4), and the *Book of Common Prayer* was the means of achieving this individual and therefore communal transformation. Targoff says that common prayer "collapsed the distinctions between personal and liturgical worship by introducing a single paradigm for devotional language" (5). This means that the lines between individual worship and communal worship blurred, requiring the health of both to function as true religious community. Prospero's epilogue explores this concept, for he cannot be freed unless others offer him indulgence, but those same others must also receive it in order to grant it. In the dance of pardon, forgiveness, and satisfaction for sin, one partner has no more authority over the other. Both are needed to forgive and in need of forgiveness. Their shared need results in a shared language of penitence and requests for grace.

Greenblatt has argued that Shakespeare's theater took the religious rituals that were forbidden and reappropriated them for the stage, creating theater's own kind of secular power from different uses of sacred rituals. In the

Shakespeare Behind Bars program, a non-religiously affiliated organization, sacred language appears to be woven throughout the members' experiences with Shakespeare's text. Scott-Douglass captures some of this language:

"Shakespeare has changed my entire outlook on everything that is everything." Big G (20)

"I can see redemption in the distance." Richard (20)

"When we're doing a play, the script is like a bible to me." Demond Bush (38)

"Shakespeare is *my* church. Shakespeare *is* my church." Hal Cobb (20)

"And, really, everything in the way Curt has us work with Shakespeare just resounds with my own spiritual journey." Hal Cobb (21)

The SBB documentary includes other examples, one of the most striking:

What really speaks to me is the idea that that indulgence, what he calls indulgence, is actually one of the most remarkable things in the world, and that's to redeem someone, to set them free, to redeem them of what they've done. That to me is the single greatest thing I've desired since October of 1994, is to be *redeemed*. (Leonard)

In Indiana, Laura Bates, founder of Shakespeare in Shackles, writes her memoir of teaching Shakespeare in solitary confinement units, using the words of her most passionate student, Larry Newton, for her title: *Shakespeare Saved My Life*. Concerning the statements she recounts, and I think applicable to Newton's words, Scott-Douglass writes: "This is the discourse of conversion" (20). She interviewed Mark Wessel, the chaplain at Luther Lockett. While not affiliated

with SBB, Wessels offered insight as to why the members of SBB found

Shakespeare so vital to their spirituality:

Shakespeare approaches philosophical issues about how we live in society, how we order society, what a healthy relationship is, what boundaries we should maintain...These are issues that most of these guys didn't reflect on before they committed their crimes. Now that they're here, they're reflective, and many of them are repentant. Most of them wouldn't put their reflection and repentance into theological words, so I think that Shakespeare gives them a voice that perhaps they wouldn't have otherwise, a voice which I think definitely has a theological component to it. (21)

Many of the SBB inmates who participate in Shakespeare Behind Bars have also professed religious conversions. One such example is Demond Bush, who has completed a seminary degree and plans to enter Christian ministry when he receives parole. Bush credits Shakespeare as an integral part of his religious conversion: "I think God used Shakespeare as the number-one tool" (Scott-Douglass 47). Yet SBB is not a religiously affiliated group, and not every member professes religious faith. Yet they still experience a "theological component" to their experiences with Shakespeare. Herold argues that SBB gives inmates something similar to what religion does, which appears close to Greenblatt's theory that the theater reappropriated the rituals of the church. I disagree with Herold's estimation of SBB, for the rituals of prison theater are not merely being used in similar ways as religious ones; rather, I find these men's encounters with Shakespeare to appear similar to religious encounters because

both Shakespeare and they are intent on discovering the truth about forgiveness. SBB offers to inmates a “theological component” because of the embedded religious hybridity of the text. Shakespeare was not reclaiming the forsaken religious rituals of his day. Rather, he was pursuing what questions those rituals held for early modern life.

The questions within *The Tempest* are indeed questions that would have resounded deeply with Shakespeare’s audience. They were interested in religious answers in a time where religious authorities shifted the definitions of cornerstone ideas regarding salvation, forgiveness, and satisfaction for sin. Shakespeare does not offer us sectarian answers, does not fully affirm Protestant England, nor does he pine for the former days of Catholicism. Instead, he creates a space where a community can navigate these tensions in a realistic, temperate way. Through a shared experience and authority of forgiveness, people can find a common language and a common grace, both to be given and received.

The common language of the participants in Shakespeare Behind Bars is, I argue, their own form of common prayer, their own attempt to navigate individual and communal (re)habilitation. These men have created a penitential community, one where they have “confessed” their individual crimes, yet seek ways as a group to work through forgiveness. Shakespeare has given them a vocabulary they did not have before they entered prison, one that requires them

to explore their interior selves. Yet they cannot do this individually — these men do not encounter these truths on their own. Led by Tofteland, they have learned to explore a play both communally and individually. They write line-by-line “translations,” painstakingly working through each word and line and idea, putting Shakespeare’s writing into their own words. They read the play over and over again, then come together to discuss it. Long before they cast themselves, they explore the characters, learn the major monologues, act out the roles. They, like early modern English people, learn a text that everyone must say and know. They then grow into wanting to say it, needing to say it, for their individual development. This communal and individual exploration flourishes when involved with communal habitual formation.

Examples of this communal penitential language permeate numerous narratives about SBB. In many ways, Tofteland has led his cast, in their initial study of the meaning of Shakespeare’s words, in a kind of catechism, allowing Shakespeare’s language to sink into their minds and be followed by meaning, which is then followed by application in the lives of the inmates. In Chapter One I discussed Sammie Byron’s reaction to watching the Kentucky Shakespeare Festival cast perform *Othello* in Luther Lockett. Byron did not disengage in the performance, keeping his eyes locked on Othello and the horrible acts he commits, acts that resemble Byron’s own crime. Byron continued to engage in a

talk-back session after the performance, where Tofteland led a discussion of the play. Tofteland begins to mention some of the powerful lines in the play. Scott-Douglass recounts:

But Sammie has found another line that deserves mention. Sammie speaks, and unlike DeMond he doesn't raise his hand. 'I heard Othello say at the very end: 'But why should honor outlive honesty? Let it go.' 'He's blowing it up to heaven,' Curt responds. Othello is saying, 'It is too late.' But when is it ever too late? 'Never,' Sammie says, without missing a beat. 'It is *never* too late.' (53)

This kind of conversation is normal for Tofteland and the SBB members. He asks questions to which he has already explored the answers with the group, individually and communally. And they continue to answer his questions, to make the answers personal to their own lives. The documentary captures a similar scene. Cobb is playing Prospero in rehearsal, and he speaks some of his most powerful lines: "The rarer action is in virtue than in vengeance." He speaks them slowly, emotionally, meaningfully, intentionally. And he stops, pensive. Tofteland speaks into the silence:

"Wow, that's great. 'The rarer action...'" He pauses. We hear multiple voices speaking, quietly, but firmly, "Virtue," answering the implied question. Tofteland continues: "Human beings rarely, but sometimes, find virtue over vengeance. Titus Andronicus, right?" Multiple "Yeses" resound. "They always chose vengeance. Always chose vengeance. That's a powerful moment."

Tofteland uses a line from *The Tempest* to connect ideas between Shakespeare's works, ideas many of the men in this room have been encountering for five years. They started with revenge plays, and they now consider what can happen when a character chooses forgiveness. They connect this to their past Shakespeare experiences; they connect this to their past personal experiences. In the documentary, this scene comes immediately before Cobb tells his story, his own struggle to forgive and be forgiven, to find virtue, demonstrating the intensity of the personal meaning of such moments for these men.

Another example comes soon after. Just a few weeks from performance, the men experience stress and tension in rehearsal. After one actor struggles and shows frustration with himself, Tofteland speaks: "This is the work, Guys." He tells them they are too focused on the product and not on the process:

You have the lines in you. We've rehearsed them. Now the ball is in your court, for the noble attempt at this moment, in this rehearsal, to create the most truthful moment that you can. And if it isn't truthful, you move to the next moment and attempt it there. You can't change the past. The past is gone. That moment in time is gone. It's only this moment, and in this moment it creates the future. How are you going to live this moment in time, because that's what you have. The next moment may be gone. All right, let's go.

There are moments, as with Byron's *Othello*, where Tofteland directs, firmly and gently, to do a scene again. At other times, he asks them to move

forward. He continues, through repetition and focus on the language of Shakespeare, to help the men encounter truth, not only in Shakespeare's text, but how it affects their own lives. In catechism-like moments, they are introduced to ideas, they memorize them, they repeat them. But the next stage is the liturgy, where they continue to repeat and to explore, to remember and understand. They have internalized the words, accepted them on an intellectual level—much like Prospero had done. But, like Prospero, they must also take their understanding deeper.

This catechism begins with Tofteland's leadership, but transforms into liturgy, where all members have the ability to speak the truth they have discovered, and to speak it together. The beauty of liturgy is the shared language which creates meaning only possible in a penitential community.

Language and Liturgy

The Reformation was a tumultuous conflict fueled by argument over what it means to be forgiven and who has the power to participate in the authority of forgiveness. This meant not only a transformation in priestly authority, but also in language, the medium of that very authority. In my estimation, the strongest current treatment of Shakespeare's plays concerning the language of forgiveness and penitence in his late plays is Sarah Beckwith's *Shakespeare and the Grammar of Forgiveness*. She writes, "The transformation of the languages of penance and

repentance were at the very center of an unprecedented, astonishing revolution in the forms and conventions of speaking, hence of modes of human relating” (4). In the midst of a political, theological, sociological upheaval, at center of this transformation lies words. And those words carry power, and that power began to shift. Shakespeare wrote while the language of forgiveness was still shifting, and in his late romances specifically, Beckwith believes he “explore(s) the vulnerabilities, exposures, and commitments of forgiving and being forgiven in new forms of theater charged with finding the pathways and possibilities of forgiveness in the absence of auricular confession and priestly absolution” (2). He does this by presenting how humans relate to each other as a result of language, and therefore exploring how language grants authority, especially in giving and receiving forgiveness.

To share in the act of forgiveness relies upon the idea of acknowledgment. Beckwith shows how Stanley Cavell places the failure of acknowledgment at the heart of Shakespearean tragedy, and Beckwith recognizes a willingness to acknowledge oneself and to acknowledge others. She uses the term “post-tragic” to refer to Shakespeare’s plays normally categorized as the romances to make this distinction. In seeing oneself, in recognizing one’s failures, a person may have the opportunity to change; and change can only come in community, in relationship with others. *Macbeth*, *Othello*, *Lear* — they isolate themselves and

deepen their blindness to themselves and to those around them. Yet after Shakespeare explored the depths of the tragedy of men and women who isolate themselves in their own false identities, he began to explore the possibilities for redemption and healing for individuals and communities who are willing to seek the language of forgiveness. *Othello* must come before *The Tempest*.

The movement from tragedy to post-tragedy, from isolation to community, is the arc that Curt Tofteland chose for Shakespeare Behind Bars. The tragedies allowed the actors to consider how the inability or refusal to acknowledge oneself or others leads to destruction, a downward spiral many of the participants admit resulted in their incarceration. Many of them identify to some level with Macbeth and Othello, recognizing the characters' flaws as similar to their own. Yet rehabilitation is more than facing and understanding what a person did wrong; it must also explore how the individual could have acted differently, and how that same person will act in the future. Returning to Michael Balfour's *Theatre in Prison* is helpful here. He writes that the theory of rehabilitation relies on the connection between what an offender failed to do and what that person should have done. Balfour calls this failure to act a "deficit of social skills," meaning the offender lacked the capability of functioning in a socially legitimate way. This deficit implies that the offender's "social education" did not develop as it should have, requiring the need for the offender to learn

how to “adapt or re-adapt more successfully to society” (9). Because of this need to understand what a person should have done but failed to do, and how a person could have acted differently, role-play is a vital training method for incarcerated individuals. This allows theater to be a powerful medium for self-exploration, emphasizing that a person does have the ability to change his or her behavior, and allowing that person to explore through the “lives” of others how his or her own life could be different. Balfour’s statement is worth repeating: “The function of the aesthetic experience is therefore to re-engage with the decisions of a criminal act and highlight consequences of actions in order to encourage greater degrees of social responsibility and moral maturation” (9). This maturity is a process, one that Tofteland patiently worked through with the SBB members. Before realizing what one could have done differently, the individual must first face what he did wrongly. Understanding the crime—the motives, the circumstances, the pain of the victim—was the first stage, which I explored earlier in Sammie Byron’s encounter with Othello. But once tragedy, both Shakespearean and personal, was understood by the cast, redemptive action came next. Both tragic and redemptive action encountered by SBB members begins with Shakespeare’s script, with Shakespeare’s language. Then, these men bring it to life. They memorize the language, then they discuss the meaning, then they work out its complexities in lived, real experiences of the characters in

rehearsal. Like the Aristotelean idea of “habit,” which informed the *Book of Common Prayer*, the men speak the words, then the meaning and application of them follows.

Targoff, in her discussion of the *Book of Common Prayer*, distinguishes between true and false prayer, which “relies entirely upon two different affective states of the body.” She writes, “It is not only the soul and heart but also the body that experiences the effects of sincere devotion” (8). The words must move from internal understanding to outward action, from an intellectual grasp to a physical, deep experience. As Prospero discovers, forgiveness must move from the head to the heart, from a concept to compassion. The men in Shakespeare *Behind Bars* don’t just study Shakespeare’s words; they, through allowing Shakespeare to help form their habits, then *inhabit* his words. They embody the very prayers they have spoken.

CHAPTER FOUR

Conclusion

Aiming to “please”: What Prison Shakespeare Can Do for Shakespeare Studies

At the end of *The Tempest*, Prospero finally clearly tells us his intent: the purpose of his “project” was “to please.” And there is more to this than simply meeting the audience’s expectations of a good performance.

The first three definitions of the word “please” in the *Oxford English Dictionary* allow for multiple meanings in Prospero’s use of the word. The first definition from the *OED* is as an intransitive word: “With a person as object: to satisfy, be agreeable to.” Examples listed under this definition come from the Wycliffe Bible, the Psalter, and Murdoch Nisbet’s translation of the New Testament into Scots (translated from Wycliffe’s Bible). Each example shows a sacred text using the word in the sense of meeting a standard and fulfilling a requirement. There is a spiritual component in the idea of “pleasing” God; it is more than bringing God enjoyment—it is satisfying his standards of righteousness. The synonym “satisfy” is also found in the transitive definition of the word: “To be agreeable to; to gratify, satisfy, delight.” And it is the same in the third definition, the transitive reflexive: “To gratify or satisfy oneself; to do

as one likes, have one's own way." The first examples of this use are Thomas More's *Debellacyon Salem and Bizance*, Sidney's *The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia*, and Shakespeare's *As You Like It*. The first two definitions of the word include an action required from an individual towards someone else, and the examples are from medieval and sacred texts, often involving pleasing God. Yet when the word becomes reflexive in Renaissance texts. Perhaps this comes from the shift in identity within the Renaissance concerning self-awareness and personhood. Protestantism brought a wave of individual accountability, of private responsibility to God that perhaps blurred the lines between satisfying God and satisfying—assuring—oneself of having achieved *satis*.

The word "please" in Shakespeare's time held the meaning of meeting a standard outside of oneself, to achieve expectations set for an individual by someone other than that individual. But the world also holds expectations for oneself within the individual in its reflexive form. One can also be pleased by meeting one's own needs, standards, expectations. Prospero's use of "to please" is traditionally accepted as, "I set out to please you, my audience." We accept his gesture as the actor stepping outside of his role and using traditional early modern conventions in an epilogue: he is merely stating that he hopes his performance entertained his audience. However, considering what comes next, I believe there is a deeper meaning to his desire.

Prospero does not only need to please his audience; he needs to please, to satisfy, his own expectations. He makes this evident in how his desire to “please” is couched between two pleas for the audience’s help: “But release me from my bands / With the help of your good hands: / Gentle breath of yours my sails / Must fill, or else my project fails,” and then he tells us, for the first time, his purpose: “Which was to please.” He tells us he has desired to satisfy, on the level of acting, the audience’s desire for entertainment. But on the deeper level of Prospero’s desire, the character, not the actor, he also craves satisfaction for himself.

I have discussed how Prospero recognizes in the epilogue his failures in his journey towards forgiveness. He has overstepped boundaries, and even when he has allowed his body to feel what his reason understood, he still fears total exposure, total acknowledgment of himself from others. He knows he has not fully satisfied perfect mercy and forgiveness; and he knows that he himself still needs the very forgiveness he has struggled to offer. He aims to please, to both give and receive satisfaction, the result of forgiveness. He is speaking the language of penitence.

It is the penitence of Prospero’s prisoners that allows Ariel to prompt his master to feel compassion. Possibly the most powerful and memorable lines of the play come when Prospero allows his reason to follow Ariel’s compassion:

“...the rarer action is / In virtue than in vengeance”; yet the quote usually stops there, leaving out the next half of the line: “they being penitent, / The sole drift of my purpose doth extend / Not a frown further” (5.1.27-30). Here Prospero hints at his purpose: I have argued it could be that his purpose was to revenge, but now he will change and “frown” at his prisoners no more. Or, as others suggest, he intended to forgive all along, and merely took on the aspect of anger to force his prisoners into penitence. But either way, we are unsure as the audience of what his original purpose is, just as we have been throughout the play. But now, we know one thing: the penitence of the prisoners plays a part in Prospero’s willingness to end his “play” by choosing to forgive them.

Sharing a similar concern to that we are left with in the play, we must ask of prison Shakespeare: is controlled penitence true penitence? How does organized processing of wrongs affect validity of confession? For Curt Tofteland, he entered Luther Lockett Correctional Facility knowing what Shakespeare’s plays say and do with ideas about justice and mercy, revenge and forgiveness. If we should feel uneasy about Prospero’s control of those on the island, should we also be leery of SBB and programs like it?

I find a key difference between Prospero’s control and Tofteland’s influence: Prospero creates scenarios that force his prisoners into situations of which they are not even aware he is controlling. Tofteland offers an invitation for

individuals to gather around a text, to enter into a shared language, one which they can pursue further or leave if they so choose. Yet the inmates choose to stay with Shakespeare. They recognize that Tofteland is not doing anything to them. Shakespeare is. Tofteland invites them into a work which invites them into a space where they can explore, process, and discover. Shakespeare does not offer them definitive answers; rather, he allows them to answer the questions they did not know they needed to ask.

Shakespeare Behind Bars has been found understandably offensive to some. Scott-Douglass describes her experience watching the SBB documentary at its premiere at the Sundance Festival. The woman beside her, a fellow Shakespeare lover and someone openly interested in possibilities for prison reform, had waited since 8:30am to get a ticket to film. But after it was over, Scott-Douglass overheard the woman say to her friend: “I don’t care how sorry he is. I don’t care how good of an actor he is. I don’t care how much we both love Shakespeare. I don’t forgive someone who molests little girls” (123). This woman could not synthesize the crimes of the men performing on the screen before her with their sentiments about Shakespeare and forgiveness. No matter how beautiful Shakespeare’s art is—no matter how he may try in his *Winter’s Tale*, *Cymbeline*, or *Tempest*, as Beckwith claims, to raise the dead—performances of his plays by prison inmates cannot bring back to life the victims of these men. They

have killed, raped, abused, stolen, lied, manipulated—they have harmed society and have forever hurt altered the lives of real people in real pain. In this, these inmates have harmed themselves. No play can satisfy what they have done. No performance, however genuine or powerful, no tears, however sincere and continuous as Sammy Byron's, can bring true restorative justice to the families of the victims harmed by these prison actors. And these men know that. Nothing they can do can ever be *satis*—they cannot make enough. They feel the Protestant ethic of punishment, that no person can have merit enough before God for sin. Yet they also feel the desperate desire of sacramental restoration: they want penitence, some tangible way of making amends. They want to seek satisfaction, even as they know direct justice is impossible. They want healing and hope, for their victims and for their victims' families, for themselves and their own families. They live daily an existence that tells them they must "pay" for their crimes, yet knowing all the while they cannot do "enough." They seek a life in this tension, between the impossible and the desperate desire for satisfaction. They live much as Shakespeare's original playgoers might have: doubting their merit, yet longing to take part in some physical action that showed their attempt and desire for the "enough" they were told was outside of their own actions. They sought to satisfy the demands of God and their own needs for feeling part of the process of satisfaction for sin. They sought to please, as Prospero did.

In this project, I have also sought to “please.” I have sought to satisfy questions concerning why prison Shakespeare works in prison. But I also must ask the question the SBB actors ask themselves in each encounter with Shakespeare: what do I *do* with this? I believe there is much to be said in response to this question for the Shakespeare scholar.

We constantly remember that Shakespeare wrote for stage performance, not for publication.¹ We cannot separate the playwright from the “play” in his writing. We know the audience Shakespeare wrote for, and we know who experienced his work: London playgoers. We make conjectures and inquiries as to what these people were like, what they thought, how they received Shakespeare. We create an image, especially through new historicist readings, of the lives of these individuals. I have certainly done so in this project. Yet we do this, as I have done this, knowing that all I can offer is an image, a speculation, a possibility when it comes to Shakespeare’s life and the life of his original audience. We have limited accounts of how individual people actually received Shakespeare’s work. As much as we seek to recreate the context of early modern

¹ For a compelling argument that Shakespeare’s revisions throughout the quartos of *Hamlet* suggest his struggle between writing for the page and writing for the stage, see James Shapiro’s *A Year in the Life of William Shakespeare: 1599*, chapter fifteen: “Second Thoughts.” Significantly, Shapiro concludes that Shakespeare chose the stage as the higher priority; yet this is not surprising considering that the theater promised a more possible and lucrative revenue than did publication for playwrights. Still, Shapiro’s argument holds Shakespeare in high regards as a creative mastermind, both ahead of his time and still aware of the need to write for the audience of his time.

English playgoers, we can craft general understandings rather than individual stories of how Shakespeare affected people's lives.

Prison Shakespeare allows students to encounter living, breathing men and women with names and stories we can recreate through both printed text and through media, who consistently affirm that "Shakespeare saved my life." These individuals literally embody the assumptions we hold as true: that literature can create change, and that Shakespeare is worthy of our attention because the literature he gives us is among the greatest in Western civilization.

Applied Literature

In the last twenty years, the term "applied theater" has developed as what Philip Taylor coins an "umbrella term" for certain kinds of theater (93). These theatrical practices include museum theater, Boal's theater of the oppressed, therapy theater, theater crafted for developing nations—any theater seeking an immediate recognition of the possibility for social change. Prendergast and Saxton, as editors of *Applied Theatre: International Case Studies and Challenges for Practice*, recognize that theater has always allowed people to "talk back to power"; theater has been a catalyst for social change and political commentary since the classic Greek plays. For as long as we can see behind us in history, theater has been a way for people to tell their stories and to express the desire to change society (7). Prison theater is one of the key categories of applied theater,

which can be defined through its purpose as much as by its categories. Taylor states that applied theater is about “finding links and connections for all of us committed to the power of theatre in making a difference in the human lifespan whether they come from the arts or education departments, or community and vocational setting” (Taylor 93). Shakespeare Behind Bars may appear on the surface to be a program that identifies as applied theater; while this is true of many prison Shakespeare programs, SBB is actually applied *literature*. One key difference between applied and traditional theater is that in applied theater, the script can change. Traditional theater requires the interpretation of an already written script, but applied theater often involves improvisation, rewriting, and “finishing” a script techniques. For example, an applied theater workshop in a prison might involve participants being given a scenario in which they reach a decision point where they could commit a crime, but may pause before they “write” the rest of the scene so that they can process as a group what alternative decisions there are to that crime. This simple example is part of a much larger spectrum of applied theater in prisons, which has proven highly effective in rehabilitation. Yet this is not what Shakespeare Behind Bars accomplishes.

Actors in SBB work with first-folio editions of Shakespeare’s works. They never change the script. The text drives their characters and their works, and even when they disagree with their characters’ decisions, they play them out,

believing there is still value in revisiting selfish, violent, misled choices through Shakespeare's characters. These men hold the script in reverence, many of them having it memorized entirely throughout the rehearsal process. While they incorporate applied theater practices in certain rehearsal games, improvisation, etc., their interpretation and potential as actors is bounded by the script Shakespeare wrote. They are people of the word.

Applied literature is not currently a functioning term in literary studies. In language study, the term means having a student learning a particular language study primarily through reading that new language in literary works. But I propose a different meaning for the term. What if we as scholars and teachers of literature also studied the effect that literature has on individual and communal experiences, both and historically and contemporarily?

Applied literature could be possible in Shakespeare studies as an extension of new historicism. In my introduction I discussed Paul Coleman's review of Greenblatt's *Hamlet in Purgatory*. Coleman identifies Greenblatt's "empathy" with early modern experiences of grief as "a kind of literary and historical sentimentality which may or may not be the natural, final orientation of his new historicism" (174). This sentimentality might also be termed "relatability," but this term comes with its own negative connotations: for the Shakespeare scholar, relatability might result in criticism that presentizes, that

finds values from the past for the present. For the Shakespeare teacher, relatability might mean sacrificing too much class time showing the newest Shakespeare film rather than engaging in a disciplined, focused manner with Shakespeare's text. Yet I am leery of seeing the idea of relatability in a negative light alone; I believe it is a part of the process of blurring the lines between historical and contemporary contexts. In my introduction, I called this merging of contexts the "pinnacle" of new historicism. Here I propose use that pinnacle as a threshold to a new way of studying and teaching Shakespeare.

Herold's focus on anachronicity, of "folding the past and present into each other" (6), allows for history and contemporary experience enter a conversation, both enlightening each other. If we accept the new historicist principle that Shakespeare wrote within a convergence of multiple contexts, I believe we can simultaneously focus on how his context and our context collide.

This proposal of applied literature comes with concerns: 1) Validity for scholarship; 2) Practicality for teaching; 3) Sustainability. I will close by briefly addressing each of these.

The fundamental purpose of Shakespeare scholarship is to understand his texts in a new and better way. Every year, more panels on prison Shakespeare appear at academic conferences. Prison Shakespeare has recently acquired enough scholarly interest for Peter Holland, Scott Jackson, and Curt Tofteland to

work together to found the Shakespeare at Notre Dame department's Shakespeare in Prison Network. SPN's mission statement is: "The Shakespeare in Prisons Network serves as a global forum for the prison and community arts practitioner community; promotes the production and study of the plays of William Shakespeare within prison and alternative settings; and advocates on a local, national, and international level on behalf of organizations engaged in arts programming for and by incarcerated and nontraditional populations" (SPN). This organization has now hosted two Shakespeare in Prison conferences at Notre Dame, one in November of 2013, and another in January of 2016. The conference this year fulfilled SPN's mission statement to bring together Shakespeare scholars from around the world; some of the most respected Shakespeare scholars and directors from the US, the UK, Ireland, and Australia were present. A panel was held specifically for "The Academic Researcher and Shakespeare in Prison," focusing on where academic discourse can and will take prison Shakespeare. More work is coming; we are guaranteed to have more to read regarding prison Shakespeare.

I've been both a student and teacher who has experienced individual moments of applied literature in the classroom. I remember the day I learned that John Wilkes Booth played Brutus the year before he assassinated Abraham Lincoln, as well as the first day I told my own students the same fact. While

moments such as these are intriguing, there is a deeper, more sustainable form of pedagogy when we show our students how the historical and theological world of Shakespeare embedded in his texts not only affected his audience then, but is impacting the lives of individuals now. While no printed scholarship concerning prison Shakespeare and pedagogy exists to date, there are Shakespeare scholars who have been incorporating incarcerated individuals' encounters with Shakespeare into their university classrooms for decades. Long before a single scholar wrote about Shakespeare in prison, university English faculty were teaching inmates. Laura Bates, associate professor of English at Indiana State University and founder of Shakespeare in Shackles, not only teaches in prisons; she has taken her university students inside prison walls to encounter Shakespeare performed by her incarcerated Shakespeare students. This, however, is not an easy undertaking; university policy itself presents an immediate difficulty. Because of the vast potential complications and risks involved with taking college students into prisons, educators such as Lisa Cavanagh of Emory University has used technology to bring incarcerated Shakespeare students in Seattle, WA, into conversation with her traditional Shakespeare students in Atlanta, GA. Experiences like this have led her to found a teaching and research model called the World Shakespeare Project. This model uses the internet to engage "with international, often isolated, academic

communities" ("Global Shakespeare"). And Cavanagh's students have found great success in their study of Shakespeare in collaboration with incarcerated Shakespeare students around the world.

Yet this, too, might be considered a risk, and an intense and unprecedented commitment on behalf of the Shakespeare scholars. Some may find prison Shakespeare a compelling possibility for an elective Shakespeare course, but a danger to the quality of traditional Shakespeare classes whose purpose is to focus on the text and the literary criticism surrounding it. This is a fair concern, which is why I ultimately argue here that the most practical and beneficial use of prison Shakespeare for the literature professor is a supplementary focus on the applicability of Shakespeare's text.

At a basic level, applied literature could offer the Shakespeare classroom an opportunity to experience Shakespeare "in action" after studying historical, theological, and sociological contexts of his plays. After reading the history plays, students could encounter how Shakespeare has been performed in Rwanda in efforts to explore the cause and effects of Civil War. After discussing the psychological breakdown of Macbeth as a result of his bloody murder of Duncan, students could read about the encounters with the play in psychiatric wards in Britain, or read accounts of criminal psychiatrists who have analyzed through *Macbeth* the verisimilitude of Shakespeare's language compared to the

language of individuals convicted of murder. After reading *Othello*, students could read about its performance in Civil War soldier camps, or about how certain US companies are returning to focusing on *Othello* as an Arabic ex-Muslim rather than on his blackness alone. Each of these scenarios asks the students to continue to go deeper into the text, to focus on what can be done with Shakespeare's text, and how those texts are affecting society today.

"Global Shakespeare" is study all in its own. In London, Shakespeare's Globe, the theater reconstructed in 1997 in attempt to capture as closely as possible Shakespeare's original stage, has been touring Shakespeare's plays around the world since 2007, and has been bringing international Shakespeare companies to perform on the London stage. This mission is called, "Globe to Globe," and it crosses boundaries and blurs lines concerning, merging contexts and experiences of Shakespeare around the world through cross-cultural sharing of his works. This addresses my final concern—the sustainability of the method of applied literature regarding Shakespeare. Shakespeare's work thrives around the world: we will never run out of contexts which show the application of his work speaking to contemporary concerns. Prison Shakespeare programs are multiplying throughout the United States, and I believe their numbers will only accelerate in years to come. While I've focused on ideas surrounding Shakespeare religious studies in this project, I have only accessed one theme in

the cacophony of prisoners' voices about why they love Shakespeare: He speaks to racial conflict. He speaks to familial conflict. He explores falling in love, affairs, adultery, illegitimate children. He engages politics and oppressive societal structures. He shows us the danger of gang warfare and class conflict. The list goes on, because when people, inside or outside the prison bars, encounter Shakespeare, they meet him on a human level. Prisoners might help us look at ideas concerning forgiveness and reconciliation in a new light, but there are many other discussions they sustain which have nothing to do with their identity as a prisoner and everything to do with their identity as sons and daughters, mothers and fathers, brothers and sisters, with being human. My point is this: prison is a context to examine the application of Shakespeare's works in real people's lives. Yet within prisons, multiple other contexts of the human experience arise.

I conclude my argument with a return to a specific focus on what prison Shakespeare does for religious studies: when studying Shakespeare's plays that approach concepts of justice, satisfaction, forgiveness, and reconciliation, we cannot appreciate the power of the plays without considering the embedded religious questions, controversies, and tensions within them. When we do this, we also have the opportunity realize how those same considerations resonate with United States incarcerated Shakespeare students in a way unique way,

tracing how our prison system is a direct result of the Protestant Reformation in England. The retributive penal system of the United States expects that people can “pay” for their crimes, which leads women and men behind bars to crave a form of penance while navigating a system of meritlessness, much like members in the early modern Shakespearean audience might have done. This analogous relationship offers much to us as Shakespeare scholars: it gives us an opportunity to explore through a contemporary situation the historical religious situation of Shakespeare and his audience. It allows us to relate to complex ideas that may seem distant, but are experienced by individuals who are, although kept silent behind bars, closer to than we might remember. And it ultimately reminds us that Shakespeare is timeless: his exploration of the complexity of what it means to be human has made his work last. Yet he is also timely, both the “Soule of the Age!” of the early modern stage, as Ben Jonson said, as well as the heart of the journey towards rehabilitation for his friends behind bars. Jonson also wrote in the same epitaph in the First Folio that “He was not of an age, but for all time!” (Jonson 35).

“Shakespeare changed my life.” This is the statement many Shakespeare scholars would claim led them to pursue the study of the bard vocationally.

“Shakespeare saved my life.” This is the statement multiple men and women behind bars say leads them to work through their (re)habilitation. Shakespeare teaches

us how to live in a world full of tension, complexity, confusion. He teaches us how to inhabit the space that makes us human. He did so for lovers of his plays in his time; and he is just as timely today for lovers of his works, behind and outside prison bars.

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