Reconciliation
in Selected Shakespearean Dramas
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Edited by

Beatrice Batson

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For all who helped behind the scenes
to make this book possible
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INTRODUCTION

BEATRICE BATSON

With one exception, these essays were originally presented as lectures and position papers at a Shakespeare Institute held at Wheaton College in June, 2005. At times some essays probably bear marks of their original presentations, containing characteristics of the spoken word. Nevertheless, all papers, though not completely rewritten, have been carefully edited in an attempt to bring readers the scholarly and readable papers that each author intended.

The general subject of the twelve papers is “Reconciliation in Selected Shakespearean Plays.” Contributors were requested only to choose a subject related to the main topic, to feel free to select a play or several plays with which they were comfortable and to define the term, “Reconciliation” as they believed Shakespeare depicted it in the plays which they selected for study.

In the first paper, Chris Hassel, Jr. reveals the prominence of the term, “reconciliation” in both public and religious discussion. He also holds that the term has been declared several times as both a thematic and narrative pattern in Shakespeare, particularly in the late romances but also in the early comedies and in King Lear. In Hassel’s judgment, reconciliation has a rich biblical and theological basis which calls for reconciliation to God and to one another. Also, for him, crucial to the understanding of the theology of Reconciliation are homilies which were to be read in churches during the reign of Queen Elizabeth.

Continuing to lay the foundation for the way Shakespeare’s plays embody reconciliation in various plays, Hassel spends thorough thinking on the religious words associated with reconciliation in Measure for Measure. He also expects readers to question the ways characters use the term and then to determine which need reconciliation.

Charles Forker sees reconciliation pervading all three categories into which the First Folio divides Shakespeare’s plays. In the chronicle plays, he believes the term is complex, for reconciliation in the histories touches individuals and nations and rulers and subjects; consequently, the state of the individual soul becomes inextricably intertwined with the soul of the
Therefore, in his essay, “The Soul of the State and the State of the Soul,” Forker’s intent is to re-examine the complementary reconciliation episodes of Shakespeare’s Second Historical Tetralogy and to argue that as he evolved as a dramatist of Chronicle history, Shakespeare increasingly mingled the moral and theological aspects of personal forgiveness with dynastic and political issues. His study leads him to raise a question, and he responds to his own question: whether or not a shift occurs in the dramatist’s treatment of reconciliation as he moves from the first to the second tetralogy. Does Shakespeare appear to have come to terms with a politics divorced from a theological concept of history as he makes his move?

Forker is unafraid to show that potential problems in some apparent reconciliations are unmistakable. In 1 Henry IV, a character speaks of King Henry’s “anointed majesty,” but Bolingbroke is a usurper whose reconciliation, contends Forker, lacks root in the appropriation of Christ’s sacrifice, but occurs in the hope that he can pass on his ill-gotten crown with less “soil” than when he achieved it. What this means is that whatever grace may attend the king’s deathbed reconciliation, his physical debility has spread to the sick kingdom. Thus the soul of the state and the state of the soul are intertwined. But there are two episodes after the “king-son reconciliation” that present reconciliation and its antithesis. Why? And who are reconciled? Forker responds to these important questions.

To some extent, Grace Tiffany touches on the soul of the state and the state of the soul, but her concerns differ from those of Charles Forker. Her essay on “Hamlet, Reconciliation, and the Just State” begins with the assertion that the characters proceed in pairs. She looks first at a pair of kings, Claudius and Hamlet’s father, the Ghost. She names and studies additional pairs, but gives considerable attention to the kings. What she immediately states is that much is said of the differences between the pair of kings. While acknowledging that the differences are profound, she believes that careful study indicates that there are also many similarities which illuminate not only Hamlet’s participation in general Reformation disputes but also in late-Elizabethan arguments regarding the importance of public counsel on issues of warfare, inheritance, and royal succession. Further, by emphasizing the old and new king’s similar sins and deeds of misgovernance, the play comments not only on the shared need of the monarchies to clear the gap between their soul and God but also on Hamlet’s obligation publicly to repair their civic mistakes to restore justice to Denmark and Norway. In brief, Tiffany contends that Hamlet must prove himself to be a better public servant than his uncle or his father has been.
Grace Tiffany then turns to the likenesses of the two kings. She wrestles with a series of important questions: what of their sins and of their punishments? What of their behavior and of their language? In her responses, her position becomes clear as she moves from stage to stage. Undoubtedly in Tiffany’s view, it is essential to declare that the Ghost’s past sins are not obscure and not the “garden-variety sins of many Christians,” but they are specific, and clearly seeing their specificity is important to an understanding of the play. Why the latter is necessary, she carefully reveals.

But questions continue to mount. Where is the Ghost when he makes his plan for revenge? What is the link between his sins and his plan? Does he or Claudius know reconciliation to Heaven? How does Shakespeare show the link between the private and public worlds of the two Danish kings? She responds to these questions with clarity, and also she ultimately suggests that the play *Hamlet* offers two versions of monarchical obligation. To be sure, Tiffany leaves no reader wondering about her understanding of numerous questions that pervade the play, including the Ghost’s heavenly inheritance and the destination of Hamlet.

In his essay, Maurice Hunt also focuses on the tragedy of *Hamlet*, but his concern is not with repairing an unjust state or necessarily with the destination of the main character but rather with Hamlet’s reconciliation with characters in the Danish court. As far into the play as 5.2, Hunt holds that no reconciliation exists, but he believes that Hamlet is particularly concerned with a reconciliation with Laertes even though he admits that Claudius’s behavior indicates that reconciliation with Laertes was not Hamlet’s original impulse. Furthermore, Hamlet may not have a less than genuine heartfelt attempt at reconciliation. For example, Laertes is called a gentleman several times by different individuals. Does this mean, Hunt queries, that the competitive Hamlet simply wishes to “out-gentleman” the gentleman, Laertes? This could be a puzzle, but Hunt clarifies the complexity and analyzes ways in which Shakespeare possibly views the suggestion as a basis for reconciliation.

Additional considerations call for discussion. Does the fact that both Laertes and Hamlet have the role of revenge for a dead father thrust upon them create a similarity that makes them brothers? Hunt untangles this question and strikes at the core of the possibility for reconciliation for both Laertes and Hamlet.

Yet, is there not need for Hamlet to be reconciled with his mother? He finds in the lengthy speech of the Player King a suggestion of the meaning of forgiveness, and the discovery might well be helpful in clarifying the Ghost’s accusation that the marriage of Claudius and Gertrude is an
incestuous union. Although Hamlet admonishes her to “confess her sin” to heaven and to repent of all that is past, is there solid evidence that she heeds the admonishment? The manner in which Maurice Hunt responds to the various questions raised throughout the essay will undoubtedly help readers understand why he uses as his title, “Conditional Reconciliation in Hamlet.”

Using as a point of departure an essay by Regina M. Schwartz which suggests that “re-membering presupposes something has been dismembered or lost...,” Dan Colvin begins his study of what he calls “Focalizing Reconciliation: Filmic Endings to *Hamlet*.” He early observes the numerous instances of fractures in the play that call for re-membering, and he finds the Ghost’s words to Hamlet as being most appropriate. These two words, “Remember me,” in Colvin’s judgment, are a call to reconciliation.

In seeking to show how “the camera provides a means of forming audience perspective...even though the narrative itself can be either consonant [the same] with point of view or can complement or undercut it,” Colvin chooses Micke Bal’s term, “focalization,” as well as his distinction between speaker and spectator to examine the subject of reconciliation in *Hamlet*. With the help of Bal’s term and other cinematic techniques, he scrutinizes four modern films of *Hamlet*: Olivier (1948), Zeffirelli (1990), Branagh (1996), and Almeryda (2000).

Several questions loom large. Do the directors of these four films increase the audience’s understanding of reconciliation in the play? How do they show it? How do they control the spectator’s perspective or direct the audience’s point of view? And, what happens to the earlier concerns of “re-membering”? Colvin keeps in focus these questions throughout the examination of the various productions and shows to what extent each director does or does not depict reconciliation and re-membering? When readers complete the reading of the essay, they will probably understand why Colvin uses the word, “focalization.”

At the heart of David Beauregard’s argument in “From Sin to Reconciliation: The Dynamics of Anger in *King Lear*” is a clear conviction that there is a theological and ethical dimension to *King Lear* as well as a Christian anthropology, particularly of suffering, forgiveness and reconciliation. To develop his premise, Beauregard focuses on Shakespeare’s Aristotelian-Thomistic virtue ethics. For him, the process of reconciliation falls rather clearly into three stages: the representation of Lear’s passionate anger, the sufferings of Lear and Gloucester, and finally, Lear’s reconciliation with Cordelia.
Believing that these three stages can best be understood in conjunction with the Aristotelian tradition as his guide, Beauregard studies the first stage with its emphasis on the flaws of individuals, especially Lear and Gloucester, and concludes that sin leads to suffering. In the second stage, he probes the role of suffering in the lives of sinful individuals and becomes convinced that suffering leads to a recognition of sins committed, and in the third stage, he affirms that suffering elicits compassion and mercy (misericordia) which will result in reconciliation. If this is true, then definite questions must be confronted. Does Lear’s suffering elicit compassion and mercy from Cordelia? Does Gloucester’s suffering elicit compassion and mercy from Edgar? When Lear dies, does death come from the effects of sinful anger, or from grief over the plight of his daughter? With guidance from the pattern he has followed as well as from a close observation of the text, Beauregard clearly presents a response to the questions that he raises.

Dennis Taylor also focuses on King Lear, but his emphasis does not center on the Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition as a guide through a study of the play. Rather, he begins with the assertion that numerous critics seem to think only of the play’s having an inner meaning in Christian or secular terms. Although Taylor is aware of the inner struggles and the intensity of pain in the tragedy, he contends that King Lear embodies outward significance. To support his position, he suggests that two facets of recent research give direction for an understanding of “outward gestures.” One important matter is the new awareness of Catholic concepts in Shakespeare’s personal life, including the possibility that he was the son of a recusant Catholic father but not that the dramatist was necessarily a Catholic in his beliefs.

Another feature is the enormous amount of research taking place on the Catholic contexts of Elizabethan England, especially in the political and religious world that brought persecution to those of the Catholic faith even though there was a huge tide of sympathy for them during the reign of the Tudor monarch. In light of the events that brought persecution, Taylor ponders the possibility of a connection between Shakespeare’s writing of his major tragedies and the dark years of Catholic persecution at the onset of the Jacobean years. More specifically, does King Lear unfold a connection between the dramatist and what Taylor calls this dark period of Catholic history? Is the play, he wonders, possibly an allegory of the religious and political disturbances? Taylor explores the question and immediately turns to problems attending an attempt to interpret a Shakespeare play as allegory. He shows, however, popular ways of allegorizing King Lear, but soon questions whether an allegorical
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approach argues for “a restoration of the original Catholic England” or does it seek a reconciliation between the old religion and the new religious currents.

What route Taylor as critic takes is clear as he reveals his position on the Protestant allusions in the play as well as in his discussion of the language of the tragedy. He finally declares that the more one studies the complexities of the work, the more one becomes aware that Shakespeare’s play centers on a proud, suffering old king, not on Henry VIII or a divided England. Nevertheless, Taylor is unwilling to deny Shakespeare’s relevance to the religious wars.

For Taylor, one question persists: what in Shakespeare or in his era motivates the deep darkness of *King Lear*? As he thinks on the entire play, other questions and paradoxes remain, but Taylor does briefly show a reconciliation in the midst of difficult and unanswered questions.

Joseph Candido turns not to a tragedy but to a familiar comedy for his study of reconciliation. Choosing as his subject “Why is *Twelfth Night* Called *Twelfth Night*?” Candido builds on the work of a small number of critics who have linked the language and spirit of *Twelfth Night* to the religious feast of Epiphany. He admits that he will seek to locate the “epiphanic” in the play in a somewhat more oblique way than the few critics who have convincingly linked it to the culmination of the twelve days of Christmas.

Turning to a later perspective on the Epiphany, T. S. Eliot’s “Journey of the Magi,” Candido suggests that the speaker in the poem may serve as direction for exploring analogous concerns in *Twelfth Night*. He knows that Eliot’s Epiphany drastically differs from Shakespeare’s play, and he clearly shows the differences. Equally clear is his position that “reconciliation and alienation, spiritual certainty and unease...in Eliot’s reconstruction of Epiphany are always near neighbors.” The same mixture of Eliot’s Epiphany, Candido believes, lies at the heart of the “epiphanic” in *Twelfth Night*.

Starting with Viola and Sebastian, he carefully shows the parallels between their experiences and those of Eliot’s Magus. No reader can escape the thoughtful handling of the restless, ill at ease, disoriented, sad Viola and Sebastian, but with the same careful observation, Candido shows the burst of “epiphanic” light that their reconciliation produced. What he ultimately concludes is convincing: their “epiphanic” moment reanimated them to open the way to serious obligations inherent in their new, though complicated, relationships.

The character, Malvolio, now commands consideration. Immediately admitting that he is a formidable challenge to any “epiphanic” vision in
Twelfth Night, suggests that Shakespeare deliberately leads the reader and spectator into a stereotypical way of looking at Malvolio in order to catch the audience in an “epiphanic trap.” How Joseph Candido depicts the “trap” and how the audience may still be able to experience epiphany shows remarkable insight into the possibility of the true nature of Epiphany.

In “The Earthly City Redeemed: The Reconciliation of Cain and Abel in As You Like It,” Marsha Robinson argues that Shakespeare’s dramatization of the reconciliation of warring brothers enacts “both the atonement of the earthly city and the city of God.” Fraternal conflict, a recurring theme in As You Like It, is informed with “a symbolic importance which echoes the theology and historiography of Augustine’s The City of God. Robinson later shows, however, that Shakespeare’s appropriation of Augustinian thought could have come through the impact of medieval drama on Shakespeare’s work, but she also reveals how Shakespeare’s presentation of the warring brothers resonates “against medieval drama’s narrative of the history of salvation.” Further, she identifies Augustine’s characteristics of both the earthly and heavenly city and specifically indicates that the two cities are diametrically opposed. Cain, a fratricide, is founder of the earthly city; Abel, symbol of the heavenly city, embodies the paradoxes of the Christian faith, “in which gain is loss and death is life.” Not only does she show how Shakespeare presents these individuals as figures of two opposed cities and are intrinsic to a typological reading of redemptive history, but she also shows the stages in the enmity and reconciliation of two other sets of warring brothers, Oliver and Orlando de Boys and Duke Senior and their reconciliation.

How Marsha Robinson shows the biblical and Augustinian prototypes is of special interest to a reader; equally provocative is discovering these prototypes in the Forest of Arden whose exiled inhabitants are happy to escape the earthly city. Appropriately, near the close of her study, Robinson depicts how Shakespeare dramatizes reconciliation between the two sets of brothers and concludes that the marks of the earthly city are juxtaposed with the regenerative blood of Christ, “the symbol of brotherly reconciliation.” One can now expect only transformation to occur and “at-onement” to prevail.

Daniel O’Day also focuses on As You Like It and selects as his subject “Reconciliation in As You Like It: World Enough and Time. Concentrating on Episode nine, the “Scylla and Charbydis” chapter in James Joyce’s Ulysses, which contains emphasis on the banishments, exiles, or “sunderings” in Shakespeare’s late plays, O’Day sees the topics as
thematic catalysts for dramatic action in *As You Like It*. Joyce’s character, Stephen Dedalus, declares that reconciliation must invariably be preceded by a sundering.

*As You Like It* begins with two fraternal conflicts, the kind to which Stephen alludes, O’Day immediately observes, and obviously it concludes “with two reconciliations, one resulting from repentance, and in at least one case from an act of forgiveness.” The first conflict occurs prior to the opening of the play with the overthrow of Duke Senior by his younger brother Duke Frederick who simply wants power. The second injustice or sundering stems from Oliver’s oppression of his younger brother Orlando which O’Day associates with that of the Prodigal Son. The action, however, centers on the developing relationship between Rosalind and Orlando, both banished by Duke Frederick. What must take place before the relationship is complete is a realistic reconciliation to one another, and that will occur with the passage of time combined with a mature understanding of time’s meaning. Time passes, and new understanding comes primarily during the period of banishment and exile and by making contact with different types of personalities. All of these personalities are of various ages and all are in need of reconciliation, including individuals such as Touchstone, Audrey, Jacques, the male Ganymede, Silvius and Phebe.

Obviously, there are various personalities, and there are different views of time and meanings of time presented by the different personalities. The question remains at this point: Where has O’Day left the reader? As the author completes his study, he leads the reader to see why he contends that, “sunderings precede reconciliation,” why new understanding comes through exile, and new meaning comes through time’s passage, and reconciliation with others embodies archetypal significance, and it often comes in unexpected ways.

Grace Hall sees various kinds of alienation and separation preceding reconciliation and resurrection in *The Winter’s Tale*. In her essay, “Alienation, Separation, Redemption, Reconciliation and Resurrection in *The Winter’s Tale*,” she perceives the romance embodying all of the large, significant terms mentioned here, but all incapable of being wholly understood by human reason.

Contrary to early and popular literary criticism, this chapter reveals both Shakespeare’s understanding of the new scientific concepts of the heavens and the new mathematics. It describes the devastating effects on human relationships Shakespeare finds in one man’s attempt to use the scientific method of theorizing after collecting data as a means of categorizing rather than understanding others. It also distinguishes
between the benefits of one man’s use of the new mathematics and the devastating effect on others in its use by another. Hall describes not only how various characters in *The Winter’s Tale* live by the stories they tell, but also how, through multiple references and typical behavior of some characters, Shakespeare resurrects and champions the biblical story of alienation, separation, redemption, reconciliation, and resurrection.

Among the large, general losses are disbelief in stories, integration once provided by the Ptolemaic and Dantean views of the universe, and a cosmology that once provided meaning for the universe but now left without a referent. Thus in the first half of the romance, Shakespeare, Hall contends, presents a fractured microcosm, the alienation of two societies, Sicilia and Bohemia and their rulers. Differences between the kings, Hall believes, are symbolic of the greater fracture in the macrocosm, which separated fields of knowledge.

In the first half of the play, Hall observes, that at first, the ruler of Bohemia, Polixenes, describes his visit to Sicilia in terms that show wholeness of life and experience. Leontes, ruler of Sicilia, thinks of knowledge only in terms of collection of data, opinion and pseudo reasoning. These two ways of knowing will have a profound impact on many individual characters throughout the play.

Before the Bohemian world appears, King Leontes’s personal losses, either by death or separation, are almost beyond comprehension: his son, daughter, wife, courtier and friend, for examples. To make the suffering even more unbearable, Leontes knows no peace of mind or spirit and exists day by day with a sense of guilt and grief ripping him apart.

Following separation and loss, the Chorus, Time, enters. As Grace Hall suggests, Shakespeare now draws the past and future together into “redemptive” or kairos time. Before the impact of “redemptive” time becomes apparent, the dramatist depicts typical devices of romance, a little baby abandoned to the dangers of the elements, a princess found and brought up by shepherds, a prince disguised as a shepherd’s son, and a sea voyage. Love is threatened by a parent who thinks what he perceives an inferior social rank in the young woman his son loves. Not unlike other romances, *The Winter’s Tale* contains sadness and mystery. Hermione is dead, or is she? If she is dead, does she experience resurrection? Does the play end in awakened faith, joy and reconciliation? The reader discovers how Hall responds to these and other questions.

It is obvious that contributors have used different approaches in their respective studies of reconciliation in selected plays. It is equally obvious that they think of reconciliation as frequently having a biblical basis, but this may not always seem essential to all. Whenever they write of
reconciliation, however, each one usually uncovers some Christian feature of the play. All show that Shakespeare is a consummate artist.
“Reconciliation” has recently become a prominent word in political and religious discourse. We associate it with the formal attempts of Archbishop Desmond Tutu, through the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, to investigate wrongs done against his people during the times of Apartheid, but also through that process to encourage both repentance and forgiveness among the wronged and the wrongers alike. The word is also richly associated with many of the efforts of Archbishop Rowan Williams to heal the varied differences within the catholic, that is the worldwide, Christian Church. A simple Google search of Rowan Williams and reconciliation yielded 19,800 results, the majority of them unrelated to an American bishop named Robinson. Reconciliation has also been discussed more than once as both a thematic and a narrative pattern in Shakespeare, particularly in the late romances but also in some of the earlier comedies and in *King Lear*.¹

I

The word “reconciliation” has a rich biblical and theological basis. It applies essentially to two dimensions of religious experience, embodied in two succinct biblical passages, St. Paul’s “Be reconciled to God” (2 Cor. 5:20) and Christ’s “Be reconciled to your brother” (Matt. 5:24). We read more fully of the first, reconciliation to God, from Paul’s Letter to the Romans 5:8-11, Geneva version:
But as God setteth out his love toward us seeing that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us, 9. Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him. 10. For as when we were enemies, we were reconcile’d to God by the death of his sonne, much more being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life. 11. And not only so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement.

The second usage, reconciliation one to another, comes from Christ’s Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5:23-24:

If thou then bring thy gift to the altar, and there remembrest, that thy brother hath aught against thee, 24. Leave there thine offering before the altar, and go thy ways: first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.

These are both rich and resonant biblical contexts. The first connects reconciliation to the theology of our justification and atonement before God through Christ’s sacrificial death; the second, set as it is in the midst of the Beatitudes, proclaims that reconcilement one to another, our forgiveness of our enemies, is central to the Christian’s experience on earth. “Judge not that ye be not judged” (Matt. 7:1-2) and “You have heard that it hath been said, an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth” (Matt. 5:38-39), two passages to which we will return, follow hard upon this passage in Christ’s extraordinary sermon.

Paul’s Second Letter to the Corinthians (5:18-20) makes explicit the connection between the two passages:

God...hath reconciled us unto himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given unto us the ministerie of reconciliation. 19. For God was in Christ, and reconciled the world to himself, not imputing their sinne unto them, and hath committed to us the worke of reconciliation. 20. Now then we are ambassadors for Christ.

Crucial to any understanding of the theology of reconciliation in Shakespeare’s time are three sermons from the official collection Certaine Sermons or Homilies appointed to be read in churches in the time of Queen Elizabeth I. The main sermon’s title, “Of Repentance, and true Reconciliation unto God,” itself suggests that any moment in a play in which repentance looms large, like Claudius’s attempted prayer in Hamlet or Claudio’s prescribed repentance in Much Ado About Nothing, is necessarily also a moment about reconcilement unto God. As the homily claims, “No doctrine is so necessary to the Church of God, as is the doctrine of repentance and amendment of life” (467). Further, “Repentance
and forgiveness of sins are always preached together, as our saviour Jesus Christ did appoint himself, saying [in Luke 24:46, 47] “that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in his name among all nations.” Our sins separate us from God; our repentance and forgiveness and Christ’s mediation return us to God, through faith: Repentance is [477] “the conversion or turning again of the whole man unto God, from whom we go away by sin.”

But true repentance in the homily requires not only confession unto God but also commands, from James 5:16—“Acknowledge your faults one to another” [479-80]—that we forgive others. The homily, quoting the passage in Mark, calls this “brotherly reconciliation,” adding, “The faithful ought to acknowledge their offences, whereby some hatred, rancor, grudge, or malice have risen or grown among them one to another, that a brotherly reconciliation may be had, without the which no thing that we do can be acceptable unto God.” If this is a prominent part of a “most necessary” Christian doctrine, it is also prominent through Reformation controversy. Confession to priests was considered by many of the early reformers a papist tradition; its remedy was confession one to another. The Geneva Bible’s marginal note makes clear the close association between brotherly reconciliation and divine when it glosses Matthew 5:23—“be reconciled to your brother”—“For that thou hast offended him, or he hath offended thee: for God preferreth brotherly reconciliation to sacrifice.” God’s forgiveness of us and our forgiveness of others are also closely associated through the Lord’s Prayer. As the homily of Christian Love and Charity says, “If we will have of God forgiveness, there is none other remedy, but to forgive the offences done unto us.” The same homily assures us “if we thus direct our life by Christian love and charity, then Christ doth promise and assure us, that he loveth us, that we will be the children of our heavenly father, reconciled to him forever.” At the same time, we read between these politicized marginal lines another jab at the imputed Roman Catholic preference for works over faith, formal observance over inner grace and love. Paul’s words in Romans 5:10 nicely connect the two reconciliations: “and by him to reconcile all things unto himself, and to set at peace through the blood of the cross both the things in earth and the things in heaven.”

II

There are twenty uses of some form of the word “reconciliation” in Shakespeare. Naseeb Shaheen designates only one of them as a liturgical or a biblical allusion. That is not to say, of course, that the very presence
in the play of such a potentially religious word might not invite associations beyond the merely psychological and sociological. Nor does the mere absence of the word “reconcile” in a play disqualify it from thematic or narrative importance there. If that were the case, I could consider neither Measure for Measure nor Love’s Labour’s Lost with you. Most of us would also acknowledge the crucial position of the closely analogous themes of edifying humiliation and the forgiveness of others in the comedies and in the romances, not to mention in a play like King Lear. Thematically, Richard of Gloucester must finally face the prophecies of eleven ghosts that he will both “despair and die” and Claudius knows full well, though the eavesdropping Hamlet cannot see it, that his inadequate repentance keeps him severed from God’s grace. The absence of reconciliation to God is also prominent in Macbeth’s decision in the middle of the play not to “return” to grace, and in his obdurate refusal later to acknowledge a life signifying something. The idea of reconciliation with God defines Turquin’s sense of reprobation, Othello’s similar desperation that he will be cast from heaven at compt, Iago’s gleeful affiliation with the “divinity of hell,” and Hamlet’s abusive priesthood to his mother (“for love of grace”), as well as his own possible acceptance of God’s shaping divinity later. Portia also tries (and fails) to convince Shylock that the human quality of mercy is closely related to the divine. The theme of human reconciliation (or as commonly its failure) looms especially large in Measure for Measure, Love’s Labour’s Lost, The Merchant of Venice, As You Like It, The Two Gentlemen of Verona, Twelfth Night, All’s Well that Ends Well, Richard II, Richard III, 2 Henry IV, the three Henry VI plays, and King John. I see it receiving a particularly strong theological spin in Measure for Measure (through forgiveness), Love’s Labour’s Lost (through charity), and The Merchant of Venice (through Jewish law and Christian mercy). The contents of this collection suggest other compelling examples.

In a few cases, however, the actual usage of the word “reconcile” along with its dramatic context may explicitly invite and direct a theological understanding. The clearest theological usage occurs when Othello advises Desdemona, “If you bethink yourself of any crime / Unreconcil’d as yet to heaven and grace, / Solicit for it straight” (5:2.26-28). Here “reconciled” refers unambiguously if also ironically to reestablishing a relationship with a forgiving God. In The Winter’s Tale, Polixenes calls Leontes “that penitent and reconcil’d king” (4:22-23), though admittedly his subsequent “as thou cal’st him” hedges his theological and personal assessment. Earlier in The Winter’s Tale, Leontes himself, after denying the truth of the Delphic oracle and learning of the apparently resultant death of his
son, first asks “Apollo, pardon / My great profaneness ’gainst thy oracle,” then promises, “I’ll reconcile me to Polixenes, / New woo my queen” (3.2.155-6). These uses of the word “reconcile” could be merely personal, but the word “penitent” and the prayer to Apollo foreground the close connections between human and divine reconciliation. If one is not in love and charity with one’s neighbor, one can hardly expect to be reconciled to God: “Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.” That the last two references occur technically in a classical rather than a Christian context complicates but does not necessarily negate such a connection.

An even richer example of Shakespeare’s religious usage of “reconcile” occurs in Richard III. Richard of Gloucester plays the first religious card when he calls making “peace of enmity, fair love of hate” “A blessed labor” (2:1.51-53), then pretends with liturgical formality “to reconcile me” to any “Among this princely heap” who wrongly think that he has wronged them:

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Among this princely heap, if any here
By false intelligence or wrong surmise
Hold me a foe—
If I [unwittingly], or in my rage
Have aught committed that is hardly borne
By any in this presence, I desire
To reconcile me to his friendly peace.
’Tis death to me to be at enmity;
I hate it, and desire all good men’s love. (2:1.54-62)
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Of course, Richard insults even as he seems to pardon and ask for pardon; he admits more their “false intelligence or wrong surmise” than his own unwitting, or unwilling,9 sinfulness even as he manipulates them.

Then he turns unctuously to Queen Elizabeth, Buckingham, Rivers, and Dorset, asking all of them to drop their undeserved grudges against him:

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I do not know that Englishman alive
With whom my soul is any jot at odds
More than the infant that is born to-night,
I thank my God for my humility. (R3 2:1.70-73)
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This masterpiece of false piety, thinly veiled sarcasm, and apparent naiveté is deeply informed by the theology of reconciliation. In its final evocation of God’s grace (and Richard’s humility), it even implicitly connects reconciliation with enemies and reconciliation with God. Donne calls
humility “the soul of all virtues” because of its inevitable relationship to Christ’s redemptive mission. He came “to save sinners” and thereby “reconcile God and man”; therefore “the more they acknowledge themselves to be [sinners], the nearer they are to this salvation.”

At the same time, Richard knows full well that brother Clarence has already been murdered by brother Edward’s secret command, and thus Richard glories in the irony of Edward’s evocation of the doctrine of reconciliation even as he uses the word in the speech that follows. When brother Edward learns later in the same scene that his command has been executed, he laments with equal theological point, if not the actual word “reconcile,” “O God! I fear thy justice will take hold / On me and you, and mine and yours, for this” (2:1.132-33). Richard’s charitable response to all of the princely heap he has just forgiven? “God will revenge it.” God does of course, in ways Richard cannot always imagine.

On the other hand, while one could argue that a phrase like the Friar’s in Romeo and Juliet, “reconcile your friends” (3:3.151) cannot be completely without theological resonance, little else in the passage necessitates such a sense of context. The same might be said of Desdemona’s plea, prayer if you will, to Othello for Cassio, “his present reconciliation take” (3:3.47), though to be sure both are trying to “make peace of enmity.” The Friar does wear a religious garb that matches this religious role, and Desdemona, who has been dressed as an intercessor by Iago’s machinations, is in a sense playing “heavenly shows” (2:3:352). Pleading before a sternly judgmental Othello, she resembles the Virgin’s intercessory role at compt. I think that in Hamlet, Laertes’s “I stand aloof, and will no reconcilement” (5:2.247) is more a matter of honor than religion, but he also reaches back, dying, with the somewhat more obviously theological words, “Exchange forgiveness with me, noble Hamlet.” Hamlet’s response, “Heaven make thee free of it! I follow thee” (5:2.329-32) certainly has a religious ring to it.

It is just such rich complexity that makes me wish, belatedly alas, that I had included “reconcile” as a keyword in my new dictionary, Shakespeare’s Religious Language. You read me right—the word “reconcile” is used more than once in the dictionary, most particularly in two quotations of Othello’s late (and brief) concern that Desdemona might be “Unreconcil’d as yet to heaven and grace” (5:2.27) and in quotations from Donne and Jewel. But to my considerable embarrassment, it did not become a keyword. This leaves me feeling more like the naked emperor than Lady Godiva. But here I stand. After what I have learned in writing this essay, I assure you that “reconcile” will be the first word added in the second edition. Sins of omission, though inadvertent, are always the bane
of lexicographers. At least confession is good for the soul, not to mention entertaining.

III

It should come as no surprise that good readers have already considered the importance of the theme of reconciliation in Measure for Measure. An early essay by Roy Battenhouse develops the analogous idea of an “atonement paradigm” in the play, one inevitably involving obvious sinners like Claudio and Angelo being humbled and thereby prepared through repentance for grace. Battenhouse also argues that embracing the Duke’s edification allows a severely moral Isabella the better to forgive both Angelo and her brother. Francis Fergusson styles the Duke in the earthly role of grace, Diane McColley speaks of a “providential physic” in the play, and Dayton Haskin connects the play’s actions to ideas of Pauline justification.13 With generous helpings from my dictionary, I will first look at some of the other words in Measure for Measure most resonant with the religious issue of reconciliation; then I will consider some of its broad and often problematic thematic appearances in the play.

This theological scheme of sinfulness and reconciliation lies at the heart of the theological debate between Angelo and Isabella about why he should forgive her brother Claudio’s fault. Angelo tries to reduce the issue to legal indebtedness on earth: “Your brother is a forfeit of the law.” Isabella counters by connecting it to heavenly justice and grace, specifically Christ’s redemptive and reconciling sacrifice for our sins: “Why, all the souls that were were forfeit once, / And He that might the vantage best have took / Found out the remedy” (2.2.71-75). This is not the only time that the need for a reconciliation between God and humanity figures literally into the conversations of Measure for Measure. Legally, a forfeit is a debt whose due date has passed; because it can also mean subjected to such a debt, Isabella chooses to hear Angelo’s forfeit as a reference to the human debt to the God of justice, eternal damnation, which can only be paid, in the Christian scheme, by Christ’s sacrifice on the cross. Lancelot Andrewes speaks of this financial-theological metaphor when he says, “Oft we have heard, in redemption there is emption, a buying, and re, that is back; a buying back of that, which formerly hath been lost or made away.” “Redemption real [speaks] of our estates, lands, or goods; redemption personal, of our own selves, souls, and bodies” (3.208).

The word “redeem,” meaning buy back, often spoken theologically of the way Christ’s sacrifice and death expiated, paid off, the sins of Adam
and the rest of us, is also obviously associated with the idea of reconciliation with God. Andrewes says of Gal. 4:4-5: Christ came “that He might redeem them that were under the Law” (1:57): “The first and main benefit his Redeemer will raise him to, is to see God. That he lost when he became aliened; that he recovers, being redeemed. Here begins all misery, to be cast out of His presence; here all happiness, to be restored to the light of His countenance” (2:261). Though the Duke’s promise to help Isabella “Redeem your brother from the angry law” (3:1.201-02) speaks about the severity of human rather than divine law, I think it resonates too well with the “measure-for-measure” theological context of the play to be without religious associations.

But as Isabella clearly understands in her increasingly heated conversation with Angelo before the proposition, the person’s reconciliation with God is closely interrelated with his or her reconciliation one to another: “How would you be, / If He, which is the top of judgment, should / But judge you as you are? O think on that, / And mercy then will breathe within your lips, / Like man made new” (2.2.75-79). Because Christ taught the prayer, “Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us,” and also enacted His own forgiving sacrifice to redeem erring humanity, forgiveness has become one of the central virtues of Christian precept, if not always of Christian practice. Andrewes says, “And when we pray, ‘Forgive us our debts,’ we learn that it is our duty to crave forgiveness for others as for ourselves” (5:428); “for by mercy shewed, sins are forgiven” (1:442-43). The kind Judge Escalus in Measure for Measure warns his severe colleague Angelo just after he has condemned Claudio to death for fornication, and just before his first confrontation with Isabella, “Well; heaven forgive him! and forgive us all! / Some rise by sin, and some by virtue fall” (2.1.37-38). Tyndale says even more threateningly of Matt. 6.14-15, “If ye shall forgive men their faults, your heavenly Father shall forgive you; but and if ye shall not forgive men their faults, no more shall your Father forgive you your faults” (1:470).14

Its rich usage of the word “grace” also reveals the central place of the theology of reconciliation within the words and actions of Measure for Measure. “Grace go with you, Benedicite!” (2.3.39), is merely the disguised Duke’s uttered blessing of the pregnant Juliet. However, when the Duke, already taken with Isabella, calls “grace” just two scenes later “the soul of your complexion” (3.1.183), he refers both to the gift of her physical beauty15 and her divinely inspired virtue. The profane Lucio challenges a Gentleman’s piety by saying “I think thou never wast where grace was said.” Then he moves quickly from this “grace” as prayers before meals to “grace” as a prominent theological issue when he adds
“Grace is grace, despite of all controversy.” Finally he condemns the gentlemen as a reprobate who not only shows no marks of God’s unmerited favor and love but seems to have resisted their spiritual influence in his own life: “thou thyself art a wicked villain, despite of all grace” (1.2.18-26). Isabella’s stridently self-righteous response to her brother’s weakness in 3.1 is hardly gracious in either the secular or the religious sense of the word. And when the Duke later promises Isabella “Grace of the Duke, revenges to your heart, / And general honor” if she will let him, godlike, direct her “wisdom / In that good path that I would wish it go” (4.3.132-36), the “Grace” and the “general honor” which the Duke promises may be both worldly prominence if she marries him and a heightened capacity to forgive both Angelo and her brother if she follows his gracious lead during the trial. Of course, the Duke’s proposal is also full of dangers and ambiguities, not the least his wish that she leave her vocation and grace him with marriage. Is the Duke godlike here in wisdom and direction, or merely in desire? His grace, and hers, have justifiably been the subject of considerable disagreement.

“The law” in Measure for Measure and The Merchant of Venice also resonates with both judicial and theological nuance related to the theology of reconciliation. Angelo’s “Your brother is a forfeit of the law” or “Redeem your brother from the angry law” (2.2.71; 3.1.201-02) combine theologically loaded words like “forfeit” and “redeem” with “law” in ways which encourage both understandings (cf. 1.4.63; 2.2.41, 80, 90; 2.4.61, 93-94, 114; 3.2.15). The play’s title and one of its chief phrases too, the Duke’s threatening if also theatrical “measure still for measure” (5.1.411), also come from Christ’s Sermon on the Mount: “Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again” (Matt. 7:1-2). In The Merchant of Venice, Shylock the Jew says to the assembled Christians about his rightful bond for a pound of Antonio’s “fair flesh” (1.3.150), “I stand here for law,” and “I crave the law.” He also asks “Is that the law?” when the tables of literal interpretation are turned against him, prompting Portia’s not entirely gracious “The law hath yet another hold on you” (4.1.142, 206, 314, 347). Jew and Christian, the Old Dispensation and the New, the law of justice and the law of mercy, are all resonant in the tensions of this exchange.

In Shakespeare’s usage, mercy is often spoken theologically both of God’s compassionate forbearance towards human sinfulness and of the recommended human imitation of this quality. If the word “justice” is associated with the Old Testament God, divine “mercy” describes its mitigation through the new dispensation of Christ’s sacrifice. In The
Sermons of John Donne, edited by Potter and Simpson, Donne reminds the worldly judge of the traditional association of mercy here and mercy hereafter: “Waigh the mercy of thy Judge then, and think there is such mercy required in thy judgement now” (3:291).

Both Portia and Isabella also associate human mercy with the grace of God; Isabella argues to Angelo that not even “the judge’s robe” becomes him “with one half so good a grace / As mercy does” (2.2.61-63). But both women also find it very difficult to forgive a “precise” Angelo (1.3.50) or a vengeful Shylock, either of whom would murder in the name of the law, and both of whom have refused to temper the “just but severe law” with mercy (MM 2.2.41). Portia finally cries out “The Jew shall have all justice” during the trial scene, and Isabella says at her parallel moment, “The very mercy of the law cries out” for what she has earlier demanded —“justice, justice, justice, justice” (5.1.407, 25). Isabella’s “somewhat madly spoken” description of Angelo as “this pernicious caitiff deputy” (5.1.88-89) is part of this same understandable if also troublesome parcel.

One of the most famous assertions from Christ’s Sermon on the Mount is “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets” (Matt. 22:37-40; cf. Mark 12:30-31, Luke 10:27). These two commandments contrast the old dispensation of law with the new dispensation of love. The Reformer Marbeck offers this clear distinction: “The Law saith, pay thy debt: the Gospell saith, Christ hath payed it. The Lawe saith, thou art a sinner, dispaire and thou shalt be damned: the Gospell saith, thy sinnes are forgiven thee, be of good comfort thou shalt be saved. The Lawe saith, make amends for thy sinnes: the Gospell saith, Christ hath made it for thee. The Law saith, the father of heaven is angry with thee: the Gospell saith, Christ hath pacified him with his bloud” (1581), 616. Such concepts lie at the heart of the theology of reconciliation.

Finally, “ransom” and “reprieve” can both refer theologically to the results of Christ’s sacrifice on the cross or of Mary’s intervention on our behalf for “the remission of our sins.” Measure for Measure’s repeated opposition of the ethos of equitable punishment for wrongdoing, measure for measure, against that of loving and forgiving even one’s enemies (Matt. 5:38-44), probably gives even its two essentially secular uses of “reprieve” some religious resonance. When Isabella argues with Angelo for her brother’s “reprieve” from “the most just law,” his response is to offer her the chance to “redeem him” with the “sweet uncleanness” of having sex with Angelo (2.4.39, 52-5). Her angry reference to a “bending