

Religion and / as Language Proposals

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“With Profitable Labour to His Grave”: The Work of Protestant Language in *Henry V* **Katherine B. Attié, Towson University**

Arguing that the new historicist fixation on the spectacle of power/power as spectacle has made us underestimate the power of the everyday in Shakespearean drama, this paper calls needed attention to the playwright’s “quotidian aesthetic,” which extols the social dignity and quiet beauty of daily effort and which in turn implies Protestant values. Concentrating on *Henry V*, my reading demonstrates that the crucial contrast between “profitable labour” (4.1.265) and “idol [idle] ceremony” (4.1.228) invokes the ecclesiastical divide between fruitful Protestant faith and bankrupt Catholic idolatry. Moreover, in King Harry’s representation of himself and his army as humble, hardworking soldiers (“we are but warriors for the working day”), we find a specifically Calvinist emphasis on productive vocational labor as a sign of election. “Shakespeare’s hatred and contempt of the Puritans appear on every occasion,” avers Max Weber (*Protestant Ethic*, ed. Swedberg, p. 147n); most scholars, especially in the face of that killjoy Malvolio, have judged likewise that Puritanism was entirely anathema to Shakespeare’s art. To the contrary, I contend that Shakespeare – who surely knew the meaning of committing oneself to a calling – found something congenial to his art in Calvinist theology’s sublimation of routine, in its spiritualization of profitable labor. Turning finally to the poet’s own vocational labor, the essay concludes by suggesting that in privileging the enduring patterns of everyday life, Shakespeare privileged those formal, poetic patterns with which he himself worked on a daily basis.

The Grammar of Faith in *Twelfth Night*

John Baxter, Dalhousie University

Debora Shuger, following Wesley Trimpi (following Aristotle), speaks of “two kinds of knowability” in the Early Modern Period. She cites Richard Hooker’s characterization of the two kinds as “certainty of evidence,” involving proof and perception, and “certainty of adherence,” involving hope and faith “against all reason of believing.” In Hooker’s view “faith grasps its object by love, not evidence” and “emotion has a central role in the act of faith.” What is not yet fully clear is the role of action in such “acts of faith.” What is it that movers are moved to do via their certainty of adherence, and what sort of language do they use to account for or register such actions? How do Hooker’s versions of knowability work in accordance with his understanding of law, and especially what he calls human law: “any rule or canon whereby actions are framed”? I propose to explore such questions by tracking the way actions are framed in *Twelfth Night* and the way speakers negotiate a course between certainty of evidence (not always reliable) and certainty of adherence (not completely devoid of reason). This play presents special challenges because in it “adherence” and “evidence” offer both collaborating and competing ways of knowing and acting. To what extent and by what means is the language of faith tested, confirmed, or transposed by the speech acts of the play?

Hendiadys and Interpretation in Anne Lock's *Meditation*

Gabriel Bloomfield, Columbia University

Anne Lock's *Meditations of a Penitent Sinner* have not often been subjected to close rhetorical analysis. Critics have typically preferred to locate this psalm translation as a node in literary history: as a founding document of "Puritan poetics"; as the first sonnet sequence in English; and as the earliest English example of a verse-by-verse poetic gloss on a scriptural text. Concomitantly, Lock's verse is found to be "unoriginal, [...] stalling, indecisive, circular, [...] scrambled," a repetitive heap that would seem unlikely to yield interesting results if placed under the microscope of close reading. This paper seeks to undo some of these critical truisms by examining the figure of hendiadys in Lock's sonnets. Hendiadys, I argue, (the figure of "one-through-two"), figures the proliferation and "increase" of sin and horror in the Psalmist's text while simultaneously marking the moments of Lock's paraphrase where she strugglingly and self-consciously departs from the literal sense of the scripture she is adapting. I contextualize these hendiadic structures as examples of *expolitio*, the classical figure of simultaneous dilation and polishing. In these expolitory moments, Lock generates brief but striking exegeses of her source text, Psalm 51. My paper therefore suggests new perspectives on the sequence's relationship to the text it accompanies (Lock's translations of Calvin's sermons) and the semi-forgotten history of the trope of hendiadys.

Our Fangled World: Freedom and Prophetic Speech in *Cymbeline*

Claire Falck, Rowan University

My paper analyzes the prophetic tablet in *Cymbeline* as an instrument of the play's paradoxical strategy to enable free individual choice and communal restoration through rhetorical and temporal over-determination. Although *Cymbeline* is celebrated for its luxuriant excesses, perhaps no single object better encapsulates the play's generous redundancy than Posthumus's prophetic tablet. This gift, given to him in his sleep by his ghostly family at the "great behest" (5.3.186) of Jupiter, is ostentatiously unnecessary from the moment it appears. Couched in language so obscure that Posthumus despairs of deciphering it, he promptly forgets about it until the play's end. After the emotional enormity of the last scene's revelations and reconciliations, the Roman soothsayer's post-mortem construction of the tablet as prophesizing everything we just witnessed is distinctly anti-climactic. In an era acutely conscious of the spiritual potency and pitfalls of prophetic speech, such a prophecy may appear just one more ornamental flourish in what Posthumus describes as *Cymbeline's* "fangled world" (5.3.198). However, I propose that the prophetic tablet demonstrates how, in *Cymbeline*, it is the excesses, ambiguities and redundancies of language that create the space for the free actions of confession, revelation, and pardon that characterize the play's final movement. No one is constrained by the tablet's prophetic speech, but its presence as an legible sign of Jupiter's illegible providential plotting is what empowers the characters to enact their providence and peace, and bring "a speaking such / As sense cannot untie" into "sympathy" with the actions of life (5.3.210-214).

Twelfth Night: The Clown and the Prayer Book

Gayle Gaskill, St. Catherine University

In *Twelfth Night*, the Clown repeatedly and comically appropriates the manner of a parson by echoing the familiar 1559 Book of Common Prayer, the authorized Anglican liturgies of communal worship. Initially his gentle parody of the Confirmation office leads Olivia to leave mourning for her dead brother long enough to smile in her conviction—bolstered by the Burial Office--of his place in heaven. Further catechistical dialogues develop in Olivia's first love-struck conversation with Cesario and climax in the twins' dramatically piecemeal, seemingly miraculous revelation of their identities. Meanwhile, as he delivers Malvolio from imprisonment for insanity, the Clown attempts to minimize the practical joke with a comic reference to the order of service for the Lord's Supper: "But as a madman's epistles are no gospels, so it skills not much when they are delivered." When the Clown starts to play a Parson in a clerical gown, however, and visits Malvolio in his dark house with phrases from the prayer book's Order for the Visitation of the Sick, he quickly abandons the text for an improvisational exorcism and the prayer book's language of forgiveness and communal reconciliation recedes into the isolating taunts of reciprocal revenge.

Shakespeare's Language of Botched Repentance

Jonathan Goossen, Ambrose University

Shakespeare seems to have had *Hamlet* still in mind when, several years later, he was penning *Measure for Measure*. Angelo's anguished considerations of temptation and the results of succumbing to it strongly recall Claudius's equally haunted deliberation over his crime and the possibility of repenting it. In attempting to extricate themselves from sin (whether contemplated or committed), both characters employ the theological language of "guilt," "will," and "grace" to diagnose with striking verbal precision and moral clarity the nature of that sin. Yet despite their acute perceptions, neither character can bring himself to repent. In keeping with the theme of "seeming" crucial to both plays, Angelo and Claudius figure their problem as an inability to unite outward words with inward intentions in prayer: as Claudius concludes, "My words fly up, my thoughts remain below." The diction and scenarios of their soliloquys, then, invite consideration of Shakespeare's perennial interest in the relationship of action to intention from the perspective of a theology of repentance. This paper draws on recent critical studies of early modern confession, repentance, and forgiveness to identify what intervenes between Angelo's and Claudius's knowledge, intentions, and actions to botch their attempted repentance.

The Poetics of Asceticism: Word and Meaning as Body and Soul

Patrick McGrath, Southern Illinois University

This paper engages the seminar's theme—"Religion and/as Language"—by considering how a devotional mode (asceticism) had linguistic and literary consequence in early modern England. Asceticism is one attitude towards the relationship between the body and soul; it seeks to purge the soul of sinful carnality. After the Reformation, the traditional forms of ascetic life—monasticism, virginity, corporal mortification—were variously rejected, reformed, and reinvented. They were revised with this question in mind: Was asceticism primarily a spiritual or physical process? If the end of asceticism was spiritual, then shouldn't the means to achieve it be similarly spiritualist? Isn't that precisely what Roman Catholic asceticism got wrong? And yet, a purely spiritual emphasis ran up against the paradox of embodiment, of fallen bodies: the body was both the thing superseded and the means of supersession; pervasive, insidious carnality made the body an unavoidable ascetic partner. As a result, a tension emerged between spiritual and physical modes of asceticism in early modern England.

Enter literature.

How literature negotiates the relation between word and meaning, form and content, recapitulates the central problem of asceticism. What is, and what *should be*, the relationship between the body and the soul, and how to go about achieving it? The literary applicability of that relationship is based on an analogy—found in scriptural exegeses from Augustine to Erasmus and many early modern literary texts—equating words with the body and their meanings with the soul. Should signs (body) be disregarded for the signified (soul) they contain? Is a concentration of meaning/content achieved through—or in spite of—form? I explore these questions by examining the plain and metaphysical styles in the work of Andrew Marvell, John Milton, and Abiezer Coppe. How these styles treat their linguistic raw materials adumbrates a tension that defines asceticism in early modern England.

Rhetorical Fooling and Theological Parody in *Hamlet* 5.1

Lee Oser, College of the Holy Cross

My premise is that the author of *Hamlet* appreciated the power of Erasmus's debate with Luther over free will. Neither the historic magnitude of this debate, nor its connection to other influential writings (in More, for instance), has been sufficiently acknowledged by the play's legion of critics. Given how deeply the problem of free will enters into *Hamlet*'s dialogue and imagery, we may deduce that, for Shakespeare, the traditional moral purpose of drama itself was at stake in the Luther's rejection of free will. What moral impact, after all, could a play have on an audience whose souls were already spoken for?

And yet, despite his late-Reformation (*not* post-Reformation) consciousness of how the "bondage of the will" would nullify the moral aspirations of literature, Shakespeare refused to champion the Catholic Erasmus, the Protestant Luther, or their proxies. Highlighting Shakespeare's rhetorical art, I suggest that, through his clownish gravediggers, Shakespeare uses rhetorical vices—what we would today class broadly as "Malapropisms"—figures of speech that reveal a speaker's ignorant misapplication of a word, or, more interestingly, his or her punning and dexterous ambiguity, in order to avoid resolving crucial theological questions. I propose that Shakespeare subjects these religious cruxes to a high order of serious parody. In my view, the dizzying alternation of Protestant and Catholic ritual and sensibility, among the remains of Yorick and Ophelia, serves Shakespeare's moral argument for religious tolerance.

Redefining “Error”: The Admonition Controversy and Shakespeare’s *The Comedy of Errors*

Marsha S. Robinson, Kean University

The conflict over disciplinary reform which troubled the Church of England from the 1570s to the early 1590s was styled by establishment spokesman Archbishop John Whitgift, as a “persecution of the tongue.” Like all controversies it featured a constellation of recycled words which would have been familiar to readers, sermon-goers and a weary and alienated public. Chief among these words is the word “error.” This word not only repeatedly appears in the work of controversialists, but determines the very structure of their discourse. The reformers’ bitter accusations of doctrinal error are countered by conformist replies which exhaustively refute each error and launch scathing counter-charges. In 1593 both conformist theologian Richard Hooker in his *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity* and dramatist William Shakespeare in his *The Comedy of Errors* engage in this national debate. Both writers shift the conversation about “error.” Writing as an establishment polemicist, Hooker hopes to persuade the presbyterian reformers of “the error” of their platform for church polity; however, his analysis moves inward beyond “error” as a proposition which deviates from truth to an examination of error as subjectivity. Shakespeare too re-frames the controversy over “error.” Giving doctrinal error “a local habitation and a name” (evoked by the biblical Ephesus), he farcically reduces theological error to Plautus’ mistaken identities. And like Hooker he portrays error as endemic to the fallen condition of humankind.

“Shall’s have a play of this?” Heresy and Adultery in Shakespeare’s *Cymbeline*

Kilian Schindler, University of Fribourg

In this paper, I will examine the language in which Shakespeare addresses questions of heresy and religious conflict. Early modern writers on those subjects had a number of conventionalised metaphors for heresy at their disposal, such as disease, counterfeiting, or adultery. Despite such conventionalisation, however, the semantic imprecision of figurative language resulting from the discrepancy between tenor and vehicle provided individual writers with a considerable space of linguistic freedom to manipulate the inferences to be made from a given conventional comparison or metaphor. As I shall argue, such figurative language therefore permits, despite its mostly negative connotations, to change perspectives on heresy and to formulate a plea for toleration.

As I intend to demonstrate with a brief survey of the early modern use of the metaphor of adultery for heresy, writers in various genres did indeed employ it in order to back up a surprisingly wide range of theological agendas and positions on persecution and toleration. Also Shakespeare was not oblivious to this kind language usage in *Cymbeline*. By contextualising Shakespeare’s figurative language in the theological discourses of his time, I thus hope to show that *Cymbeline* is not without religious implications. On the contrary, the play can be seen to entail a forceful critique of religious persecution in its remarkably lenient treatment of adultery as well as its stress on forgiveness and the dangers of misrecognition.

Shakespeare and Private Prayer
Ceri Sullivan, Cardiff University

Literary critics may yawn at the mention of prayer: how could it ever be free to argue, sow doubt, be ironic, experiment with form, or be playful? But at the turn of the seventeenth century prayer collections celebrated it as a vital force, freeing social energies by its elevated energy and excitement, prophetic of what should be and could be. Whether best-sellers or one-off pieces, across doctrinal positions, regardless of the rank or vocation of their intended readers, these collections were uncharacteristically unanimous: for the first time ever, all lay people were expected to compose their own prayers, in their own language, about the urgent issues in their community. There is an explicitly dramatic aspect to private prayer, which is clarified when prayers are written for the stage. Research questions include:

- How did developing conceptual frameworks of prayer and creativity converge, especially over how preparation yielded to improvisation?
- What was the artistry needed in putting up a prayer for another person? Conversely, did striking situations in the prayer collections make it onto stage?
- What were the imaginative possibilities offered by focusing on ‘what ifs’? Reversing this, did staged prayer illuminate alternative plot-lines and options open to a character?
- Did advice on alternating acting and reviewing in prayer respond to the evolving technique of soliloquising? Can such advice suggest how a player might act this form? Or how a written form (prayer or player’s part) was spoken?
- What is the ‘hot dynamic’ between pray-ing actor and audience?

The Poetics of Faith: George Herbert and the Failures of Articulation
Amber True, Michigan State University

Christian theology makes a clear distinction between the religious phenomena of faith and belief, a distinction that appears in the earliest Christian writings and persists into the early modern period (and beyond). To draw a rather simplistic analogy, we can compare this distinction to the process of reasoning: faith is the premise(s) from which belief is drawn. Faith, as Debora Shuger notes in “The Philosophical Foundations of Sacred Rhetoric,” is trust. It is a state of being – a full acceptance of one’s relationship with God. Belief, on the other hand, is the set of conclusions and practices drawn from faith. As such, literary representations of belief are extremely common. But representations of faith are not nearly so common, mainly due to the inherent inarticulability of faith.

This paper explores the problem of representing faith as such in lyric poetry, with a focus on George Herbert’s poem “Faith.” Herbert’s poetry is steeped in representations of belief, particularly the material nature of belief. But “Faith” suggests a different kind of exploration, one which demonstrates the bounds of language to convey this religious phenomenon, the singular phenomenon at the root of the Christian experience. Herbert’s struggle to represent faith points to a deeper problem with his own role within the church and with organized Christianity, that if neither direct nor figurative language can convey faith, what capacity does theology or the Church have to do the same?

On “the Host”

Margaret Tudeau-Clayton, University of Neuchatel

This paper examines a neglected, though highly charged instance of what Sarah Beckwith describes as the ‘revolution’ in religious language that takes place in the English Reformation: the erasure of the word ‘Host’ from the sacred lexicon. The word is explicitly rejected as ‘papist’ in protestant attacks on ‘the Mass’ — another explicitly rejected word — and implicitly rejected in mocking citations of ‘papist’ practices. The most telling evidence, however, is the absence of the word from the language used of, and in the rite of ‘the Lord’s Supper’ (as ‘the Mass’ was renamed), in *The Book of Common Prayer*. Two reasons for this erasure emerge: first, ‘the Host’ is associated with the idea of sacrifice carried in the Latin *hostia* from which this sense of the word form derives (*OED* ‘host’ n. 4); second, its lexical particularity underscores the substantial ‘real’ difference of the consecrated bread. Within this context two very different texts, charged with this lexical event, are shown to acquire fresh significance: a scene of reconciliation in William Shakespeare’s comedy *The Merry Wives of Windsor* in which the figure of the Host of the Inn is associated with the trans-national integrative function carried by the spectacle of ‘the Host’, and George Herbert’s religious lyric ‘Love (III)’, which stages a scene of the Lord’s Supper in which ‘the Host’ is a present-absent sign of ‘the superstition’, as the 1552 version of *The Book of Common Prayer* puts it, which has been erased in the reformed rite. In both texts the evocation of this present-absence depends on the polyvalence of the English word form, notably the sense, derived from the Latin *hospes*, of one who houses another (*OED* ‘host’ n. 2). Interestingly – and perhaps significantly — the two senses are exploited by the Catholic William Reynolds in a mocking riposte (1593) to the denial of the substantial –‘real’- difference of the consecrated host in the published sermons of the Presbyterian Robert Bruce (1591).

The Political and Dramatic Possibilities of Religious Rhetoric in *Henry V*

Denis Yarow, University of Toronto

When the disguised Henry, speaking on his own behalf in Act 4, Scene 1, defends the king’s cause as “just” and his quarrel as “honourable,” his soldiers instantly deny the certitude of his claims: “That’s more than we know,” Williams declares, a statement qualified by Bates’ conciliatory “Ay, or more than we should seek after.” Henry refuses to engage the implications of Williams’ epistemological inflection of their debate on the ethics of war, absolving himself instead of any responsibility for his soldiers’ fates by arguing that each is answerable to God without royal mediation. In this paper, I take up Williams’ challenge in order to investigate the political and dramatic uses of religious rhetoric in the play. From its beginning, Henry V is infused with epistemological anxieties over the legitimacy of the war effort, the legacy of usurpation, and the limits of sovereign authority, with religious language mobilized in each instance as the primary mode of (self-) persuasion. However effective the rhetorical power of such language may be in the maintenance of social hierarchies (granting Henry legitimacy over his subjects), its inherent, universalizing doctrinal impulses unsettle any strictures, yielding a highly generative tension that propels the play’s action. My aim in this paper will be to trace the dynamics of that tension as encoded in the relationship between the play’s dramatic action and form and the rhetorical material of its text in an effort to develop strategies for conceiving of a religious rhetoric unique to the theatre of early modern England.