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“BUT BREAK MY HEART, FOR I MUST HOLD MY TONGUE:” SILENCE IN SHAKESPEARE’S *HAMLET*

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To Austin, Madison, Tristan, & Brooklyn
Everything I do is for you.

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I: Abstract

This paper will explore the topic of conscience in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, using sixteenth-century casuistry and diplomacy as lenses through which to explain the strand of advice concerning silence by various characters in the play. The religio-politico relationship in Shakespeare's England can be better understood by examining motifs and themes in his works that are relevant to both politics *and* religion. Using silence and casuistry to evaluate questions of conscience in *Hamlet* subsequently reveals the interconnectedness of this relationship, in the period, and Shakespeare's particular brand of casuistry provides a unique lens through which to explore *Hamlet.* Ultimately, I argue that silence becomes a language of its own, in *Hamlet*, through which a Christian performs casuistry in order to take morally responsible actions in his day to day life while navigating potentially dangerous political circumstances.

II: Introduction

Typically, when we think about the term *conscience*, we do so in positive terms. Our conscience helps us determine right action from wrong action. However, in Shakespeare that is not always the sentiment, signifying a complicated view of conscience in the Renaissance and early modern Period. In Shakespeare's *Richard III*, the protagonist dismisses conscience as "but a word that cowards use" (5.3.309-310). The First Stranger in *Timon of Athens* tells us that "Men must learn now with pity to dispense,/For policy sits above conscience" (3.2.80-1). Hamlet tells us that "conscience does make cowards of us all" (3.1). But *why* does conscience make us cowards? The ideas of conscience in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, particularly, demonstrate confusion about religion, politics, and one's place in a post Reformation England struggling to reconcile competing claims about what it means to be a good, just citizen *and* Christian. Discussing conscience in Shakespeare's canon is not a task that scholars have neglected.[1] However, research that considers conscience in *Hamlet*, using the motif of silence and popular theology of the period, has been largely underappreciated in recent decades since Revisionist historians have re-evaluated the mono-religious nature of post Reformation England.[2] I argue in this analysis that the tension between words and silence in Shakespeare's canon serves as a point of convergence between two popularly espoused, and controversial, ideals of post Reformation England: political discretion and Christian moral integrity. The topic of

[1] See, Catherine Belsey's, "The Case of Hamlet's Conscience." *Studies in Philology*, vol. 76, no. 2, 1979, pp. 127-48. *JSTOR*. Accessed 10 Oct. 2016.
[2] Prior to the nineteen-nineties, England's Reformation tended to produce scholarship with largely Protestant sympathies that present a much more religiously unified vision of Reformed England.

conscience in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* underscores the nature of diplomacy and court politics in the Elizabethan period while simultaneously drawing attention to a theological emphasis on conscience as demonstrated in theories of casuistry and in particular in the work of William Perkins. Ultimately, I suggest that Shakespeare's strategic use of silence helps us understand the habits of mind related to conscience, a topic which is inflected by both politics *and* religion, and to place emphasis on one above the other neglects to acknowledge the interwoven relationship between politics and religion in the period.[3] Not only can political action and religious action be examined through an emphasis on silence and conscience in the play, but they become inseparable because of the political and religious climate of a schismatic post Reformation England. Moreover, I suggest that the political issues at hand are better understood in light of the moral issues that are raised, and the play calls for its audience to reflect on the moral implications of one's political actions.

Hamlet's internal struggle indicates a personal conflict between participating in politics *and* maintaining personal integrity, and his delay in acting can be better understood by considering early modern advice concerning the management of one's conscience in day-to-day life: politically, religiously, and socially. This paper will

[3] Scholars have long debated what *Hamlet* is "really about." Looking primarily at Hegel and Marx, Margreta de Grazia argues that a detachment from "land" has been considered to be one of the preconditions in the development of a modern consciousness. For Hegel, the seminal figure in the transition to modernity was Luther, with the Great Schism marking the break from a medieval past that focused its energy and devotion on the Holy Land to a new age that turned the work of the spirit inward. For Marx, the passage from feudalism to capitalist production has entailed a dissociation of labor from land, formalizing the detachment of humans from humus. A.C. Bradley suggests that action is essentially the expression of character. In other words, who Hamlet *is* dictates what Hamlet *does*. Coleridge termed the subterranean the "Psychological," in which one himself is not completely aware of what truly impedes his action. De Grazia argues against this: "Hamlet always possessed an area within, hidden from the other characters, and has good reason for keeping to himself…But what Hamlet does not possess until around 1800 is an area of consciousness which he cannot reveal even to himself" (164). De Grazia ultimately suggests that Hamlet is first and foremost a prince "dispossessed," and that the political implications super cede the religious concerns.

explore these questions by focusing on the ways the play uses *silence*, as a motif, to manage crises of conscience and political status, and how this use of silence shifts between political and personal relationships. Although some critics have explored Polonius as counselor and others have looked at the play's Catholic sympathies or Protestant sympathies, scholarship that explores contemporary issues of both political diplomacy and the good counselor *and* Christian morality, in terms of *silence*, is almost non-existent. Despite various competing examples of right and wrong behavior, there is a common strand of advice that presents itself in *Hamlet*. Scripture advises men in times of anger or despair, "Tremble and sin not: examine your own heart upon your bed, and be still" (Psalms 4:4). A modern interpretation of the same verse tells us, "Tremble and do not sin; when you are on your beds, *search your hearts and be silent*."[4] Polonius advises Laertes to, "Give thy thoughts no tongue,/Nor any unproportioned thought his act," to "Beware/Of any entrance to a quarrel," to "Give every man thine ear but few thy voice,/Take each man's censure [opinion], but reserve thy judgment," but above all, "To thine own self be true" (1.3.59-78). This advice, from father to son, is enacted by Hamlet—self-evaluation, caution, silence, suggesting that despite the inconsistency of characters participating in moments of silence, the concept itself is relevant in early modern England, both politically and religiously, and it is used here to reconcile post Reformation anxieties concerning conscience and salvation as well as political instabilities.

While critics have discussed silence as a means of subjugating the "other," as a distinctly feminine attribute of chastity, or as a marker of social class distinction and

[4] The first biblical example is taken from the 1599 Geneva Bible, while the second example is taken from the New International Version. Biblegateway.com.

hierarchical privilege, I will argue that close textual analysis and alternative understandings of silence through the lens of both diplomatic procedure and casuistical theology of the period offer analysis that fills a gap in scholarship and speaks to the religio-politico climate of post Reformation England. I posit that theological texts intended to help Englishmen guide their consciences, for example Perkins' theories of casuistry, were an important influence on Shakespeare's writing in both explicit and implicit ways. Moreover, I will suggest that Hamlet engages in a particular and unique mode of casuistry, neither explicitly Catholic or explicitly Reformed, which motivates his struggles and vacillations from scene to scene. This paper will focus on the connections between political diplomatic advice concerning silence *and* Christian moral integrity, in *Hamlet,* and will employ cultural histories, political treatises, and theological texts, that discuss Reformation history and casuistry, in order to demonstrate that Hamlet's interiority and delayed action is partly the product of a post-Reformation England concerned with how to balance political obligations and legal justice with the responsibilities of being a good Christian, either Traditional *or* Reformed.[5] Ultimately, *silence* becomes a language of its own through which a Christian performs casuistry in order to take morally responsible actions in his day to day life. Simultaneously, silence acts as a mode of self-preservation and advancement in political circumstances. The first part of the

[5] Steven Mullaney argues, in *The Reformation of Emotions in the Age of Shakespeare*, that Elizabethan popular drama played a significant role in confronting the uncertainties and unresolved traumas of Elizabethan Protestant England. Shakespeare and his contemporaries—audiences as well as playwrights—reshaped popular drama into a new form of embodied social, critical, and affective thought. Examining a variety of works, from revenge plays to Shakespeare's first history tetralogy and beyond, Mullaney explores how post-Reformation drama not only exposed these fault lines of society on stage but also provoked playgoers in the audience to acknowledge their shared differences. He demonstrates that our most lasting works of culture remain powerful largely because of their deep roots in the emotional landscape of their times.

paper will provide historical context related to conscience and casuistry, while the second part of the paper will deal with *Hamlet*, specifically. Using silence and casuistry to evaluate questions of conscience and diplomacy in *Hamlet* subsequently reveals the inseparable relationship between the political and the religious in Elizabethan England, and Shakespeare's particular brand of casuistry provides a unique lens through which to explore *Hamlet.*

III: Historical Overview of *Conscience* and *Casuistry*

In his history of conscience, Arthur Lindsley argues that, "In the early Greeks, such as Plato, conscience is related to self-awareness and to rational evaluation of moral acts" ("Conscience and Casuistry," 8). For these thinkers, self-awareness and evaluation required knowledge and truth-seeking. Plato writes, "There's no chance of their having a conscious glimpse of the truth as long as they refuse to disturb the things they take for granted and remain incapable of explaining them" (*The Republic*). Plato goes on to say that if the starting point is unknown, then the intermediate and end points will be "woven together out of unknown material," and although there may be coherence, true knowledge and truth will be unattainable. Although this truth-seeking lacks the direction of later Christian moral philosophy, it nonetheless indicates a long historical interest in ideas of seeking truth and discerning right and wrong actions by turning inwardly.[6] Shifting from the Greeks to Biblical

[6] Rosalynde Welch, in *Placing Private Conscience in Early Modern England*, argues that conscience, as a particularly private concept concerning morality and rightness of behavior, occurs in the aftermath of the English Reformation. She writes that the English Reformation was not a "uniform imposition of ideological Protestantism upon a passive populace, but rather a dynamic process of negotiation and mediation between forms of Protestantism and Catholicism; partisan polemic requires protagonist and antagonist. English Catholics participated in reformation both positively and negatively: continued

history, a moral understanding of self-awareness and self-evaluation becomes inherent in ideals of conscience, and that connotation remains relevant, today. There is no particular word for *conscience* in the Old Testament, however scholars agree that the heart serves as the metaphorical place where one finds deeper awareness with God. For example, "Then David's heart smote him, after that he had numbered the people: and David said unto the Lord, I have sinned exceedingly, in that I have done: therefore now, Lord, I beseech thee, take away the trespass of thy servant: for I have done very foolishly" (II Samuel 24:10). There is a negative connotation associated with the smitten heart (conscience). Lindsley writes, "The Old Testament is aware of the reality of a tormented conscience. But its voice is the voice of the divine judge. The function of conscience is attributed to the heart" (9).[7] With the New Testament, and particularly the teachings of Paul, the term itself and the emphasis on goodness of conscience becomes more explicit. Paul says, "And herein I endeavor myself to have always a clear conscience towards God and toward men" (Acts 24:16). Conscience is at once both tormenting and comforting-there is the *smiting* conscience and the *clear* conscience.[8] Throughout the middle ages, ideas of conscience became explicitly related to truth, and truth derived from knowledge. The classical and biblical ideals seemed to merge in terms of an inner self that was capable of discerning right action

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Catholic practice exerted a steady pressure on the Protestant regime, which responded with tightened legislation; alternately, Elizabeth's conciliatory method led her to frame some of her policies with an eye to English Catholic opinion" (6). She goes on to suggest that the development of personal private conscience is the result of this religious schism, and pointedly, a way of reconciling Catholic and Protestant tensions while establishing a state religious settlement.

[7] In *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions*, John Donne talks about the heart in a similar fashion: it is the "bedchamber" of God, indicating that even in the centuries following Shakespeare there is literature that demonstrates anxieties concerning conscience and salvation, and particularly in the case of Donne, the body's internal relationship to God.

[8] According to some scholars, Philo (c. 25 BCE-c. 50) was the first to think through, theologically, a doctrine of conscience. For Philo, it was a "normative" entity shaped by God, intended to "convict, reprove, and expose" in order to bring about a consciousness of sin.

from wrong action-both before the deed was done and in retrospect. Naturally, the ways of resolving such discernment varied between particular religious groups ("Conscience and Casuistry," 6-35).[9] Despite the attention paid to resolving issues of conscience, it was not until early in the seventeenth-century that a derivative of the word *casuistry* was applied to such works of theology.[10] I define casuistry as the self-evaluative process one undergoes in determining justifiable action or speech, both in terms of man's laws and divine law. This process is messy because often in Shakespeare's period there is no "good" choice to be made; Man's laws do not always coincide with God's. Essentially, casuistry is case divinity—"the application of moral law to particular cases" (Slights, *The Casuistical Tradition*, Preface).[11]

Maintaining a clear conscience was a difficult feat considering the competing claims in Catholic and Protestant theology of the period, and late medieval and early modern thinkers paid a great deal of attention to how it could be done. Camille Slights further defines sixteenth and seventeenth-century casuistry as, "a branch of theology that attempts to provide the perplexed human conscience with a means of reconciling the obligations of religious faith with the demands of particular human

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[9] Lindsley writes, "Much of Roman Catholic casuistry and seventeenth-century Anglican casuistry dealt with the subject as a sub-section of ethics. This is not the case with Aquinas' Summa Theologiae or with later Catholic moral theology. The Puritans, Perkins and Ames, in their works on "Cases of Conscience," were also casuists in the most general sense. Their casuistry covered the whole field of ethics" (66). Because of competing theologies following the Reformation, ways of resolving crises of conscience became complicated.

[10] In the year of Shakespeare's death, 1616, the term *casuistry* was applied to earlier and contemporary theology that deals with the reconciliation of crises of conscience. Shakespeare's rival, Ben Jonson, is the first to use a form of the word in literature (OED). Jonson writes about a character going to "talk with a casuist about his divorce," (Epicœne: or The Silent Woman). The casuist in this sense is someone intended to help resolve issues of conscience.

[11] According to Oxford English Dictionary (online), casuistry is defined as: The science, art, or reasoning of the casuist; that part of Ethics which resolves cases of conscience, applying the general rules of religion and morality to particular instances in which 'circumstances alter cases', or in which there appears to be a conflict of duties.

situations" (3). Whether Roman Catholic, Anglican, or Puritan, Christian ethics should regulate all human activity, and therefore casuistry could be applied to virtually any situation: domestic, professional, political, and financial. Casuists understood that unique human situations could obscure the "moral quality" of specific actions. Though questions of conscience arose when Henry VIII questioned the lawfulness of his marriage to Katherine of Aragon, the literature justifying his divorce was less casuistical than polemical.[12] Although Henry claimed his marriage was invalid from the start, and his conscience therefore could not be cleansed until a divorce was granted, his statesmen Thomas More resisted to accept the divorce, and Henry as head of the church, because it was against *his* conscience. Henry's process of "clearing his conscience" is quite different than Thomas More's process of keeping his conscience clean. Simply, Henry lost a wife (well several), and More lost his head. Fundamentally, casuistry of the Roman Church during Henry's reign was intended to guide the priests.[13] However, the Reformation upended the ecclesiastical discipline of the English Church, and a "well-articulated program" for guiding men's consciences was absent until late in the sixteenth-century.[14] In 1589, Francis Bacon

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[12] Henry made the divorce issue a legality. While he claimed his conscience was troubled, he needed something more concrete to legally justify the divorce.

[13] In "Casuistry and Tragedy: Cases of Conscience and Dramatizations of Subjectivity in Early Modern England, Paula McQuade writes, "Prior to the Reformation, case-divinity in England revolved around the sacrament of confession. In response to the threat posed by the Albigensian heresy, the Catholic Church mandated the practice of private confession in the Fourth Lateran Council (1215). A canon of the council stipulated that all parishioners appear before a priest at least one time per year to make a formal recitation of their sins and receive absolution. Because the Church recognized that many of the priests were unqualified to discern between "mortal" and "venial" sins, treatises were designed to aid the priest into his inquiry of human behavior. They drew heavily upon Aquinas and other scholastic theologians. A key component in this practice that seems to have been adopted by sixteenth and seventeenth-century casuists is the method of analyzing both the individual intent and the particular circumstances in which the action took place.

[14] Note: Shakespeare's *Henry VIII* uses the word conscience a total of nineteen times, significantly more than any of his other plays. With the loss of the confessional practice inherent in Catholic tradition, there was no concrete system for handling crises of conscience and repentance at a distinctly

laments the absence of theological texts that address crises of conscience when he writes, "The word (*the bread of life*) they toss up and down, they break it not. They draw not their directions down *ad casus conscientia*; that a man may be warranted in his particular actions whether they be lawful or not" (92).[15] Theologians such as William Perkins agreed with Bacon. Though Perkins' mother was Puritan, and he likely enlisted himself on the side of Reform, he was also considered a peacemaker in Parliament and court. England's break with the Roman Church, and the subsequent, and often inconsistent, theology emerging from Reformed thinkers had left Englishmen and women with many questions concerning conscience and salvation.[16] Slights writes that, "English casuists tried to correct manners and morals that lead men to God, but their primary concern was not to elucidate the great moral truths or to soften stony hearts but rather to disentangle the mingled good and evil in particular and actual situations" (preface). Slights suggests that a key component in understanding casuistry in the sixteenth and seventeenth-centuries is accepting that the usefulness of the practice depended upon approximating specific situations that

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individual level, and theologians recognized the importance of resolving such a disparity. The Henry VIII example demonstrates the monumental societal upheaval that could result from a "crisis of conscience" that perhaps Shakespeare recognized and illuminated in his enthusiastic use of the word, in his play.

[15] In other words, theologians put forth great effort forth writing about scripture and arguing about interpretation, but they do not offer enough direction "in cases of conscience" for particular human situations. Francis Bacon, "An Advertisement Touching the Controversies of the Church of England," in The Letters and the Life of Francis Bacon, ed. James Spedding, 7 volumes (London: Longmans, 1861-1872), I, 92.

[16] See Euan Cameron's, *The European Reformation*. Cameron argues that Reformers such as Melanchthon, Oecolampadius, and Capito thought that doctrines concerning predestination and the particulars of salvation was too complex and apt to lead to complacency on one hand, and "despair on the other." Luther and Calvin, however, disagreed and encouraged preachers and theologians to teach the public about predestination. Erasmus suggested some things "ought not to be made public." Luther and Calvin, according to Cameron, "resisted these arguments for silence for almost identical reasons (131)." While Reformation theology initially focused on great moral truths and biblical interpretation, late sixteenth-century theologians such as Perkins shifted toward less abstract attention to moral concerns.

men actually encountered. Therefore, using silence as a means of understanding Renaissance casuistical practices in *Hamlet* is less of an argument about solving moral problems or answering a specific question and more of an argument for the "habit of mind" with which men approached the process of satisfying their consciences. While scripture was meant to act as the supreme expression of divine will, post Reformation casuists recognized paradoxes that would make it difficult for men to reconcile the authority between man's laws and divine law. Hamlet must obey his father, his king (Claudius), and of course divine law. But how does he proceed when these courses of action cannot be reconciled, morally? To obey his father means killing his king. By using casuistry and silence to resolve his conscience, Hamlet's methods of action (or inaction) symbolize a contemporary concern in Shakespeare's England: how can one remain a good Christian, in terms of theology and scripture, when political and personal demands contradict moral behavior?[17]

Paula McQuade writes about moral behavior and Catholic casuistry in *Othello*, and suggests that because casuistry "examines how abstract principles apply in concrete circumstances, it is more realistic about the consequences of the marital hierarchy; it recognizes that the reality of a wife's social subordination may impede her ability to tell the truth" ("Love and Lies," 418). In other words, we can justify Desdemona's lie about the handkerchief, through the lens of casuistry, because of the specificity of her insubordinate and therefore vulnerable circumstances. Othello asks Desdemona, "Is't lost? Is't gone? Speak, is't out o'the' way?" She responds, "Heaven

[17] I use the term *resolve* loosely. While I maintain this is the goal of casuists, to help men resolve crises of conscience, I do not suggest that Hamlet successfully completes the task or always behaves in a morally satisfying manner. Rather, I suggest his "habits of mind," or erratic behavior, can be attributed to the *process of attempting to resolve* his conscience.

bless us!" He asks again: "Say you?" And she counters: "It is not lost, but what an if it were?" (3.4.78-81). Her linguistic manipulation is lawful because she confronts an unjust or biased judge, her husband. Her conscience is clean, concerning the sin in question (her infidelity), and therefore the lie is excusable. This method of thinking about casuistry is the more familiar method in Shakespeare scholarship. McQuade goes on to clarify, however, that *Protestant* casuists, unlike Catholics, rejected "all forms of mental reservation as heinous lies," clearly demonstrating that at minimum two competing strands of casuistry existed in Shakespeare's England (422). We could argue that Hamlet's distaste of rhetoric and manipulation of words suggests a more Protestant casuistry, although he hardly demonstrates apprehension about "*all forms of mental reservation*" (emphasis mine). If anything, he exercises *multiple* forms of mental reservation, to avoid lies against Claudius, while attempting to gather information and justify his actions. Casuistry deals with crises of conscience in the period, yet *Hamlet* cannot be classified as demonstrative of either purely Catholic casuistry or purely Protestant casuistry.[18] The distinction between these different ways of thinking about casuistry is important for the scope of this analysis, and I will argue that *Hamlet's* casuistry is best understood through Shakespeare's use of

[18] One might think of Catholic casuistry in terms of the 1605 Gunpowder Plot, using deception to get away with something illegal-justifiable or not. We may think of Protestant casuistry in terms of Martyrology, refusing to lie about your faith, even at the cost of your life. In other words, what is acceptable from a Christian moral perspective, when considering the proper course of action to take when the law is antagonistic to your religious convictions? While arguing for William Perkins' role in the birth of Puritan Casuistry in sixteenth-century England, George Mosse writes that it is not the actions themselves, "but the intentions behind these actions [that] are important; it all depends upon the manner in which the action is undertaken rather than upon its actual performance" (100). He goes on to quote Perkins: God "judgeth not the goodness of the work done by the excellency of the matter whereby it is occupied, but by the heart of the doer" (Mosse, from Perkins, *A Godly and Learned Exposition*, 30). This follows Augustinian traditional thinking concerning when to speak and when to remain silent.

silences. Silence offers a form of casuistry that transcends the confessional binary between Recusant Catholicism and Protestantism, the religious and the political. It becomes a language of its own that is necessary for "biding one's time" in order to preserve his or her life and moral integrity, in a fragmented society. Silence acts as a way of navigating the political and religious dilemmas of the period, and casuistical discourse is a way of helping us understand how this works and explains the binaries between virtuous and deceptive silence throughout the play. Ultimately, considering the 'silent casuist' is perhaps a way of reconciling questions concerning life in post-Reformation England for those that are neither Catholic recusant or Protestant martyr, but both Traditional *and* Reformed, virtuous *and* deceptive, playwright *and* player.

IV: *Hamlet* analyses using the motif of silence

The simple binary between *speaking* and *remaining silent* is complicated for various reasons in the early modern Period, and advice concerning silence can be found in many of Shakespeare's texts. In *The Merchant of Venice,* for example, Graziano exalts his own garrulity exclaiming that, "Silence is only commendable/ In a neat's tongue dried and a maid not vendible" (1.1.111-12). Of course, we can dispute the reliability of Graziano's claims considering that Bassanio (the more reliable character) immediately counters, "Graziano speaks an infinite deal of nothing, more/than any man in all of Venice. His reasons are as two grains of wheat hid in two bushels of chaff: you shall seek all day ere/you find them, and when you have them they are not worth/the search" (1.1.114-118). In other words, empty speech

is worse than silence, and this is especially true concerning politics in the period.[19] Often the bard tells us that silence in his world is a good idea, both politically and theologically. A disguised Kent says to Lear when asked what his purpose is, "I do profess to be no less than I seem; to serve him truly/that will put me in trust; to love him that is honest; to converse/with him *that is wise and says little*" (*King Lear,* Conflated Text, 1.4.12-14, emphasis mine). This language is starkly reminiscent to advice concerning silence in *Hamlet*; to be wise is to listen and say little, just as Polonius advises Laertes when he urges him to, "Give every man thine ear, but few thy voice" (1.3.68).[20] We have two of Shakespeare's major counselor figures, in this example, offering similar advice regarding silence, though the former is "good" and the latter is questionable. Kent and Polonius offer a principle concerning silence and speech that we see demonstrated by both commendable characters *and* questionable characters, in *Hamlet*. Recalling Slights observations as aforementioned in the historical overview of casuistry, there are different "methods of mind" concerning conscience, and right and wrong behavior, being utilized in Shakespeare's period, which explains why the silence motif is employed in competing ways, and by players

[19] In *Hamlet's Moment*, Andràs Kiséry writes, "the ability to talk politics is a form of cultural capital and a mark of distinction," in early modern England," and "The stage helped to make politics into an appealing subject, a topic of conversation, transforming knowledge about statecraft from a quasi-professional, instrumental expertise into a form of cultural capital useful in making one's mark in everyday sociable interaction" (11-17). Ultimately, Kiséry argues that *Hamlet* is about the birth of modern politics and the modern public sphere and represents "A turn away from public-minded polemic, and towards the pressures on the self-interested subject" (31). Again, we have an example of recent *Hamlet* scholarship that places an emphasis on the politics of the play above the religious.

[20] In "The Role of Ambassador and the Use of Ciphers," Tracy Sowerby argues that ambassadors needed to demonstrate credibility. In order to do this, they needed to be able to claim political intimacy with their king or queen. As the monarch's representative, ambassadors had to defend their honour and reputation, "at its most basic, this meant behaving in a civilized, courteous manner" (intro). Fundamentally, good ambassadors were persuasive and proficient speakers.

that are both commendable *and* questionable in terms of personal integrity. This is unsurprising considering the competing practices of Recusant Catholic casuistry and Protestant casuistry influencing the period, post Reformation. Despite the interconnectedness between politics and religion, and the clear points of contention both morally and pragmatically, silence as a unifying method of managing one's day to day, whether politically or religiously, life drives the narrative in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*.

The motif of silence is used consistently throughout Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, from the opening dialogue to Hamlet's final words in the last Act. At the very start of the play, Bernardo the night watchman asks Francisco, "Have you had quiet guard?" to which Francisco replies, "Not a mouse stirring." (1.1.6-7). Quiet in this context means "peaceful," immediately establishing a link between quiet, or silent, and peace. Examples of *quiet as peace* are numerous biblically, and there is a sense from the start of the action that when all is quiet, all is well.[21] Throughout the rest of this opening scene the word "speak" is also repeatedly used, and there is a feeling of unease with the presence of the ghost because of his *unwillingness* to speak. Horatio is first to speak to the ghost when he says, "What art thou that usurp'st this time of night,/In which the majesty of buried Denmark/Did sometimes march? By heaven, I charge thee to speak" (1.1.44-6) The ghost does not speak, and Marcellus claims that "it is offended" (1.1.47). Horatio tries again, "Stay, speak, speak, I charge thee speak" (1.149) Yet it remains silent. The ghost has multiple opportunities to relay his story of

[21] See Judges 11:13, Judges 16:2, Exodus 18:23, 2 Kings 11:20, 1 Chronicles 4:40, 1 Chronicles 22:9. In 1 Chronicles 22:9, "Behold, a son is born to thee, which shall b a man of rest, for I will give him rest from all his enemies round about: therefore his name is Solomon: and I will send peace and quietness upon Israel in his days" (1599 Geneva Bible, *Biblegateway.com*).

murder and betrayal but refuses to speak until his son is alone with him.[22] Timothy Hampton discusses the ghost figure in *Hamlet* as a largely political figure and argues that diplomacy is a tool used in *Hamlet* to divert violence away from the state and that the ghost of Old Hamlet represents an archaic notion of the warrior, anti-diplomat (*Fictions of Embassy*, 145-6). However, while the ghost does fit the archaic warrior description, his refusal to speak to anyone but Hamlet implies a markedly diplomatic approach concerning silence.[23] Also, Horatio continually pleas for the ghost to speak, and the notion of silence changes: "If though hast any sound or use of voice,/Speak to me./If there be any good thing to be done/That may to thee do ease and grace to me,/Speak to me./If thou art privy to thy country's fate/Which happily foreknowing may avoid,/O speak!" (1.1.109-16). *Silence*, in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, quickly transitions from something denoting a state of peace, to something that is potentially threatening, with the presence of the ghost.

Despite the militaristic setting of the opening of the play, the reason for the guards' unease with the ghost's silence feels both political *and* religious in theme. Marcellus says, after the ghost's departure, "It faded on the crowing of the cock/Some say that ever 'gainst that season comes/Wherein our saviour's birth is celebrated/The bird of dawning singeth all night long;/And then, they say, no spirit can walk

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[22] Stephen Greenblatt suggests that in many medieval and Renaissance accounts of Purgatory, these "spectral visions" appear "shortly after death, while the memory of the deceased, usually a close relative or friend of the living person to whom the vision manifests itself, is still fresh" (*Hamlet in Purgatory*, 41). This contemporary Catholic notion of the supernatural could partially explain why the ghost will only speak to Hamlet, though he does technically *appear* several times to the watchmen. It seems more likely that the ghost is simply waiting to speak to his son for reasons of secrecy.

[23] Diplomacy is the art of dealing with international affairs, so in Shakespeare's world, foreign ambassadors, court, and monarch. Managing relationships in a way that benefits both oneself and his country is essential. I am suggesting that although players in *Hamlet* are not necessarily dealing with foreign leaders, they are practicing diplomacy regarding silence and secret keeping, among themselves. This tactic works not only in cases of international business, but also when the legitimacy of the monarch is called into question.

abroad/The nights are wholesome; then no planets strike,/No fairy takes, nor witch hath power to charm,/So hallowed and so gracious is the time" (1.1.38-45). This suggests that perhaps the ghost is of a devilish spirit, and if so, can we trust him? We cannot help but question the religious undertones regarding Purgatory that accompany this scene, and while silence acts as vehicle for navigating the political world, it is also foregrounded in the first act in regard to religion and raises questions about the truthfulness of a major point of contention in Catholic and Reformation theology: purgatory and salvation.[24] Speech and silence as a means of carefully navigating the political and religious world continues throughout the play, and it vacillates between silence as virtuous and silence as deceitful in different characters, co-mingling politics and religion in unique ways that are often irreconcilable. Hampton's argument that considers Claudius as the more "modern" ruler, using diplomacy to demonstrate the unity of Denmark and to deflect danger from outside forces, is one example of the different ways that silence is used in a political fashion in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, and rhetoric becomes increasingly important (*Fictions of Embassy*, 145-6).[25] We see this use of language manipulation put into practice with Claudius, in his first speech, when he implores Laertes to speak. He tells him, "You cannot speak of reason to the Dane/And lose your voice" (1.2.44-5). In other words, you will not be reprimanded as long as your speech is reasonable. But how are we to understand what Shakespeare means by *reason*, in this context? Reasonable speech

[24] For more on this subject, see Stephen Greenblatt's, *Hamlet in Purgatory*. Also, Christopher Haigh's "English Reformations"

[25] Stephen Alford, in Fictions of Embassy, suggests that use of rhetoric and language is especially valued in Shakespeare's England, partially because of the various reasons for both collecting information and keeping information secret, in Elizabeth's court: "how to talk about one's loyalty to the state was impossible to disentangle from loyalty also to Elizabeth's supremacy in the English Church" ("Some Elizabethan Spies in the Office of Sir Francis Walsingham," 47).

seems to imply careful use of rhetoric, in Shakespeare, both in terms of politics and religion.

The references to "reason" in Shakespeare's canon are numerous, but one theme is undeniable: reason is the opposite of youthful passion. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Shakespeare writes, "The will of man is by his reason sway'd" (2.2.775). In *All's Well That Ends Well*, he writes, "Natural rebellion, done i' the blaze of youth;/When oil and fire, too strong for *reason's force*,/O'erbears it and burns on" (5.3.267, emphasis mine). Reason is guided by knowledge, and ultimately should act as guide to the will and conscience. Arguably, "reasonable" speech is deemed reasonable by the audience, a particularly interesting concept when considering that Old Hamlet is killed via poison in the ears, a literally permanent silencing.[26] Just as it is important for the politician to listen carefully, in order to gather information, it is also important to carefully select his speech, and to whom. A close reader may determine Claudius' advice to be a sort of warning to Laertes; *be careful what you say*. But more so, *be careful what you say to your king*. Claudius encourages him to speak: "What wouldst thou beg, Laertes,/That shall not be my offer, not thy asking?" (1.2.45-6). But Laertes' hesitation indicates that silence, as a tool for navigating court politics in this particular situation, is the norm. Moreover, Claudius' performance encouraging Laertes to speak is comparable to the previous engagement between Horatio and the ghost. In his speech to Laertes, Claudius implores him to speak five times, in only nine lines of text: "What's the news with

[26] Arguably, the ear represents the internal disorder that is hard to see. The play is essentially about trying to figure out what is on the *inside* (conscience) and to break through the veil of the external, whether it is regarding politics or religion.

you? What is't, Laertes? What wouldst thou beg, Laertes? Not thy asking? What wouldst thou have, Laertes?" (1.2.42-49). While Horatio's passionate pleas to the ghost do not result in speech, Claudius uses his rhetorical skill to urge Laertes (1.2.43). Of course, unlike the ghost, Laertes *does* speak up and ask to return to France, though his words are carefully crafted as one would be expected to speak to their king in a flattering tone. From Horatio and the ghost to Claudius and Laertes, all characters seem to be participating in contemporary examples of diplomacy and court politics, indicating Shakespeare's keen awareness of the realities of life in an Elizabethan court and the importance of speech and silence. Silence acts as a crucial ingredient to make the process of politics work. All of this emphasis on speech and silence takes place before Hamlet appears on stage. When he does appear, he demonstrates no reservation, initially, with his words to Claudius and his mother. Claudius refers to Hamlet as "cousin" and "son," to which Hamlet responds, "A little more than kin and less than kind" (1.2.64-5). His dislike for his new king, and stepfather, is instantly established. Although Hamlet's motivations for disliking Claudius appear personal and political at this stage of the drama, the religious rendering of silence appears in a more explicit way later in the first Act.

Lina Wilder suggests that Claudius' crimes and Hamlet's political status changes the way we must perceive Hamlet's revenge; it is a "restoration of public order" rather than personal revenge ("*Baser Matter*," 114).[27] After his conversation with the ghost, Hamlet tells his friends, "And still your fingers on your lips, I

[27] In her book chapter, "*Baser matter*" and *mnemonic pedagogy* in Hamlet," Wilder writes about Mnemonic pedagogy, particularly concerning memory, and suggests that controlling memory is a means of subordination of sons by fathers, subjects by monarchs, a sister by a brother. She argues that memory is used to gender characters in interesting ways, and her close readings of the text offer useful insight into this paper, although the subject is distinctly different.

pray./The time is out of joint. O cursèd spite/That ever I was born to set it right!" (1.5.188-90). This ideal, the importance of "public order," allows us to juxtapose *Hamlet's* use of silence as an example of useful diplomatic procedure *and* as a means of maintaining personal moral integrity. The religious and political are explicitly linked as we finish the first Act. By recognizing Hamlet as a Prince and diplomatic figure, his revenge against Claudius is more acceptable in terms of personal integrity, because his actions can be justified as politically necessary—Claudius is *not* the rightful king. However, Hamlet is not merely just another Prince trying to get ahead politically; He is a grieving son that goes to great lengths to justify vengeance against those responsible for the murder of his father and King. His concerns for his own salvation, as well as his political concerns, are revealed throughout, both in his use of rhetoric and his demand for a lack of rhetoric (silence) from those whom he trusts most. He asks his friends to swear an oath of silence, multiple times: "Never make known what you have seen tonight" (1.5.48). A few lines later Hamlet repeats his demand, "Never to speak of this that you have seen,/Swear by my sword" (1.5.155.6). After multiple swearing of oaths, Hamlet is still unsatisfied: "And lay your hands again upon my sword/Never to speak of this that you have heard" (1.5.160-61). Ultimately, any actions that he takes will be questionable morally *and* politically, and the tone of the passage when Hamlet passionately pleas for his friends to remain silent is starkly reminiscent to the first scene when Horatio passionately pleas for the ghost to speak.[28] Speech, or lack thereof, therefore holds significant value from the

[28] See John Kerrigan's, *Shakespeare's Binding Language*, for more on oath-taking in Shakespeare. Kerrigan writes, "Oaths, according to early modern commentators, resolve disputed matter. For Shakespeare, however, their decisiveness is frequently deceptive: sworn over points of doubt, they are hedged, conflicted, and unravel" (*Shakespeare's Binding Language*, intro). Oaths are morally, and thus

start of the play, signified by the parallels between speaking and silence from the outset, as well as the demand for oath-taking by Hamlet, to his friends. If Hamlet says and does nothing, he has failed to restore public order to Denmark and failed to obey his father. If he enacts revenge, by speech or action, he has committed treason against his King and failed to obey divine law.[29] Though the political issues and the religious issues are inseparable, the irreconcilability is managed by Hamlet through silences and using methods of casuistry to deal with his crises of conscience *and* play the role of a good politician and diplomat.

Silence as virtuous is a common way of thinking, concerning the period in question, though when we think of silence in Shakespeare's period, from a theological perspective, it is natural to do so in terms of female chastity. Ophelia's silence is often explored in this context.[30] Polonius warns his daughter, in order to preserve her virtuous reputation, "I would not, in plain terms, from this time forth/Have you so slander any moment leisure/As to give words or talk with the Lord Hamlet" (1.4.131-4). Silence protects her from being trapped by Hamlet's "springes to catch woodcocks" (1.4.115).[31] However, in recent years, the relationship between silence and female chastity has been taken a step further by scholars such as Christina

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theologically, grounded, while simultaneously holding political, and thus legal, power. An oath is serious, and Hamlet's request for silence is to be taken seriously, in this instance.

[29] Rebecca Lemon, in *Treason by Words: Literature, Law, and Rebellion in Shakespeare's England*, discusses the 1534 statute on "treason by words" passed during the reign of Henry VIII. She suggests this law reshaped definitions of the word treason for the hundred years that followed, and it did so, "with its innovative claim that treason is based in language" (5). Prior to Henry's statute, physical action had to be taken against the body of the sovereign. Questions of treasonous action, and justifiable action, against a monarch would continue well into the mid-seventeenth century and the English Civil War.

[30] For scholarship that explores Ophelia in terms of silence and female chastity, see: Olivas, Tynelle, et al. "Who Is Ophelia? An Examination of the Objectification and Subjectivity of Shakespeare's Ophelia." 2015. Also see: "Ophelia's Loneliness." *ELH*, vol. 82, no. 2, 2015, pp. 521–551.

[31] According to the editors of the Norton Shakespeare, Second edition, this line literally means traps, "for proverbially gullible birds" (1709).

Luckyj, who explores the topic of silence and gender in early modern England and classical literature and writes, "The notion of *silence as a powerful rhetoric* in itself and an alternative form of eloquence can be traced back to classical sources and is just as frequently gendered male" (intro, emphasis mine).[32] In other words, while silence as a marker of female chastity is a relevant point of study, silence as a quality of virtue is applicable to both sexes, and it is often overlooked. Shakespeare's use of classical texts as inspiration in his plays and poetry is evident throughout his canon, and most recently Collin Burrows discusses Shakespeare's grammar school education and his relationship with classical writers such as Ovid, Cicero, and Virgil, and their ideals concerning morality and speech.[33] Luckyj writes, "Rhetoric, according to Cicero and others, was inseparable from moral philosophy and could persuade men to virtue, establish order in the commonwealth, and bond society" (13). Both Cicero and Petrarch advocated for silence over garrulity, for the orator, while simultaneously insisting on the importance of proper use of language. This notion of virtuous rhetoric, silence over garrulity, can be traced throughout Shakespeare's works, and those of his contemporaries in the early modern period, but I posit that it takes on a particularly resonate quality in *Hamlet*. If rhetoric can be used to 'persuade men to virtue' and 'establish order,' perhaps Shakespeare is suggesting that silence can be used to reach the same ends, just as his classical muses would have done, and that becomes apparent when we interpret *Hamlet's* political and religious silences through

[32] *A Moving Rhetoricke*, intro.
[33] Burrows suggests that Shakespeare would have learned to translate classical texts from the onset of his education and would have been encouraged *not to bind himself to the exact language* of the classical author but rather to *adopt the style and attitudes* of the classical authors (*Shakespeare and Classical Antiquity,* intro, emphasis mine*).* With this education, Shakespeare would have been exposed to the power of classical rhetoric and the moral obligations of the rhetorician, particularly concerning silence versus speech.

the theories of Renaissance casuistry and methods of managing conscience. Silences allow Hamlet, and others, to participate in politics while simultaneously considering the rightness and wrongness of their words and actions. Revenge, in particular, seems to call for a different set of rules regarding right and wrong.[34] Hamlet tells the players before the mousetrap scene, "Suit the action to the word, the word to the/action, with this special observance: that you o'erstep not the/modesty of nature. For anything so overdone is from the pur-/pose of playing, whose end, both at the first and now, was and/is to hold as 'twere the mirror up to nature, to show virtue her/own feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body/of the time his form and pressure" (3.1.16-22). Words and actions matter. Just as Hamlet understands the importance of language and rhetoric, as we see explicitly in the *Moustrap* scene, he also understands the importance of silence, and his actions reflect this understanding.

Cambridge theologian, William Perkins, was an important figure in Shakespeare's England, contributing to popular theology concerning conscience, "weighty and intricate moral analysis, complete with printed diagrams of the path to salvation" (MacCulloch, 389). According to the Reformation historian, Perkins'

[34] Note: In Ovid, one man rapes Philomela and cuts out her tongue; In *Titus Andronicus*, two men rape Lavinia and cut of her hands, as well as the removing of her tongue. So not only are we repeating the bad behaviors of the figures in the classical texts we revere, but we are worsening the crimes. Seneca writes, "An act is not revenged unless it is surpassed." This seems to be a clear message in *Titus*, for example, and Shakespeare is arguably exceeding the paradigms of Roman tradition. Just as Milton wants to "surpass" the classical epic genre he emulates in *Paradise Lost*, Shakespeare perhaps wants to "surpass" the classical revenge tragedy genre that he inherits early in his career, as in the case of *Titus*. However, later in his career his representations of revenge seem to ask questions regarding morality and conscience, more explicitly. What we see as "too much" in *Titus Andronicus*, could in fact be a representation of a young writer trying to cement himself in the traditions that inspire him. *Hamlet*, his much later revenge tragedy, is the product of a more sophisticated attempt at the genre and perhaps a more pointed commentary on popular theology of his period, regarding conscience. Ultimately, however, despite the attempt to resolve his conscience through various silences in the play, as I argue herein, *Hamlet* inevitably demonstrates that 'violence breeds more violence,' and many concerns of Shakespeare's period are simply irreconcilable.

publications were widely outnumbering those of John Calvin by the time of his [Perkins'] death in 1602. Rather than focusing on church government, Perkins focused on Covenant theology.[35] Ian Breward writes that, "Perkins was the key figure in the rally of Puritan forces that took place in the last decade of Elizabeth's reign" ("William Perkins and The Origins of Reformed Casuistry," 9). According to Breward, Perkins' writings were incredibly popular, and he influenced "countless" young men that were entering into ministry and making their way to the Church of England. Because national reform had proven to be difficult, Perkins' and his colleagues instead focused their Puritan cause on individual pastoral care (9-14).[36] Considering their position concerning the civil court's responsibility for handling issues of discipline, rather than the church, the only way that a notion of individual care could work was to appeal to the conscience of the individual. Most sixteenth and seventeenth-century Englishmen despised individualism as we would define it today, so I use the turn of phrase, 'conscience of the individual,' as a means of contrast against the 'collective,' rather than a suggestion that *Hamlet* represents an early example of our modern notion of individualism.[37] I do suggest however, that Perkins'

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[35] MacCulloch writes, "From the early days of Reformed Protestantism in Bullinger's Zürich, the theme of Covenant was an attractive metaphor in societies which were trying to live up to the divine plan for Israel. A further reason for its attractiveness was that it provided an answer to that familiar problem of 'antinomianism': free grace might seem to destroy the importance of moral law in human affairs if God's plan of salvation had nothing to do with morality. Perkins took this one step further. He suggested a sort of "temporary faith" given to those who are damned according to double predestination. For more on this, see MacCulloch's *The Reformation.*

[36] Perkins' thoughts on "temporary faith" demanded that individual pastoral care be emphasized. After all, theologians could not agree as to whether or not predestination and double predestination was appropriate for preaching to groups. It was a sensitive subject.

[37] See the following publication for more on individualism in Shakespeare, including *Hamlet* and *Romeo and Juliet.* Holbrook discusses motifs of blackness, solitariness, and melancholy to make connections to modern conceptions of individualism: Holbrook, Peter. *Shakespeare's Individualism*. Cambridge, U.K.; New York, Cambridge University Press, 2010.
Also see, Low, Anthony. "Hamlet and the Ghost of Purgatory: Intimations of Killing the Father." *English Literary Renaissance*, vol. 29, no. 3, 1999, pp. 443–467.

reputation as the "doctor of conscience," and the many widely read works that he and other post Reformation theologians devoted to answering questions concerning conscience and salvation had a marked effect on the culture which produced *Hamlet*.[38] While others, such as Woolton in *Of the conscience* (1576) and Hume's *Ane treatise of conscience* (1594) clearly demonstrate that resolving crises of conscience was a legitimate issue in Shakespeare's England, Perkins' writings offer a rich body of work that considers conscience and how the individual can maintain his or her Christian moral integrity while navigating a particularly unstable political society, and his works are popularly distributed in London in the 1590s when Shakespeare is arriving on the scene.[39] Moreover the social implications of this interest in conscience and salvation reveals a great deal about life in early modern England, post-Reformation.[40]

For Perkins, in order to maintain moral integrity and a clean conscience, one must understand natural law and then apply that knowledge to individual decisions. Departing from Medieval theologians and adopting a reformed position, Perkins taught that conscience was in the understanding: "a part of the understanding in all reasonable creatures, determining of their particular actions either with them or

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[38] See: Breward, I. (ed.) *The Works of William Perkins*, Berkshire, England. Sutton-Courtnay Press, 1970, intro.

[39] See: Woolton, John. *Of the Conscience A Discourse Wherein Is Playnely Declared, the Vnspeakeable Ioye, and Comfort of a Good Conscience, and the Intollerable Griefe and Discomfort of an Euill Conscience. Made by Iohn Woolton, Minister of the Gospell. Anno. 1576.* London], Imprinted by H. Iackson, for Humfery Toye, 1576. See also: Hume, Alexander. *Ane Treatise of Conscience Quhairin Divers Secreits Concerning That Subiect, Are Discovered, as May Appeare, in the Table Following.* At Edinburgh, Printed by Robert Walde-Graue Printer to the Kings Maiestie, 1594.

[40] The attention to theological issues at an individual level demonstrates the struggle that Englishmen and women must have faced during the Reformation years. Perkins' works on conscience, how to navigate particular human laws *and* maintain moral integrity, were extremely popular. Reasonably, debates on the existence of Purgatory and the truthfulness of Predestination created anxiety in lay people concerning their salvation.

against them".[41] A key component in determining the rightfulness or wrongfulness of action is to listen, and then evaluate.[42] Claudius literally strips Old Hamlet of this ability to listen by pouring the poison into his ears. The ghost tells Hamlet, "Upon my secure hour thy uncle stole/With juice of cursèd hebenon in a vial,/And in the porches of mine ears did pour/The leperous distilment" (1.5.61-4). This jeopardizes his political position *and* his salvation. However, although the ghost asks Hamlet to revenge this crime, to save Denmark from being a "couch for luxury and damnèd incest," he instructs him further to "Taint not thy mind, nor let thy soul contrive/Against thy mother aught" (1.5.85). In other words, *however you pursue justice, do not let yourself become corrupt*; Keep your conscience clean. Hamlet's actions are delayed because he is experiencing a crisis of conscience that parallels the concern in England, among Christians, regarding salvation; How can Hamlet pursue political revenge with a clean conscience? Silence is not the solution to Hamlet's dilemma, but if it is the language of conscience, self-evaluative and personal, and conscience is the key to salvation, then silence is Hamlet's only option, albeit temporary. Silence, in this regard, represents both the "Old Hamlet" way of ruling, lack of rhetoric, and Claudius' new way of ruling, diplomacy and careful selection of speech. Shakespeare's silences then act as both political and religious necessities to increase one's potential for survival in this world, and the next.

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[41] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theological* (London, 1920-25), I.q 79. a 13. ad 1-3.

[42] Perkins writes, "The things that conscience determines of, are a mans owne actions. To be certen what an other man hath saide or done, is commonly called knowledge: but for a man to be certen what he himselfe hath done or saide, that is conscience" (Perkins*, A Golden Chain*, 4).
Hamlet needs to know the truth about Claudius' actions, then, to satisfy his own conscience regarding revenge.

According to Perkins, it is important for man to understand the relationship between intelligence and conscience, and that is a difficult task. Hamlet's character perfectly represents this struggle, and his most popular lines in the play are directly mirrored in *A Golden Chain*: "Intelligence simply conceives a thing *to be or not to be*" (Perkins, 4, emphasis mine). Action must be determined by first determining truth. Therefore, Hamlet's delay concerning political action is morally driven. He cannot in good conscience proceed until he gathers information. This concept is repeatedly emphasized by Perkins' popular theology, and we see it performed throughout *Hamlet* in both implicit and explicit ways. Although De Grazia's commentary on these lines, that he must hold his tongue because it is treasonous to do otherwise, is convincing, the speech as a whole reflects a more complicated struggle, and Hamlet cannot be motivated by politics alone; He has multiple obligations to contend with: his familial ties to both Claudius and Gertrude, his political status as both prince and subject, and his relationship with God and his own salvation.[43] Immediately, we see a juxtaposition between silence as a diplomatic/political strategy *and* silence as a virtuous Christian quality. Silence is a temporary, though honorable, solution for Hamlet, and his inaction concerning revenge allows him to fulfill two opposing concerns in early modern England. First, he is playing the role of a good diplomat and Prince by listening, collecting information, and saying little. Second, he is being a good Christian by employing Perkins' concept of casuistry when he [Perkins] writes, "The things that conscience determines of, are a mans owne actions" and "To be certen what an other man hath saide or done, is commonly called

[43] De Grazia, Margreta. *Hamlet without Hamlet*. Cambridge; New York, Cambridge University Press, 2007.

knowledge: but for man to be certen what he himselfe hath done or saide, that is conscience" (*A Golden Chain*, 4). He must '*search his heart and be silent*.'[44]

Thomas More and William Tyndale precede Perkins in writing about conscience and are valuable examples of popular early modern humanists that espouse the type of advice we see in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. More wore many hats in early Tudor England, but parallels Hamlet in this investigation as a representative of the two central ideas being explored herein: he was a political diplomat, and he was a Christian that was consistently concerned with personal integrity. Gerald Wegemer writes of More, "The concept of 'integrity' is immensely important in understanding Thomas More…More was the first to use the word 'integrity' as we use it today, and he shows that integrity is impossible without a conscience guided by just law and *long reflection* upon the character of just law" ("Integrity and Conscience in the Life and Thought of Thomas More," emphasis mine, intro). Henry VIII advised More on two separate occasions to always look first to God and his conscience and *then* to his King. Although the sincerity of Henry's words and character is debatable, just as Polonius' character is questionable, this string of advice seems reasonable. While the political situation is of a pressing concern, personal integrity is important to Hamlet, just as Thomas More before him. Shakespeare's attention to using methods of casuistical discourse to influence political action cannot be overlooked. Ultimately, concern for personal integrity and maintaining a clear conscience drives the action, or

[44] This theme of silent prayer and private communication with God is common in Reformation theology, and scripture suggests that private prayer is most honest: **"**And when thou prayest, be not as the hypocrites: for they love to stand and pray in the Synagogues, and in the corners of the streets, because they would be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, they have their reward. But when thou prayest, enter into thy chamber: and when thou hast shut thy door, pray unto thy Father which is in secret, and thy Father which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly" (Matthew 6: 5-6, 1599 Geneva Bible).

lack thereof, in *Hamlet,* through silence—both political silences and religious silences, which are inherently interconnected. Camille Slights writes about the casuistical tradition in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, suggesting that Shakespeare's play presents a situation that calls for casuistry, "one where conflicting principles and the obscurity and ambiguity of available evidence mean that it is difficult to make decisions that can assure a safe conscience" ("Cases of Conscience in Shakespeare's Tragedies," 79). There is a parallel to be made between this early Shakespeare tragedy concerning moral choice and the much later tragedy, *Hamlet*. Ultimately, the advice one both gives and receives, personally or politically, is an important factor in guiding one's conscience in morally responsible ways and assuring both survival in court *and* salvation.

Early in the play, Laertes and Polonius advise Ophelia concerning her relationship with Hamlet. Laertes warns her not to trust Hamlet's words, *yet*. He says,

> His Will is not his own,
> For he himself is subject to his birth.
> He may not, as unvalued persons do,
> Carve for himself, for on his choice depends
> The sanity and health of the whole state;
> And therefore must his choice be circumscribed
> Unto the voice and yielding of that body
> Whereof he is the head. Then if he says he loves you,
> It fits your wisdom so far to believe it
> As he in his peculiar sect and force

May give his saying deed, which is no further

Than the main voice of Denmark goes withal (1.3.17-28).

In other words, Hamlet's words hold a greater weight than a man of their station because he is a prince and speaks for the entire state of Denmark. This explains his caution earlier in the play to verbally express his discontent with his mother's behavior, from the political perspective. But these words do not belong to Hamlet; they are the words of Laertes who is espousing *his* idea of what a Prince is supposed to be. Nonetheless, the advice regarding silence is consistent. Following Laertes, Polonius also advises Ophelia concerning her relationship with Hamlet. He tells her, "In few, Ophelia,/Do not believe his vows, for they are brokers,/Not of the dye which their investments show,/But mere imploratators of unholy suits,/Breathing like sanctified and pious bawds/The better to beguile" (1.4.126-131). Words become associated with the "unholy" in this instance. He goes on to implore her to avoid disgracing herself by giving "words or talk" to Hamlet (1.4.134). In other words, *keep silent*. To withhold her words from Hamlet, and remain silent, is to maintain *her* personal integrity. This also allows Hamlet to fulfill his role as politician. Therefore, silence becomes a mediator that acts in the best interest of both the political and the holy. Although Polonius is referring to Ophelia's chastity and reputation, we can easily make the connection between silence and integrity in a broader sense. For Hamlet to maintain *his* silence and refrain from impulsive action, either verbally or physically, is to maintain both his moral integrity and political status. While we see characters such as Claudius and Polonius offering "good" advice, their intentions are

often questionable. Hamlet's advice and intentions, however, are relatively consistent with his action.[45]

Continuing the discussion of language and silence, John Kerrigan explores the validity of language in *Measure for Measure* to suggest that "testimony does not derive its authority from evidence, as centuries of Anglo-American empiricism lead us to assume, but from acceptance of the illocutionary commitment and accountability of the person that utters it" (*Shakespeare's Binding Language,* 306). I think we can draw parallels from this example in *Measure* to several of Shakespeare's plays, including *Hamlet*. It is important that Hamlet speak with caution for both political reasons and to maintain personal integrity. To remain silent here is a means of preserving himself politically until he decides on a proper course of action. He is also concerned with the integrity of his friends both in this scene and others. Prior to the ghost scene, when Hamlet sees Horatio for the first time in the play, he asks him what he is doing at court instead of school. Horatio responds, "A truant disposition, good my lord," to which Hamlet responds, "I would not have your enemy say so,/Nor shall you do mine ear that violence/*To make truster of your own report/Against yourself*. I know you are no truant" (1.2.168 & 1170-72, emphasis mine). This response from Hamlet parallels Polonius' advice to Laertes: "to thine own self be true" (1.3.78). Again, we see Hamlet both behaving *and* advising others in the same ways that Polonius advises Laertes and Ophelia, and at the heart of these strands of advice in the play is an emphasis on remaining silent until the time is appropriate for

[45] Hamlet asks his friends to keep silent while he collects information to confirm Claudius' guilt. He also keeps silent. He asks the players to be cautious with their speech in the mousetrap scene, just as he is cautious with his speech. His outward dress mirrors his internal affliction, as he tells us when he first appears on stage: "But I have that within which passeth show--/These but the trappings and suits of woe" (1.2.85-6).

words, for the sake of preserving one's moral integrity *and* surviving court politics. Although there are political reasons for the silence, in many of these instances, the issue of personal integrity dominates the action of the narrative. Silence acts as a language of its own, in this sense, as we see the *lack* of words just as responsible for developing the plot as bouts of rhetoric develop the plot.

As demonstrated in the preceding pages, by the time the audience finishes the first Act of *Hamlet*, it has been riddled with this theme of silence. Hamlet's course of action is revealed through his silences, and it is largely in the soliloquies that we see him "unpack" his heart "with words" (2.2.63). He refers to the world as an "unweeded garden," a state of utter despair and suggests that he would end his life if it were not forbidden by God. But it is not until early in the second Act of the play that Hamlet's struggle is more clearly revealed to the audience. Later, In Act 2.2, he considers the passion with which the players recite a scene from a play: "Yet I, a dull and muddy-mettled rascal, peak/Like John-a-dreams, unpregnant of my cause,/*And can say nothing*—no, not for a king/Upon whose property and most dear life/A damned defeat was made" (2.2.43-8, emphasis mine). Even though, from a political perspective, vengeance for the murder of a king is justifiable, he "can say nothing." It is interesting that Hamlet does not refer to the king, in these lines, as his father. He is ashamed that he cannot take action and speak up concerning the murder of his king and is torn between his princely obligations to Denmark, his filial obligations to his father, and his moral obligations to God. He believes that his father's murderer is deserving of damnation but worries the revenger, himself, will also be damned. Hamlet tells Gertrude, "For this same lord,/I do repent. But heaven hath pleased it

so/To punish me with this, and this with me,/That I must be their scourge and minister./I will bestow him, and will answer well/the death I gave him" (3.4.156-161). He never directly expresses concern for his loss of political position, but repeatedly expresses concern for his salvation and accepts his fate as "minister" of justice. From a Machiavellian political perspective, Hamlets asks himself if he is a coward for remaining silent and not taking action earlier in the play. But he cannot do so until he is convinced of Claudius' guilt and hopes that the murder scene in the play-within-a-play will provoke Claudius to confess and justify his [Hamlet's] actions. Hamlet, after revealing these thoughts to the audience, also reveals what I contend is his greatest struggle and primary motivation for remaining silent and delaying vengeance. He tells us, "The spirit that I have seen/May be the devil, and the devil hath power/T'assume a pleasing shape; yea, and perhaps,/Out of my weakness and my melancholy—/As he is very potent with such spirits—/*Abuses me to damn me*" (2.2.575-10, emphasis mine). Before he even learns of his father's murder, he expresses his desire to die, and that the "Everlasting had not fixed/His canon 'gainst self-slaughter!" (1.2.131-2). Clearly Hamlet is concerned with his salvation from the start of the play, and this concern is revealed through his self-proclaimed "weakness" and melancholy." By the time we get to the end of Act three however, and Hamlet's suspicions about Claudius are confirmed by his own confession, he has seemingly resolved himself to the punishment he will face for enacting the revenge.

Hamlet's melancholy and distaste for flattering rhetoric have been dissected by multiple scholars in the past two decades.[46] Ross Knecht writes of the play's

[46] See: Ross Knecht's, "Shapes of Grief": Hamlet 's Grammar School Passions." *ELH*, vol. 82, no. 1, 2015, pp. 35–58; Shaw, A B, and Neil Pickering. "Depressive Illness Delayed Hamlet's Revenge."

protagonist, "in his profession clumsiness of 'words, words, words,' [Hamlet] adopts a traditional anti-rhetorical position, a dismissal of the outward qualities of language in favor of the things they strive to represent but often only obscure" ("Shapes of Grief," 35). To take this claim one step further, I suggest that while Hamlet is certainly adopting an anti-rhetorical position, as the above quotation preceding the play-within-a-play most vividly demonstrates, he does this for reasons that go beyond a distaste for misuse of language; Hamlet is in a state of mourning. In his first moment alone onstage he demonstrates the state of despair he is truly faced with: "O that this too too solid flesh would melt/Thaw, and resolve, itself into a dew,/Or that the Everlasting had not fixed/ His canon 'gainst self-slaughter! O God, O God" (1.2.129-32). Death is perhaps better than the sadness of life, but suicide is unforgivable. As he reflects on his mother's remarriage, and previous outward expressions of love toward his father, he demonstrates skepticism of her authenticity and piety: "most unrighteous tears" and "flushing of her galled eyes" (1.2.154-55). He goes on, demonstrating his internal conflict at the binary between what he feels his mother's relationship to his father *was* versus her recent behavior: "Why, she would hang on him/As if increase of appetite had grown/By what it fed on, and yet within a month/Let me not think on't; frailty, thy name is woman" (1.2.143.6). Hamlet becomes skeptical of outward appearance and internal conviction in this scene. He is sad, angry, confused. We have to remember that Hamlet is a prince and is well-versed in court political stratagem, however, and he understands the importance of saying less and listening more in order to acquire information needed to navigate the dangers of court and preserve one's position therein, and one's life.

Medical Humanities, vol. 28, no. 2, 2002, p. 92.

Simultaneously, Hamlet understands that his grief and anger at the loss of his father, his mother's behavior, and later Claudius' betrayal, are understandable and even justifiable in terms of court and family politics, but questionable in terms of Christian values regarding salvation.[47] At the conclusion of this opening soliloquy, Hamlets says, "But break, my heart, for I must hold my tongue" (1.2.159). He expresses to his audience (and himself) that he must endure the pain of his mother's "betrayal", internally, and remain silent. While the political danger of speaking out against his mother and Claudius is implicit here, Hamlet's emotionally charged words set the tone for his character not as "Prince," but rather "son." And more so, *a grieving son*. He does not understand his mother's remarriage because it contradicts her demonstration of love toward his deceased father. But Hamlet is not yet equipped with the information he needs to speak about his concerns. He knows that he must suffer alone until he has collected more information and given this issue proper consideration. He is faced with a crises of conscience, both politically and personally.

Whether Hamlet is merely melancholic from the loss of his father, appalled by the rapid remarriage of his mother, or upset at the loss of his inheritance is not up for any sort of lengthy debate in this analysis. I do suggest however that his motivation for remaining silent and delaying action against Claudius is primarily the result of his fear for his own salvation. Personal integrity must be maintained even at the threat of a regime, clearly an anti-Machiavellian conceit, and one cannot treat the political

[47] Erin Sullivan writes of sixteenth and seventeenth century Protestants and suggests that for most, "a devout and godly Protestant and a firm believer in the doctrine of predestination, [believed] a heart full of despair was one not simply filled with gloom or discouragement; rather, it was one tottering between faith and rejection, inclusion and exclusion, salvation and eternal hell" ("Doctrinal Doubleness," 534). We cannot be certain if Hamlet believes in Predestination, or Purgatory, or something entirely unknown, but he is clearly concerned with his own salvation.

concerns or religious concerns as independent issues if he is to achieve any sort of confidence concerning salvation. I suggest that England's Reformation is a major contributing factor to the seemingly multi-dimensionality of Hamlet. To briefly deviate, in 1956, Paul Baker directed an innovative version of *Hamlet* that considered the prince's multi-dimensionality by giving its audience four actors playing the title role. Each of the actors portrayed Hamlet's personalities (as interpreted by Baker, of course): a "warlike man of action," "the jovial nobleman," "the introspective philosopher," with the fourth actor portraying a composite of all three.[48] Though I am not attempting to make some sort of modern interpretive comparison between texts, or analyze the motivations behind Baker's construction, I do suggest our modern sentimentalities afford us the means to find this type of analysis of *Hamlet* reasonable. It is likely that an audience receiving Shakespeare's work in early modern England would be incapable of removing the competing religious philosophies, resulting from the Reformation, that are arguably the most important issue of the time, and greatly affect the political instability of the period.[49] Therefore, while Hamlet's delay and often erratic behavior is puzzling to many scholars, today, it is likely quite understandable in late sixteenth and early seventeenth-centuries England, considering the paradoxes that transgress the binaries between Catholic and Reformed religions.

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[48] See: Fiedler, Randy. "Waco, Strange but True: How Baylor's Paul Baker brought Hollywood to Waco." *Waco Today*, Waco Tribune-Herald, 27 Oct. 2011, www.wacotrib.com/waco_today_magazine/waco-strange-but-true-baylor-s-paul-baker-brought-hollywood/article_3bc0e77b-405b-505f-b813-e0d62b996c18.html. Accessed 27 Dec. 2016.

[49] MacCulloch, Diarmaid. "Parliament and the Reformation of Edward VI." *Parliamentary History* 34.3 (2015): 383-400. Web. Also, see: Christopher Haigh's, *English Reformations: Religion, Politics, and Society under the Tudors*.

Reformed religion calls into question the state of Purgatory and reintroduces Augustine's concept of Predestination, undoubtedly raising a new set of concerns regarding *justifiable* sinfulness, if such a thing exists, and salvation, in sixteenth-century England.[50] Impulsive action must be considered more carefully if the option for indulgences and the state of purgatory is removed, and revenge is even more difficult to contend with if one is grappling with the concept of predestination and election. In the final act of the play, Hamlet tells Horatio, "Let us know/Our indiscretion sometime serves us well/Which our dear plots do pall, and that should teach us/There's divinity that shapes our ends" (5.2.6-10). There is clearly an argument to be made here that contends with both salvation and Predestinarian ideals and the tension between Traditional theology and Reformed theology, supported also by considering the questions being raised in the previous scene during the burial of Ophelia and the questions regarding her salvation if she did indeed commit suicide.[51] Hamlet goes on to refer to "th'election" and his hopes, and although most scholars argue that these lines confirm his concerns regarding the monarchy being stolen from him by Claudius, I suggest, considering the allusions to predestination and salvation that precede the lines, that *election* is here meant to have a double meaning (5.2.66). The Catholic Denmark that we see in the play then becomes much more complicated considering the Reformed ideas that are being grappled with. I argue, therefore, that Shakespeare is demonstrating the religious and political tensions of a post

[50] Duffy, Eamon. *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England, C.1400-C.1580*. 2nd ed., New Haven; London, Yale University Press, 2005.

[51] At the start of Act five is the graveyard scene, in which Ophelia is being buried. The First Clown asks the Second Clown, "Is she to be buried in Christian burial that willfully seeks her own salvation?" (5.1.1-2). Essentially, royal order overrules ecclesiastical procedure, and despite the circumstances surrounding Ophelia's "drowning," she is given a Christian burial. Her goodness is evoked, suggesting an exception to the rule, though there is a clear indication that she is afforded the Christian burial because of her social status.

Reformation society in terms of both state *and* conscience not only in the plot but also in the multi-dimensionality of Hamlet's character, and his delayed vengeance against Claudius. Late sixteenth-century casuistry explains Hamlet's methods of mind and the course he takes to navigate the religio-politico world that Shakespeare operates within. Virtuous silences and deceitful silences drive the narrative from start to finish and represent an inseparable connection between the political and the religious in Elizabethan England.

Conclusion

Exploring conscience in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, through the lens of late sixteenth-century casuistry, reveals an inseparable relationship between politics and religion in the period. Shakespeare's use of silences, as both virtuous and deceitful, demonstrate a particular brand of casuistry that is best understood in terms of both Catholic *and* Reformed ideals concerning conscience, and the path to salvation. Hamlet's reasons for delaying revenge has been a topic of interest to critics in recent decades, and scholarship has paid particular attention to the politics of the period. However, the inseparable relationship between the political and the religious can be better understood by examining motifs and themes, in literature of the period, that are relevant to both, such as strands of advice concerning silence in *Hamlet*. Ultimately, *silence* becomes a language of its own through which a Christian performs casuistry in order to take morally responsible actions in his day to day life while navigating potentially dangerous political circumstances. Using silence and casuistry to evaluate questions of conscience in *Hamlet* subsequently reveals the inseparable relationship

between the political and the religious in Elizabethan England, and Shakespeare's particular brand of casuistry provides a unique lens through which to explore *Hamlet.* Ultimately, I argue herein that the political is religious, and Shakespeare deals with this complicated, post Reformation society, by invoking silences from the start of the narrative to Hamlet's final words; Hamlet asks Horatio to tell the story of what has transpired to the new King, Fortinbras, "more and less"…"The rest is silence" (5.2.299-300). Hamlet does not ask Horatio to pray for him, or to perform any other Catholic deathbed rituals. The story can be told, but the good of it, or the bad, cannot be shared by Hamlet; Only the conscience of the individual hearing the story can determine that. Essentially, we are introduced to Hamlet, in his first soliloquy, with "Break my heart, for I must hold my tongue," and we are left with, "The rest is silence" (1.2.159 & 5.2.300). And all of those moments of silence in-between the first act and the final act demonstrate that silence, in Shakespeare's canonical work, is a language of its own in Reformation England. It is a language of survival in both this world and the next. Whether it is spoken by the Recusant Catholic or the Protestant Martyr, used to deceive or used to self-evaluate, Shakespeare's silences reveal a method of managing social anxieties and irreconcilable religious claims of the period. While the successfulness of the strategy of employing silence is debatable, silences in *Hamlet*, particularly, create a space of "rest" symbolic of the eternal state of rest one finds in death.

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