

Some Economic Aspects to Private Prayer in Shakespeare

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One of the new subgenres developed around the end of the sixteenth century was advice on composing private prayer. It explored concrete events in daily life, freshly modelling the spiritual opportunities or risks in trade. Less laudably, an economic register was extended to the assurance of prevalency in such prayer. Contrasting positions on bargaining in or with private prayer are explored by Shakespeare in Henry VIII, Measure for Measure, and Henry V.

1. The Art of Private Prayer

The second wave of the Reformation in England moved from attempting to change church structures to attempting to change church members. The long-standing debate over the forms of public prayer rumbled on. However, increasing energy went into developing skills in private prayer. Model collections and advice books for the individual intent on composing his own prayers quadrupled in number over the decades in which Shakespeare was writing, 1580 to 1620.

One of the most invigorating aspects of the reading habits of the period was its taste for self-improvement texts, and prayer was no exception. The schoolmaster John Brinsley was brisk about how ‘the weakest Christian, taking but the least paines, may in a very short space, learne to pray of himselfe’. Brinsley’s True Watch, Containing the Perfect Rule and Summe of Prayer is ‘penned in a most plaine and familiar stile; not to delight the curious with an houres reading, (which I leave to others) but to helpe the honest heart’ (1607, title page, A4v). Such books celebrated private prayer as a vital force that freed social energies, prophetic of what should be and could be. Whether in ‘best-sellers’ or one-off pieces, across doctrinal positions, regardless of the rank or vocation of intended readers, there was uncharacteristic unanimity: for the first time, all lay people were expected to compose their own prayers about pressing issues of family, work, and state.

Writing lengthy prayers, or just following them with attention, took formal training. Children were introduced to the theory and practice of prayer at home and school, perhaps even

learning to read by following the written words of a prayer already known by heart. These were not necessarily set prayers; from the 1580s school statutes often left the matter and form of some of these prayers to the imagination of the schoolmaster (Watson 1908, pp. 38-49). Adults continued to hone their skills in this area, for it was one of the hallmarks of a noted Christian to be able to ‘conceive’ his own prayer (Collinson 1982, p. 266). Official encouragement to do so came in five of the 75 lections of the final version of the Book of Homilies of 1571 (ed. Griffiths 1859, pp. 320-51). Since this gave little practical help on the mechanics of composition, devotional authors filled the gap. Given that the bookseller Andrew Maunsell catalogued over a hundred books on private prayer in print in 1595, such books were evidently perceived at the time to constitute a distinct and substantial subgenre (1595, pp. 83-87).

The composition of prayer was to be approached as a skilled occupation. The Bishop of Winchester, Lancelot Andrewes, called it ‘an Arte no less profitable then the building of houses, or making or armour’ (1611, p. 66r), and Elnathan Parr, Rector of Palgrave in Suffolk, suggested that since ‘seven yeere is holden but a convenient terme, to learne... earthly manuell trades’ (1618, p. 57), then twice as long should be allocated to learning how to pray. The starting point is being fully in the present when addressing the Almighty, arousing zeal by cutting out distraction. It is not merely bootless, it is positively dangerous to pray without such attention; the Dean of St. Paul’s, Alexander Nowell, warned in a popular catechism that ‘God doth worthily abhore and detest their prayers that faignedly and unadvisedly utter with their tong that which they conceive not with their hart and thought’ (1570, p. 56v). Thus the first effect of the prayer came in the activity of making it, as the pray-er learned techniques for managing his mind.

Protestantism gave capitalism its impetus, argued Max Weber, by encouraging the godly to employ their time well, as a sign of the grace that inspired their actions (Weber trans. Kalberg 2011, ch. 5). David Marno thinks attention as a distinct mental faculty emerges in the late sixteenth century as a modification of devotional attention (2014, pp. 135-61), and (looking at economic and educational pamphlets, and corpora analysis) Alexis Litvine agrees that discourses about industriousness were in play long before the corresponding economic behaviour (2014, pp. 531-70). The craft of private prayer, an expression of this spirit, developed skills in conscious application. Just as a concern to ‘convert’ time produced an industrious revolution, a concern to produce correct prayer might be said to have produced an

attentive revolution in habits of mind. Prayer collections typically recommended that the pray-er start with meta-prayers, which ask for grace to pray well, such as the Puritan preacher Edward Dering's lengthy 'Prayer for constant perseverance in praying, when we are dull to prayer' (1624, pp. 240-44), which ends by requesting to be raised up by God to pray for aid to pray.

When the Dean of St. Paul's, John Donne, deals at length with prayer, in sermons from the early 1620s, he dwells on the difficulty of concentrating. 'I lock my doore to my selfe, and I throw my selfe down in the presence of my God, I deuest my selfe of all worldly thoughts, and I bend all my powers, and faculties upon God, as I think, and suddenly I finde my selfe scattered, melted, fallen into vaine thoughts', he muses, and 'sometimes I finde that I had forgot what I was about, but when I began to forget it, I cannot tell'. Donne's self-analysis is particularly helpful because he is honest about the triviality of his problems in prayer, going into details about the movement in self-consciousness. His pray-er locks the door and throws himself on his knees before Almighty God, in a thoroughly business-like fashion, but at some point drifts off. He suddenly finds his mind is elsewhere, tries again, but fails again (and again, and again, until the very form of internal quality assurance which keeps his mind on the prayer becomes the occasion for distraction). He figures this as being possessed by the devils of sloth, distraction, and error, and as a form of acting in prayer: 'I neglect God and his Angels, for the noise of a Flie, for the ratling of a Coach, for the whining of a doore; I talke on, in the same posture of praying; Eyes lifted up; knees bowed downe; as though I prayed to God' (Donne ed. Potter and Simpson 1953-62, vol. 5, p. 249, vol. 7, p. 264, vol. 10, p. 56).

One answer is to find the right external 'directions' or 'resolutions' or 'rules' to act as scaffolding for a devotionally-productive environment. Richard Rogers, preacher at Wethersfield in Essex, describes a fascinating group experiment in mind management. Rogers expands on the role of experience in the godly life:

experimental knowledge in all trades and sciences, what a difference there is betwixt it, and bare and naked skill in the same without experience. So... in matters which are heavenly and spirituall, in respect of the bare knowledge, that men have by rule or instruction onely. He that hath been trained up in an occupation, it may be, hee hath got knowledge and skill in his science or trade: but he is not able to use it to the best

advantage, and his owne greatest profit neither how, where, and when, to buy and to sell... All for want of experience... Even so it is in the spiritual trade.

Thus, in what today's performance managers would recognise as specific, measurable, assignable, and realistic targets, Rogers laid out a daily and particular regime of spiritual and secular activities to hold a 'good and well ordered course' in praying and living; showing 'how to keepe company, how to be solitarie, how to be occupied with their labours, how to cease from them, how to rise and how to lye down... not discouraged at night though they did not all duties (which in one day cannot be) but quiet and chearfull, seeing they did those by good direction they saw most necessary'.

His parishioners, when he told them about the plan, were either confused, incredulous, or irritated, though most did see that it might free their 'hearts and minds' from 'incumberances', allowing them to live more 'chearfully'. The worry that some had, that such 'tying' was going in the direction of the rituals of Rome, was dismissed by Rogers, who pointed out that all his directions came from scriptures. The group agreed to give Rogers's directions a month's trial (later extended to three months), and to note 'faithfully, how they felt it to helpe them forward in well passing the day, more then when they walked without it in the world', but also where it proved hard and where it failed. Each participant in the trial was to follow its plan privately, then discuss the results with the ministry team.

It was a resounding success. The godly concluded that 'they were able with chearfulness and without tediousness to passe the day in their calling, and in the performance of other necessarie duties either at home or abroad, as occasion was offered, which they could never do before, for any long time together'. The result was that 'they were not usually so toward when they went to prayer... they now could find matter to joy in, and make their songs of' (1603, pp. 279, 338-41). The experiment is significant for showing how rationally cheerful – not despairing nor ecstatic – much godly life could be, with its sensible, practical, concrete direction of the attention.

2. Trading in Prayer

Ian Green finds much common ground in prayer collections from across the denominations and within the church; polemic is kept separate from devotion. The principal difference occurs between those prayers composed by lay rather than clerical authors. Layfolk tend to

spend less time on praise of God's attributes and confession, and more time on thanks and requests (particularly for corporal goods). Their prayers are less buttressed with scriptural references and doctrinal explication – in short, less 'professional' – and often outsold those by the clergy (2008, pp. 199-206; 2000, ch. 5). The collections have four main groups of subjects: variations on the six petitions of the Lord's Prayer, devotional practices or spiritual situations facing every one (eg. before communion, against temptation), secular activities common to all (eg. waking, rising, dressing), and difficulties in a particular vocation in life (eg. midwife, traveller, merchant), about which lay authors were as expert as clerical ones. By the turn of the century, the last group had gained considerably over the former three groups in variety and specificity, as well as in length and number.

On economic issues there were prayers, familiar from the bible, about how to possess wealth in a godly way. These speak in general terms suitable to anyone working in any vocation. For instance, a 'Prayer to use wealth as we ought' in The Sinner's Sacrifice asks for a charitable heart;

as thou hast blessed my store, and increased my wealth, in so much as I have not onely that which may suffice mine one necessary want, but have also sufficient to leeve others in neede: drive from my hart any naturall desire of more, and give mee a will to distribute the same, according to the aboundance of my wealth (1601, M3r-M4r).

Dering's 'Prayer against the secret venom, and great danger of prosperity' runs over the danger of forgetting that his wealth comes from God.

My prosperitie leadeth mee, as by the hand, from one delight to another, and from one pleasure to another... But alas, O Lord, I finde by experience that prosperitie (such is our infirmitie) carrieth vs too too farre away... It ingendereth also secretly such peace and confidence in these things, which are but as a reede to leane vpon... But the day of aduersitie... it prouoketh many praiers for releefe (1624, pp. 431-33).

I.C.'s 'Prayer to be said, before any worke wee goe about' brings together the topics of depending on God and using wealth well:

In vaine, O Lord, rise wee earely, and sit vp late, eating the bread of carefulnesse, turmoyling and tormenting our selues with great labour and wearisomnesse vnlesse thou, O Lord, giue a blessing... In vaine endangereth himselfe the Marchant, furrowing and turning vp the waters, vnlesse thou prosper and guide his Ship... Grant that wee may prosper and haue, giuing of our abundance to those poore brethren that

want it, rather then to bee driuen to aske it... Giue me, O Lord, a true feeling of my selfe, that I may rather respect goodnesse, then gaine; and aime rather to liue honestly, then richly; affecting a mediocritie, not aboundance (1619, pp. 180-81).

However, there are a greater number of prayers about the contemporary process of becoming rich, and these deal with concrete acts rather than in the metaphors of godly riches. They do not appear in the earlier primers. The Book of Homilies advises that ‘when we have sufficiently prayed for things belonging to the soul, then may we lawfully, and with safe conscience, pray also for our bodily necessities, as... good luck in our daily affairs, and so forth, according as we shall have need’ (1859, p. 333). The books model prayers for workers in a range of jobs, which offer distinct spiritual risks and opportunities.

Playwright Thomas Dekker’s ‘Prayer for a prentice going to his labour’ names his four main temptations (to pretend to work, or to work grudgingly, or unjustly, or disobediently), then asks that he is put to work within his capacity (at least, if it is helped along by God), and ends with four further temptations (lying, swearing, sloth, and reluctance). It hints that his master is a man capable of trading illegally or immorally, and of being unjust to his staff members. Nonetheless, there can be no exemptions in obeying this God-given ‘Ruler’:

Let me not (O God) goe about my busines with eye-seruice; but sithence thou hast ordained that (like poore Ioseph) I must enter into the state of a seruant, so humble my mind, that I may perform with a cheereful willingnes whatsoever my master commands mee, and that all his commandements may be agreeable to the seruing of thee. Bestow vpon me thy grace that I may deale vprightly with all men, and that I may shew my selfe to him, who is set ouer mee (a Ruler) as I another day would desire to haue others behaue themselues to mee. Take away from him (that is, my master) all thoughts of crueltie, that like the children of Israel vnder the subiection of Pharaohs seruants, I may not be set to a taske aboute my strength: of if I be; stretch thou out my sinewes (O God) that I may with vn-wearied limbs accomplish it... Giue mee courage to beginne: patience to goe forward: and abilitie to finish them. Cleanse my heart (O thou that art the fountaine of purity) from all falsehood, from all swearing, from all abuse of thy sacred Name, from all foule, loose and vnreuerend languages. Let my thoughts when I am alone bee of thee: let my mirth in company bee to sing Psalmes, and the arguments of my talke onely touching the works of thy hand. Take sloth from my fingers, and drowsinesse from the lids of mine eye; whether

I rise early, or lie downe late, so gladly let me doe it, as if my prentiship were to bee consumed in thy seruice (1609, pp. 8-11).

In the scale of commercial importance, next comes the petty trader. In Dekker's 'Prayer for him that buyes and sels', this is a man who is tempted to use false weights or clip goods for small sums, and liable to be envious (or at least cast down) at the sight of others getting on quicker than him:

Let me not be one of those buyers and sellers, whom thy Sonne Iesus thrust out of the Temple: But rather one of those Merchants that sell all to follow thee... Let not mine eye look vpon false waights, nor my hand be held out to take vp an vneuen ballance. Hee loseth a piece of his soule, (euery time) that robbeth his chapman of his measure: & he that vniustly gaineth but thirtie pence, selleth (like Iudas) euen his master Christ... Pull out of my heart the stings of enuy, and let me reioyce to see others prosper in the world, & not to murmure if I my selfe wither like trees in Autumne, though I lose the golden leaues of wealth (1609, pp. 12-16).

A step up again in the scale of operations, prayer becomes like marine insurance for the merchant in the risky import-export business. In I.C.'s 'Prayer to be said by a Merchant, for the safe returne of his goods', the goods themselves rejoice when his prayer is proved prevalent:

with thy Word thou calmest the raging waters, and with a beck layest the furie of the winde. Grant, of thy accustomed clemencie and goodnes, such seasonable and temperate weather, that they may safely arriue at the appointed Port. Bee vnto them, O Lord, their Pylote, lest the hidden Rocks, or vnknowne Sands deuoure them. Be their defence and safegard, lest their enemies make prey on them: that relying on thy fauour, aboue the vertue of their Load-stone, they may ioyfully and merrily touch the desired Land (1619, pp. 117-18).

But when such prayer fails, the merchant loses both money and credit, as in a 'Prayer, in respect of some losse receiued, as of honour, or goods', by the Vicar of Modbury, in Devon, Samuel Hieron:

Is it not thou (O Lord) which hast laid these things vpon me? art not thou he who both giuest & takest at thy will?... Let this abridgement be a schoole master vnto mee, that I may learne by it to draw mine affections from these fading and transitorie commodities. O Lord, what is honour? Is it not a blast, or as smoke which quickly vanisheth? What is wealth? Is it not lighter then vanitie it selfe?... Let mee affect the true honour which standes in the faythfull seruice of my sauior. Let me labor for that

enduring and durable riches, which consists in the knowledge of thee (1608, pp. 88-94).

Mercantile texts of the period return the favour in making their account books prayerful. John Mellis, for instance, starts his accounting primer by ‘praying meekly that this mine intent may be to the laude of God and increase of virtue, as also for the wealth and profite of the readers and learners of the same’ (1588, A3r; Sullivan 2002, ch. 2). Richard Dafforne often ends explanations about accounting issues with a prayer: ‘of these last foure books [ledgers] I intend to treat, and to explaine their proper offices, as much as the All-Comprizer shall please to impart to my present memories apprehension. For, “On thee I God, I doe depend/ Ever mee with thy Shield defend”’ (1635, p. 5).

3. Prevalence in Prayer

Such language facilitates the idea that the pray-er may bargain, not only because it deals with the quotidian actions of trade, but because its petitions are made in such a concrete, detailed way. The Almighty is set targets for his response that are specific, measurable, agreed, realistic, and time-based.

The economic language used about the central issue of ‘prevalency’ still crops up today in brightly sceptical questions about effectiveness (‘Oh, does it work?’) and dourly sceptical questions about efficiency (‘But doesn’t God already know?’) The God of such prayer, Weber said, is ‘a mighty terrestrial potentate, whose freely disposed favor can be obtained by entreaty, gifts, service, tributes, cajolery, and bribes’, arranged in a ‘purely business-like, rationalized form that sets forth the achievements of the supplicant in behalf of the god and then claims adequate recompense therefor’ (Weber trans. Fischhoff 1965, pp. 25, 26). Nearly every advice text on private prayer had to walk a delicate line between establishing the need for prayer and forbidding the pray-er to bargain with God’s own property, the grace to pray.

The Homily on prayer starts by dismissing the idea that prayer is an exchange on God’s part. God requires prayer ‘not because he either will not or cannot not give without asking, but because he hath appointed prayer as an ordinary means’ to give, so that the pray-er acknowledges the giver. God will give according to his will, as he has promised, unconditionally in the case of spiritual good, conditionally in the case of earthly requests,

drawing on John 16.23. However, the image of God being moved by prayer should be seen solely as a metaphor. Hence the description of prayer by William Ames, an influential English writer and professor of theology at Franeker University in Freisland, was full of caveats: prayer ‘may as it were affect or move God; whence it is that the faithful are said by their their prayers as it were mightily to prevail with God... And as it were to strike’ (Ames trans. anon. 1642, pp. 279-80). The pray-er should be both humble about not deserving any response, and thankful if he gets one (Chemnitz trans. anon 1598, pp. 2-5; Ames 1642, p. 279). Part of the preparation for prayer was to develop a sense of neediness, like a ‘little hungrie dog’, in the phrase of the Portuguese Dominican writer popular in England, Luis de Granada (trans. Hopkins, 1601, p. 79), or with the ‘person and disposition of a beggar’, in that of Jean Calvin, who can neither give nor expect anything (ed. McNeill trans. F.L. Battles 1961, vol. 2, p. 859). As to when prayers will be answered, Thomas Playfere, Lady Margaret Professor of Divinity at Cambridge, described how God may impose a delay,

as a merchant, beeing about to put money into a bagge, and perceiving the bagge will scarce hold all the money, first stretches out the bagge, before he put in the money: after the same sort, in this case, dealeth God with vs. God knowing that those blessings, wherewith upon our praiers he purposes to enrich vs, are so great, that our hearts as yet are not capable of them, staies a while, till afterward when our hearts are more enlarged, and stretched out like a wide bagge, we may then receive them, when we are fitter for them (1603, pp. 4-5).

Yet, having swept aside the bare notion of exchange, authors needed to show that prayer is not only commanded but effective. Lists of when it had been prevalent often accompanied the warning that it is still only a request to God, as in Andrewes’s instances of the three types of upheaval caused by God’s response to prayer, such as how ‘Judith overcame Holofernes’, ‘Jonas escaped the Whale’, and ‘the Theife obtayned Paradice’ (1630, pp. 7-8; Narne 1620, chs. 10, 17).

In response to prayer, a change of heart (a ‘resolution’) might be as hard to do as a concrete result, but was less liable to be disputed, as only the beneficiary was in a position to verify that it had happened. A heart sanctified by prayer would eventually turn away from the things of the world. Admittedly, a good proxy measure of prevalent prayer might be the way that heart glowed. For a Rector of Treswell in Nottingham, Henry Langley, the pray-er’s very face would look ‘like one, that hath had converse with God’ (1616, p. 36, referring to Exodus

34.35). Third-party evidence – the kickable sort - was rarer, so more triumphantly cited. The Homily celebrates the biblical strongmen of prayer, such as Moses, whose exhausted arms were propped up in a gesture of prayer, in order to overcome the Amalekites, or whose prayers turned away God's wrath after the Israelites worshipped their golden calf (1859, p. 322; Andrewes 1630, pp. 6-8, referring to Exodus 17.12, 32.9-14). Famed biblical commentators such as Andrew Willet and Gervase Babington, Rector of Barley, Hertford, and Bishop of Worcester, concluded that the Lord was not bargained down in these incidents. He was contented to act as Moses wished because 'in his secret will he had ordained that Moses should pray for them, and that hee would bee entreated by his prayer' (Willet 1608, p. 740; Babington 1604, pp. 445 ff).

Case studies of more recent prevalent prayers were popular, especially prayers at tipping points. For instance, in 1603 a divinity student John Swan reported on similar success in freeing the young Mary Glover from a devil. A team of ministers took only an hour for preparation the day before the exorcism, covering the practical arrangements only. The day ran from 8 am to 7 pm, without a break, as ministers one by one led, in mostly inspired rather than set prayer (in part because Glover interposed her extended prayers, whenever a minister started his). The ministers are highly praised by Swan for the variety of matter and phrase in their prayer, which proved that the spirit was in them. Given their success, the group later regretted that they had forgotten to bring pens and paper, so had not been able to jot down the more prevalent prayers as they had been poured out.

Situation reports from a deathbed (real or fictional) also showed what prayer could do. The bestseller was Thomas Becon's Sicke Mans Salve, with nearly 300 pages on its effectiveness. The sick man goes from health to death in two days flat, attended at each stage by the prayers of his three friends. The text is in the form of a dialogue, where the four men pray individually or together, and then pause to observe what effect that prayer has had on the sick man's soul. Some of these prayers are improvised, some are those by scriptural figures (such as that by Manasseh, King of Judah, when prisoner in Babylon), some out of private prayer books: 'Give mee hether the flowre of godly prayers, that I in the name of us all may reade that prayer, which is to be said for them, that lie at the point of death', says one friend, referring to Becon's own collection, the Flour of Godlie Praiers (1613, pp. 282, 284). The group are amiably uninterested in hearing about the sick man's pains, or in cheering him with speculation on his chances of recovery. Their enquiries are mostly technical ones about what

the prayer has done to his spiritual state. When, just occasionally, a prayer does not seem to have made an immediate effect, his friends assure him that it is only a matter of time.

Prevalent private prayer might be used to confirm political positions. John Foxe commented tartly on the useless prayers of Catholic subjects for a male son to be born to Mary I, and her government's fear about the force of good Protestant prayers, forbidden in a 1555 Act from being offered for Mary's conversion (<http://www.johnfoxe.org>, 1583 edition, vol. 10, pp. 1504-6). In 1594 the 'messiah' William Hacket, and his supporters Edmund Coppinger and Henry Arthington, proposed a prayer duel with Archbishop John Whitgift. Any one of them would match him in prayer before the Queen, each side calling down vengeance on the other – last man standing to win (Walsham 1998). On the third voyage to the Virginia Company, made under Sir Walter Raleigh in 1586, Thomas Hariot reported that native Americans attended the expedition's prayer meetings. When one fell ill, he asked for the group's prayers, and recovered. When crops began to wither, others also asked for Christian prayers. All seemed to be heading in the direction of a satisfyingly high conversion rate, until the inhabitants of more unfriendly towns became sick after the English had left. The native Americans complimented the English on the strength of their prayers against enemies, but the English demurred, 'affirming that our God would not subject himselfe to any such prayers', and that they would rather pray for their enemies to live, so they could be converted (Hakluyt 1904, vol. 8, pp. 379-82). Famously, Stephen Greenblatt reads the story as Hariot raising the issue of how religion is used to subdue resistance overseas and in his own country (1988, ch. 2). It is just as probable, though, that Hariot sees the incident as a contribution to the literature against tempting God, by measuring prevalency without reference to God's will.

4. Shakespeare on Bargaining with or in Prayer

Shakespeare's plays explore the range of bargaining in prayer. Sometimes, praying for some else acts as a rather old-fashioned form of exchange, where a client repays his or her patron by praying for them, thus re-establishing some degree of equality (Reinburg 2012, pp. 149-54; Schen 2002, ch. 5). In Henry VIII (1613), for instance, prayers are the most common form of exchange at court. They are demanded as a form of service to the king. Before Elizabeth's birth, Boleyn asks for the prayers of the King. He immediately devolves the task onto Suffolk (with 'in thy prayers remember/ Th'estate of my poor Queen'), who obediently

promises to 'Remember [her in]... prayers' in the future (5.1.65-79). Prayers are also seen as an appropriate form of thanks for aid from the king, where the obligation is (by courtesy) deemed to be too great to be repayable in any tangible way. Wolsey tells the king that

For your great graces
Heaped upon me – poor undeserver – I
Can nothing render but allegiant thanks;
My prayers to heaven for you (3.2.174-7).

When Boleyn is made Marchioness of Pembroke, but she offers the same:

More than my all is nothing; nor my prayers
Are not words duly hallowed...
yet prayers and wishes
Are all I can return (2.3.67-70).

Conversely, where the expectation of reciprocal care between patron and client is not fulfilled, then prayer can also provide a remedy. The Queen argues that Wolsey's unjust taxation has caused the people's 'curses now/ [to] Live where their prayers did.../ There is no primer baseness' (1.2.62-7), punning on the primers of ill-will that replace the King's primer. Such prayers are not out-and-out curses, but they are passively aggressive. Prayer, which Calvin described as alms-giving to those the pray-er may or may not know, is, declared William Covell, Vicar of Sittingbourne in Kent, a gift which none may refuse (Calvin 1961, vol. 2, pp. 901-2; Covell 1604, p. 176). Thus, at the moment Katherine recognizes her subjection to Henry's legal proceedings against her, she threatens further prayer for him: 'Pray do my service to his majesty:/ He has my heart yet, and shall have my prayers/ While I shall have my life (3.1.179-81). Before execution, Buckingham similarly takes the high moral ground. He forgives his enemy with the words of the Lord's Prayer: 'I as free forgive you/ As I would be forgiven'. He appeals widely to 'All good people/ [to] Pray for me'. He asks his friends to 'Make of your prayers one sweet sacrifice,/And lift my soul to heaven'. They will be in a position to tell the king that they met Buckingham 'half in heaven. My vows and prayers/ Yet are the King's and, till my soul forsake,/ Shall cry for blessings on him' (2.1.82-3, 131-2, 77-8, 88-90). Traitors habitually blessed the monarch before execution, to offer some protection for their heirs; the prayers by Katherine and Buckingham go further, to load favours on Henry which he cannot refuse.

The only character who will not bargain in prayer is the incorruptible Cromwell. When Wolsey, in disgrace, urges him to 'Seek the King/ That sun I pray may never set'. Cromwell

courageously refuses the exchange: 'The King shall have my service, but my prayers/ For ever and for ever shall be yours' (3.2.414-5, 426-7). Given whom you pray for is treated as a loyalty test by other courtiers, then however courteous a refusal, however stout the offer of other services, to refuse to pray for the king when invited to do so is to run the risk of being seen as a traitor. Given that it is a spiritual duty to pray for him, Cromwell here is making a very strong protest against Henry's activities.

By contrast, in Measure for Measure (1604-5) Isabella is scandalously willing to enter into trade. She openly calculates what luxury-grade prayer is needed, to get Angelo's agreement to save her brother:

Isabella: Hark, how I'll bribe you: good my lord, turn back.

Angelo: How! bribe me?

Isabella: Ay, with such gifts that heaven shall share with you...

Not with fond sickles of the tested gold,

... but with true prayers,

That shall be up at heaven and enter there

Ere sunrise: prayers from preserved souls,

From fasting maids, whose minds are dedicate

To nothing temporal (2.2.146-56).

Though she emphasizes that her bargaining chips come from a spiritual treasury, not a physical one, this does not make it any less an exchange. The next time the two meet, she offers double value; now Angelo will gain prayers for himself, and lose any guilt arising from the exchange:

That I do beg his life, if it be sin,

Heaven let me bear it; you granting of my suit,

If that be sin, I'll make it my morn prayer

To have it added to the faults of mine,

And nothing of your answer (2.4.69-73).

Isabella overtly uses prayers as tokens of her power, with value in themselves, and not as requests in a conversation with God.

The action of Henry V (1599) starts with, hinges on, is judged by, and ends in prayer for signs that Henry is legitimate. He never asserts that his successes (nor even his actions) are his own, but attributes them to God: Shakespeare's first solifidian anti-action hero.

So Henry's prayer before Agincourt (4.1.286-302) is often played as a 'gabbled, terrified act of bribery', as Irving Wardle said of the Royal Shakespeare Company's 1984 production (Shakespeare ed. Smith 2002, 4.1.286n). The prayer starts with a two-part request. First,

steel my soldiers' hearts;

Possess them not with fear. Take from them now

The sense of reckoning, if th'opposed numbers

Pluck their hearts from them.

The fact that Henry prays before battle is not unusual, but what he asks for is: for steeling hearts, not weapons; for less counting, not greater numbers. Even God is urged to forget to count a tit for a tat: Henry's second request is that God should 'think not upon the fault/ My father made in compassing the crown'. Henry requests this on behalf of his father, not himself, having been clear throughout the play that guilt cannot be transferred. He tells both Williams and himself, ten times over, that 'every subject's duty is the King's, but every subject's soul is his own' (4.1.175-7), so it is unsurprising that he sets his face against exchange here.

However, the next section of the passage introduces a sharply contrasting register of calculation, beginning with a review of the numbers of set prayers offered since Henry came to the throne. First, 'I Richard's body have interred new,/ And on it have bestowed more contrite tears/ Than from it issued forced drops of blood'. The 'more' in the second line, which might at first seem to refer to the depth of contrition, is clarified in the third line as a calculation about the number of tears. The next clause in the contract he is offering is the 'Five hundred poor I have in yearly pay,/ Who twice a day their withered hands hold up/ Toward heaven to pardon blood'. Henry is buying in a thousand prayer sessions a day (and the folio shows some inflation from the mere 'a hundred men' promised in the first quarto, in terms both of numbers and of neediness). Finally, initiated by the telling salesman's 'and', comes Henry's reminder: 'and I have built/ Two chantries, where the sad and solemn priests/ Sing still for Richard's soul'. Q1's slip, of 'chanceries' for 'chantries', is understandable, given the passage's stress on recording obligations. The register of the passage would be quadruply offensive to its late sixteenth-century listeners. It stresses that his proxies recite set prayers; it stresses that they are sponsored to do so; it stresses that the prayers are for souls of the dead; it stresses his calculation about how many prayers can seal the deal.

The third section of the passage provides a textual crux, over which editors agonise. The folio version is:

More will I do,
Though all that I can do is nothing worth,
Since that my penitence comes after all,
Imploring pardon.

This differs substantively from Q1's 'more wil I do:/ Tho all that I can do, is all too litle'. The rephrasing of the second clause becomes precisely solifidian, as Henry's deeds are devalued from being worth 'little' to being worth 'nothing'. Moreover, a new clause about penitential prayer appears. Editors gaze anxiously at the lines' second 'all'. Gary Taylor, the Oxford editor, lays out the different interpretations: 'all' that Henry has done or can do is worthless (shown by the fact he keeps feeling penitent), or 'all' the sins that his father has done cannot be atoned for, or 'all' refers to the crown which Henry himself still holds (Shakespeare ed. Taylor 1982, pp. 295-301). The Arden editor, T.W. Craik, is less specific: 'more probably all is correct and the vagueness is intentional', the king is 'distressed' about what his father has done but not prepared to say that pardon is impossible. Henry's prayer is, he concludes, deliberately 'not clear-cut enough to run into theological difficulty' (Shakespeare ed Craik 1995, 4.2.299-302n). However, advice on prayer suggests that the stress is on 'Since that'. The initial section of the prayer is a request for a corporal good (the protection of the army), and will be answered conditionally, that is, if God has already willed a victory. Then Henry reviews the invalid prayers he and his proxies have already offered, and concludes these are not worth little, they are worth nothing at all. Keeping the folio's semi-colon after 'worth' emphasizes that a new prayer dialogue begins in the two lines added to the end by the folio. Only 'since that' time in which he and his proxies made insufficient prayers - since then - has he realised that even to attempt an exchange in prayer was wrong.

As Martin Buber warned, there is always a temptation to make a prayer a set of instructions from 'I' to 'It', rather than a conversation between 'I' and 'Thou'. William Fitzgerald argues that while a human audience is a fictional projection by any speaker which addresses it, in prayer the speaker is addressing an audience member who is real beyond the speaker's imagining. But since prayer is voiced only by one side it must repeatedly apostrophize the other side, God, to keep him in the conversation. As a consequence, the object of address is ever in danger of being objectified as a discursive prop, in a figurative scene of address (2012, ch. 2). At the turn of the sixteenth century, the discourse about prevalent prayer

acknowledges the temptation of an instrumentalist approach to what should be a loving colloquy, and tries to correct a misconception arising from the way lay people petition God for help in their daily work.

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