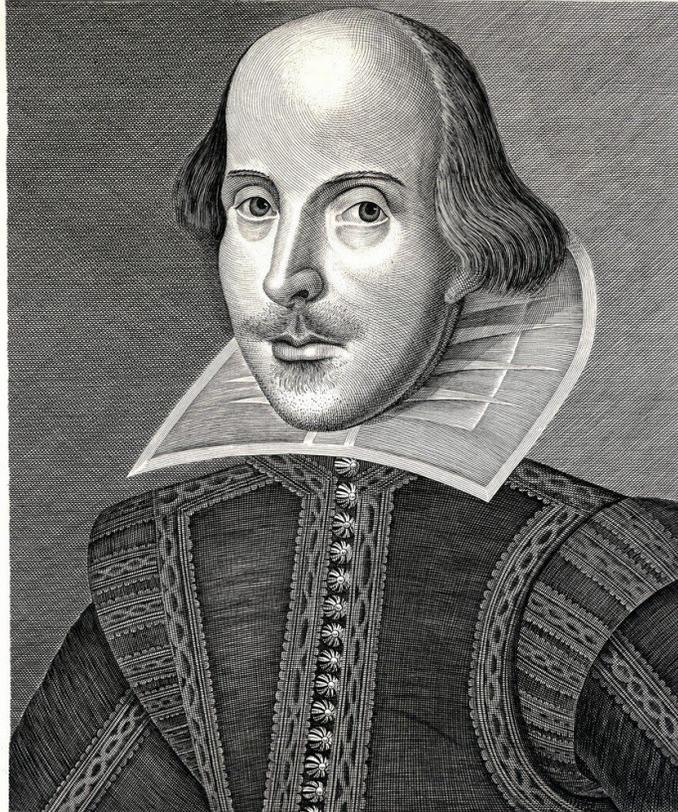


The Devil Can Cite Scripture for His Purpose: Shakespeare's use of The Parable of the Prodigal Son in *Henry IV*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *King Lear*, and *The Tempest*



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Abstract

Scholars have long identified the Bible as one of William Shakespeare's main sources of inspiration. An extension to "The Devil Can Cite Scripture for His Purpose: Shakespeare's Use of Biblical Allusions in *The Merchant of Venice*," this paper explores Shakespeare's implementation and reimagining of the parable of the Prodigal Son in *Henry IV*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *King Lear*, and *The Tempest*. His manipulation of the parable creates a universal sense of morality for the characters in each play and serves as a common ground for audiences of his time to understand and better relate to his works. To modern readers, his reworkings of the parable also serve as a social commentary on sixteenth-century English society steeped in religious conflicts and motifs. He creates several characters that act like prodigals, a term socially recognized by its relation to the parable found in Luke 15, but also universally understood as both an adjective and noun to mean "spending money or resources freely and recklessly; wastefully extravagant. / A person who spends money in a recklessly extravagant way" ("Prodigal"). Shakespeare's various reworkings of this parable prompt a conversation about the price of forgiveness, love, and whether or not grace and mercy are truly free.

Keywords

Adolescence Education - English, Shakespeare, Biblical Allusion, Prodigal Son, *Merchant of Venice*, *King Lear*, *The Tempest*, *1 Henry IV*

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The Devil Can Cite Scripture For His Purpose: Shakespeare's use of The Parable of the Prodigal Son in *Henry IV*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *King Lear*, and *The Tempest*

It is no secret that William Shakespeare is one of the thriftiest authors in English literature. His recycled and repurposed plotlines can be strategically traced through history, often finding fame in their universal understanding by readers and audience members all over the world. Though some view his works as unoriginal or stolen, the Bard's ability to manipulate familiar plotlines into new stories is reflective of the work many authors of his time were engaging in. While the list of his source material is exhaustive, Shakespeare's exposure to the Bible serves as an anchor for many of his works. Through specifically employing characteristics of the parable of the Prodigal Son in the parent/child relationships found in *Henry IV*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *King Lear*, and *The Tempest*, Shakespeare creates dynamic plot points that build upon their biblical origins to create a sense of morality in each play. In his application of Luke 15, Shakespeare capitalizes on his audience's knowledge of biblical stories to establish an understanding for what it is to be human, to ask forgiveness, and to forgive. His use of biblical allusion does not imply that his works are inherently religious or spiritual; instead, he manipulates the universal understanding they provide as a tool for the stage. King Henry IV and Prince Hal, Antonio, Bassanio and Shylock, King Lear and Cordelia, and Prospero and Miranda are some of the greatest examples of paternal forgiveness and prodigal children in Shakespeare's repertoire. His implementation of a prodigal in each relationship quickly morphs into one of his most reliable plot points and becomes increasingly more nuanced nearing the end of his writing career.

Religion in Shakespeare's England

Queen Elizabeth was crowned in November of 1558, in an England traumatized by religious crisis. Her solution came in the form of the “Elizabethan Settlement.” Russ McDonald explains that her compromise “did not completely and permanently eliminate the animosity between Catholic and Protestant zealots, but its terms managed to accommodate the most reasonable leaders of the opposing factions” (309). This compromise, otherwise known as the *via media* (middle way) cultivated a societal climate that heavily fined those practicing Catholicism in its most public and evangelical forms (310). Though attendance was required at Anglican services, “the queen resolutely opposed legislation that would have made the taking of communion compulsory” (310). Her approach stressed a shift to Anglican practices in exchange for severe monetary fines and potential jail time for those who did not cooperate. This shift to a middle way that attempts to accommodate various religious followings with lessened punishments as compared to the Queen’s predecessors left English citizens with more leeway when it came to faith. Her cultivation of this settlement allowed the Protestant church enough time to settle into England by the end of her reign (311).

In his essay “Religious Identities in Shakespeare’s England,” Peter Lake briefly summarizes the main sentiments of the religious climate in England: “The tergiversations of the previous decades had left a cultural terrain strewn with the wreckage of partially disrupted belief systems, sets of assumptions about how the world worked and where the holy was to be found and how it might be approached, invoked, and manipulated” (78). These partially disrupted belief systems created a religious climate that sought reform through the 1580s, and resulted in a bricolage of cultural material open for individual interpretation and appropriation (79). With

conflict and controversy brewing among the various branches of Catholicism and Protestantism at the time, this highly religious society produced a surge of Bible translations and publications that historically impacted the accessibility of the Bible for all. In “Reading the Bible,” David Daniell discusses the emergence of the Bible as one of the most known texts in Europe. Aside from its anchor in the lives of believers, the Bible served a crucial role in the rise of theatre in Europe. Daniell states “One of several reasons for the rise of the theatres and so much dramatic writing from the early 1580’s in England could be that playwrights and audiences had had in their bones for more than a generation past a memorable, direct plain English style, from the English Bible, known in large parts by heart” (166). Theatre was birthed from a generation taught to translate English *sententiae* from Latin to English and back again. The writers of early drama were accustomed to recycling and reworking pieces of text already in existence, and “the Bible, the Word, was now central, not the drama of the mass in a language not understood” (Daniell 169). Perhaps the most fascinating consideration of this society was the perception of actors and theatre professionals in Shakespeare’s England. Regarded in the same vein as houses of prostitution and dog fight arenas, Shakespeare’s theatre was far from what the church considered refined and spiritual. His inclusion of biblical allusion and plot points does not come from a place of religious sanctity, but instead as an attempt to reach a wider audience throughout England.

Shakespeare's Exposure to the Bible

William Shakespeare's father, John Shakespeare, played a pivotal role in the Bard's upbringing as a young man in Queen Elizabeth's England. John was a successful glover in Stratford-upon-Avon, and quickly became an influential member of their community. After his business began to decline when William was about twelve, John became increasingly more absent from his responsibilities and was strictly reprimanded in 1592 for not making monthly appearances at church. Some scholars believe that this absence was due to "a religiously motivated unwillingness to conform to the practices of the Church of England" (McDonald 13) known as recusancy. While there is no abundant or concrete evidence of the Shakespeare family's religious loyalties, this idea of recusancy provides some insights on where the Bard's family may have stood in the midst of the Elizabethan Settlement.

While it is clear that Shakespeare would have encountered biblical teachings outside of the school house, they were likely to have been verbalized and not written. He acquired most of his knowledge of the Bible at school, as Leonard Barkan explains in his article "What did Shakespeare Read?" Growing up, the Bard's schooling likely consisted of "reading religious texts like simple catechisms and the Psalms" (33). Alongside religious texts and Latin grammar, Shakespeare was exposed to literary figures like Terence, Plautus, Battista Spagnuoli, Ovid, and Virgil. Barkan later goes on to mention, "in an early modern education such as Shakespeare's, the progression is not from language to literature but from grammar to rhetoric" (34). This is clearly seen in the years he spent translating Latin sayings and phrases while in school: "the texts most commonly chosen are themselves revealing: collections of English sententiae, whose correct rendering presumably recapitulates their classical origins; or, certain books from the

(already translated) Bible, especially Psalms, Proverbs, or the apocryphal Ecclesiasticus, which, once again, can be readily rendered in the form of pithy sayings” (35). To acknowledge these as the texts and writers that nurtured Shakespeare into the writer that he became also implies that these are the texts that nurtured him into an avid reader. He didn’t attend any university, so his knowledge of lesser known literary figures came from his own drive to read. Barkan describes him as a man who consumed “stories that replicate his personal obsessions; the stories give those obsessions certain shapes; he in turn re-shapes them by producing ever-varying adaptations; in the end he becomes a reader of, and source for, himself” (44). By continuously building upon his literary knowledge, Shakespeare ensured he would never run out of material to manipulate. With knowledge of the most influential book in the world, the opportunities for reworking and reimagining stories that were already so well known created an exciting challenge for a man of the theater.

The Parable of the Prodigal Son

So what exactly is a parable? According to Sallie McFague, author of *Speaking in Parables*, “Current scholarship sees the parable as an extended metaphor, that is, as a story of ordinary people and events which is the context for envisaging and understanding the strange and the extraordinary” (2). McFague explores the similarities between a parable and a metaphor, and the ways in which the two are similar in their ability to “set the familiar in an unfamiliar context” (4). Found in the New Testament, the Parable of the Prodigal Son is one of twenty-four parables in the Book of Luke, sandwiched between three other parables that touch upon the same message of forgiving those who are “lost.” Luke 15 opens with tax collectors and sinners drawing nearer to Jesus as he is being judged by the Pharisees for eating in the company of the sinners. Jesus

begins telling the Parable of the Lost Sheep, about a shepherd who loses one of his sheep in the pasture and leaves his remaining sheep in order to find the one that is lost. Once the lost sheep is found, the shepherd returns home to rejoice with his neighbors. Jesus' commentary at the end of this parable frames the thinking and philosophy for the remaining parables in this chapter: "I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven for one sinner that converteth, *more* than for ninety and nine just men, which need none amendment of life" (Geneva translation, Luke 15:7). These parabolic stories center on characters that find themselves physically and morally lost. In order for them to gain clarity and find the right path, they must come to terms with an amendment that will better their lives. In each of Shakespeare's adaptations, there is an implication that the prodigal character is not living an acceptable life. They are each in need of drastic amendments in order for their lives to be considered worthy of the expectations set before them, and ultimately, their inheritance. Shakespeare's various subversions of this parable prompts a conversation about the price of forgiveness, and whether or not grace is truly free.

The Parable of the Prodigal Son tells the story of forgiveness and mercy between a father and his two sons. The youngest son prematurely begs his father for his inheritance, leaves home to carelessly spend every cent, and is forced to reflect on what he has done after a famine reaches him. After working as a servant without pay, he decides to return home and beg his father to be a servant. Instead of disowning him for carelessly spending his inheritance, the father forgives all of his wrongdoings and celebrates his return with a feast. The eldest of the two brothers stumbles upon their reunion after working in the fields and confronts the father about the mercy he has shown. He states: "But when this thy son was come, which hath devoured thy goods with harlots, thou has for his sake killed the fat calf. And he [the father] said unto him, Son thou art ever with

me, and all that I have is thine. It was meet that we should make merry, and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again: and he was lost, but he is found” (Geneva Translation, Luke 15:30-31). Clearly, the youngest son has acted in a way that is seemingly unworthy of any mercy, grace, or forgiveness. His act of willingly begging his father to be a servant introduces the concept of an “amendment of life” in which the son recognizes his wrongdoings and is striving to do better. This is where the father then meets him with grace and welcomes him with open arms.

For Shakespeare’s England, the repetition of this parable during mandated church services would have instilled this concept of mercy and grace that Elizabethan Christians believed was lacking in the Old Testament. The addition and acceptance of the New Testament to their religious practices and teachings introduces this idea of undeserving grace to a population that finds themselves torn between their loyalties to the crown and their loyalties to their religion. Perhaps the key to the Parable of the Prodigal Son is not the unwavering, undeserving grace that is preached in Protestant England, but instead an amendment of life that positions the prodigal in a favorable light for the forgiving father.

Henry IV

As one of the most well-known father/son relationships in Shakespeare’s canon, King Henry IV and Prince Hal are the perfect iteration of Shakespeare’s take on the Parable of the Prodigal Son. The relationship between King Henry IV and his son clearly evokes the major themes in Luke 15 through Prince Hal’s careless actions and lack of attention to the kingdom. While in conversation with the Earl of Westmorland in Act One, Scene One, the King states:

Yea, there thou mak’st me sad, and mak’st me sin

In envy that my lord Northumberland
 Should be the father to so blest a son--
 A son who is the theme of honour's tongue,
 Amongst a grove the very straightest plant,
 Who is sweet Fortune's minion and her pride--
 Whilst I by looking on the praise of him
 See riot and dishonour stain the brow
 Of my young Harry. (1.1.75-85)

Before even introducing Hal, Shakespeare clearly identifies the relationship between this father and son as one that needs mending as a result of Prince Hal's actions. King Henry goes so far as to wish his son had been switched at birth so that Hotspur's acts of valor, cunning, and loyalty could run in his lineage and not in that of the Percys (1.186-89). Without identifying the specific details of Hal's prodigal nature in Act One, Shakespeare lays the foundation of understanding that this young prince needs a serious amendment to his life before his father can deem him worthy enough for the crown.

Shakespeare juxtaposes King Henry's disdain for his son with a joyous introduction to Sir John Falstaff and Prince Hal in Act One, Scene Two. He structures the shift in scenes in a way that highlights the stark differences between Prince Hal and Hotspur, and King Henry's perception of each of them by introducing Falstaff's prodigal nature. Hal himself refers to Falstaff as "fat-witted" and rebuts his desire to know the time with "What a devil hast thou to do with the time of the day?" (1.2.5). Shakespeare introduces Falstaff as the prodigal influence on Prince Hal's life, and positions Hal as a wiser, more self-aware prince who knows that his choice

of company is less than acceptable for the kingdom. Even so, Hal's right to the throne follows him in every conversation he has with Falstaff, and proves challenging given his father's disapproval of him. While role-playing as King Henry in Act Two, Scene Five Falstaff himself confronts Hal about his positioning in society: "Shall the son of England prove a thief, and take purses?" (2.5.374). They each acknowledge Prince Hal's inadequacies as the son of England and end their role-playing on a rather sour note. Falstaff strikes again for his own cause and prompts Hal with: "Banish plump Jack, and banish all the world" (2.5.438). While serving as a bit of foreshadowing for *Henry V*, Falstaff's iconic line creates an ultimatum for Hal as he navigates his own perceptions of kingship and loyalty. In order to be the kind of son and the kind of king his father needs him to be, he must sacrifice his prodigal ways to seek the forgiveness of his father.

Act Three, Scene Two is structured like the forgiveness found at the end of the Parable of the Prodigal Son. Prince Hal begs for his father's forgiveness, but instead of being met with instant mercy he is met with a lecture on their lineage. King Henry reprimands Hal for his prodigal actions, making mention of his own struggle to win the crown from Richard II and goes as far as to compare Hal to Richard. After promising to "be more myself" (3.2.92) Hal is then confronted with the reality that Hotspur "hath more worthy interest to the state / Than thou, the shadow of succession" (3.2.99). It is this conversation between Hal and his father that prompts him to vow to kill Hotspur in an attempt to earn his father's forgiveness, and ultimately, the crown. King Henry's mention of Richard II provides a stark contrast to the forgiving father seen in Luke 15. A forgiving father would not ask his son to serve as a servant in his own home, nor would he imply that his son should kill his rival to earn his position in the kingdom; he would

instead celebrate the return of a young man with a mended way of life. In asking Hal to kill Hotspur, King Henry implies that bloodshed is his only route to an amendment of life that is honorable to the crown. This proposition of acceptance through murder is reminiscent of the Bible's use of a sacrificial lamb and highlights Prince Hal's positioning as a prodigal son in need of an amendment to his sins. King Henry reprimands Hal in respect to the crown, but also in respect to his familial obligations. The king weeps at his son's actions, and goes so far as to claim that God is punishing him through Hal. This moment between King Henry and Prince Hal provides an intimate look at a father/son relationship broken by betrayal and lack of love. In order for Hal to be an acceptable son, and ultimately an acceptable king, he must sacrifice a piece of himself: in this case, the influences of the men that he should and shouldn't be.

The Merchant of Venice

At first glance, the prodigal son/forgiving father relationship in *The Merchant of Venice* can easily be chalked up to the endless mercy Antonio shows Bassanio. While the details of their relationship are perhaps more complicated than that of a father continuously showing grace to his prodigal son, their characters fit the parable's mold quite nicely. Shakespeare then includes two further subversions of the Parable of the Prodigal Son in the relationships between Shylock and his daughter Jessica, and in the conflicts between Shylock and Antonio. In the most obvious case, Bassanio asks Antonio for money to fund a trip to woo a beautiful woman, stating:

To you, Antonio, I owe the most in money and in love,

And from your love I have a warranty

To unburden all my plots and purposes,

How to get clear of all the debts I owe. (1.1.130-134)

Shakespeare quickly establishes a deep history between Antonio and Bassanio that emphasizes Bassanio's debts to Antonio as a characteristic of his prodigal nature. In response, Antonio states "And out of doubt, you do me now more wrong / In making question of my uttermost / Than if you had made waste of all I have" (1.1.155-157). By mentioning his taken offense to Bassanio's statement, Antonio implies that he would continue providing for him in the way he always has. His characteristics of loyalty and love lend themselves to his positioning as Bassanio's forgiving father. While Bassanio may not outwardly beg Antonio for his forgiveness nearing the end of the play, Antonio is still willing to put his life on the line for him. In Act Five, Scene One, Antonio tells Portia "I once did lend my body for his wealth... I dare be bound again, / My soul upon the forfeit, that your lord / Will never more break faith advisedly" (5.1.248, 250-252). Not only would he risk his life once more for Bassanio, but he strongly believes in his character as a changed man. It is clear that Bassanio has gone through an amendment of life that allows him to no longer be "lost" in morality, but instead a forgiven man.

Shakespeare eases into a reimagining of the prodigal son/forgiving father relationship in his inclusion of Shylock's daughter, Jessica. Against her father's wishes she marries Lorenzo, a poor Christian man, and runs away with a chest of her father's gold. Jessica's elopement with Lorenzo serves to be one of the greatest betrayals to Shylock in the play. The opening lines of Act Five, Scene One perfectly sums up Jessica's prodigal nature in relation to her father.

Lorenzo states:

In such a night

Did Jessica steal from the wealthy Jew,
 And with an unthrift love did run from Venice
 As far as Belmont. (5.1.14-17)

Not only is Jessica physically stealing money from her father in a way that is reminiscent of the prodigal son in Luke 15, she is betraying her father and her religion in a way that implies she is making an amendment to her life. Her conversion to Christianity comes with an implication that being Jewish is a flaw. This is then reinforced by the romanticized conversation between Lorenzo and Jessica at the end of the play. Their repetition of “In such a night” implies that Jessica’s actions are in fact positive in nature, instead of a heartbreaking act of prodigality that is never rectified by the end of the play. This idea of inadequacy in her faith and betrayal of her father stems from the anti-semitic messages expressed by Antonio towards Shylock in Act One, Scene Three. The morals Shakespeare creates capitalize on a forgiveness centered in the beliefs of the New Testament and its belittlement of the Jewish faith. Taken in modern context, the anti-semitic nature of the play can clearly be deconstructed as what society now identifies as a violation of human rights. Taken in the time it was written, this becomes a clear reflection of a society being forced into a position where they are deemed as prodigal children because of the way they live their lives. This belief that conversion to Christianity guarantees one a spot in heaven excludes the devout members of other religions— much like the religious climate in Shakespeare’s England that mandates conformity to Anglican practices but lets members of other religious groups practice their faith in secret so long as it doesn’t interfere with the community at large.

Where Shakespeare really drives home this conformity through his interpretation of the Parable of the Prodigal Son is in the relationship between Shylock and Antonio. Antonio takes the role of prodigal son to Shylock's interpretation of the forgiving father, most explicitly seen in the trial scene in Act Four, Scene One. In the obvious sense, Antonio asks Shylock for money as the prodigal son does, but Shakespeare's addition of the Duke in the trial scene changes this from a complicated moment of justice, to one of forced forgiveness. Undeniably, the morality in the Parable of the Prodigal Son stems from an amendment of life that leads to forgiveness and mercy. This close connection to the parable is addressed by Shakespeare himself from the start of the play. In Act Two, Scene Five Shylock states "They flatter me,/ But yet I'll go in hate, to feed upon/ The Prodigal Christian" (2.5.13-15). Shylock is parting from his own daughter in this scene to go tend to Antonio and his request for money. Juxtaposed with his interactions with Jessica, Shylock's relationship with Antonio is as much a father/son relationship as his relationship with Jessica. Later, in Act Three, Scene One, Shylock refers to Antonio as a prodigal once more: "There I have another bad match. A bankrupt, a prodigal, who dare scarce show his head on the Rialto; a beggar, that was used to come so smug upon the mart" (3.1.37-39). Shakespeare's obvious inclusion of the presence of a prodigal character foreshadows the outcome of the trial at the end of the play. Shylock and Antonio, the roles and expectations are quickly reversed once the concept of forgiveness enters their relationship. In the trial scene, the Duke is the first to speak and addresses Shylock with an expectation of mercy:

Shylock, the world thinks— and I think so too—

That thou but lead'st this fashion of thy malice

To the last hour of the act, and then tis thought
 Thou'lt show thy mercy and remorse more strange
 Than is thy strange apparent cruelty,
 And where thou now exacts the penalty—
 Which is a pound of this poor merchant's flesh—
 Thou wilt not only loose the forfeiture,
 But, touched with human gentleness and love,
 Forgive a moiety of the principal,
 Glancing an eye of pity on his losses,
 That have of late so huddled on his back
 Enough to press a royal merchant down
 And pluck commiseration of his state
 From brassy bosoms and rough hearts of flint,
 From Stubborn Turks and Tartars never trained
 To offices of tender courtesy.
 We all expect a gentle answer, Jew. (4.1.15-33)

By opening with his own beliefs, which he equates to those of the world as well, the Duke establishes his beliefs as ones that should be honored because of his position of power. His last line introduces the concept of expectations in a speech that is already full of implicit biases that favor the mercy and forgiveness of the New Testament. He implies that Shylock should forgive Antonio through an amendment of his beliefs by being “touched with human gentleness and

love,” as if his existence weren’t human enough. In asking Shylock to be touched with human gentleness, he is directly calling upon the same mercy Jesus had for humanity — the same mercy the forgiving father exacted on his prodigal son. Shakespeare establishes the Elizabethan Christian’s beliefs as law in *The Merchant of Venice* through the Duke’s speech and the clear religious tensions between Shylock and Antonio. It is an expectation that all those who act in a prodigal manner— who are spendthrift with their wealth, whether monetary or familial— should be forgiven by those they have wronged. Shakespeare’s society was built on the government’s reliance and manipulation of religious beliefs; his use of familiar stories allows his audiences to better understand and relate to plot points that may not be interpreted the same way had they been taken out of context. Had the plot line of the prodigal son not been present, and had it not influenced the people of the time, Shylock’s trial may have ended differently specifically because of Shakespeare’s use of the Duke as a symbol for their society at large. A society overwhelmed with the belief that a Christian man should be forgiven for his sins would quickly turn their backs on a Jewish man hoping for the same mercy he is expected to give..

King Lear

Shakespeare then subverts the Parable of the Prodigal Son in the relationship between King Lear and his youngest daughter Cordelia. At the start of the play, it seems obvious that Cordelia could be considered the prodigal child in the eyes of her father. She does not love him enough for his standards, and in his eyes she must amend her thoughts on daughterly love in order for her to inherit his kingdom. Her refusal to admit any love greater than her bond to Lear characterizes her as selfish in the eyes of her father.

As the play goes on it becomes clear that King Lear is instead a prodigal father to Cordelia's forgiving daughter. He falls for the lies of his eldest daughters and rebukes the one child who loved him unconditionally. While dividing his kingdom he asks his daughters to express their love for him to prove that they are worthy of the land they will inherit. When Cordelia responds that she loves her father according to their bond, "no more, no less" (1.1.92), Lear lashes back with:

Here I disclaim all my paternal care,
 Propinquity and property of blood,
 And as a stranger to my heart and me
 Hold thee, from this, for ever. The barbarous Scythian,
 Or he that makes his generation menses
 To gorge his appetite, shall to my bosom
 Be as well as neighbored, pitied, and relieved,
 As thou my sometime daughter. (1.1.113-119)

He renounces all love and responsibility to Cordelia because she refuses to confess her love for him the way her sisters have. She meets him with honesty, and expects that her father will meet her with grace, stating "Then poor Cordelia! / And yet not so; since, I am sure, my love's / More ponderous than my tongue" (1.1.75-77). She believes that her honesty will redeem her, and anticipates that her father will trust his favorite daughter and understand that her love cannot be quantified in the way he is asking of her; but where she hopes to be met with grace, she is instead met with disdain. Lear splits his kingdom evenly among his eldest daughters and marries

Cordelia to the Duke of France, the only man who will marry her without an inheritance. The opening scene of *King Lear* clearly details a relationship between a father and daughter that is scarred because of Cordelia's inability to lie to her father. It can be theorized that Lear has reached an age where he is not in his right mind, and the eldest sisters are well aware that they must feed into the idiosyncrasies of their elderly (possibly senile) father in order to get what they want: "Old fools are babes again, and must be used / With checks as flatteries, when they are seen abused" (1.3.19-20). Goneril and Regan blatantly lie to their father about the extent of their love for him, but view that as kindness in response to his foolish nature. Once Lear begins overstepping his stay with each of his daughters, they take on a "tough love" approach that perhaps is more tough than it is love.

Characteristic of a prodigal, Lear expects each of his selfish desires to be accommodated as he travels between Goneril and Regan's respective kingdoms. Once the sisters are able to get rid of him, he goes on a physical journey that ultimately leads him back to his favorite daughter—the daughter that indeed loved him the most. Just before their imminent death in a jail cell, Lear begs Cordelia for her forgiveness, reminiscent of the prodigal son in Luke 15: "When thou dost ask me blessing, I'll kneel down, / And ask of thee forgiveness" (5.3.10-11). The culmination of his journey back to Cordelia ending in a heartfelt plea for forgiveness positions him clearly as a prodigal father wishing for his daughter's forgiveness. He realizes that the amendment of life he was expecting from his youngest daughter did not exist because he was the one that needed to make a change. He misused the love he received from his daughters and comes to an understanding that he morally must ask for forgiveness. Shakespeare expertly twists this plotline to fit his tragic ending. He creates a sense of morality through the implementation of

the Parable of the Prodigal Son in a play so obscured by tragedy that there is no peace found at the close of Act Five.

The Tempest

Shakespeare utilizes the epilogue in one of his only romances to further explore the shift from a prodigal child to a prodigal father in *The Tempest*. The relationship Shakespeare creates between Miranda and Prospero questions what it means to be a caring father and to what extent forgiveness should be granted. Prospero's revenge plot blinds him from caring for his daughter the way a father should, and his performative request for forgiveness in the epilogue undermines the amendment of life that Luke 15 establishes.

Shakespeare introduces the dynamic between this father/daughter duo when Prospero confesses the truth of how he and Miranda ended up on their island. He proclaims Miranda as the apple of his eye: "o, a cherubin / thou wast that did preserve me" (1.2.152-153), and his saving grace during such a stressful time in his past. Despite this grand love he has for his only child, he uses her as one of the biggest pawns in his revenge plot. Once she meets the young Ferdinand, Miranda is taken aback by the shift in her father:

Why speaks my father so ungently? This

Is the third man that e'er I saw, the first

That e'er I sighed for. Pity move my father

To be inclined my way. (1.2.448-451)

She clearly recognizes that there is a change happening, both in herself and her father as she navigates this new sensation of affection towards a man that doesn't have control over her. Prospero then expresses how crucial Miranda and Ferdinand are to his plan: "They are both in either's powers. But this swift business / I must uneasy make, lest too light winning / Make the prize light" (1.2.454-456). He loses sight of his daughter's emotions as he navigates getting revenge on his brother and risks the trusting relationship with his only daughter through his prodigal actions.

As the play progresses and ultimately comes to an end, Prospero grants his brother forgiveness by setting his men free after being confronted by Ariel, who suggests that Prospero isn't acting in a human way:

ARIEL. Your charm so strongly works 'em

That if you now beheld them your affections

Would become tender.

PROSPERO. Dost thou think so, spirit?

ARIEL. Mine would, sir, were I human." (5.1.17-21)

Ariel's questioning of Prospero's actions serves to emulate the Duke from *The Merchant of Venice*. Both characters seek a response grounded in mercy because it is the human way; they prompt reflection through their words (though the Duke's speech is met with a much more tragic ending). Prospero eventually sets the men free but not without a price. He tells Alonso in Act Five, Scene One, "And thence retire me to my Milan, where / Every third thought shall be my grave" (5.1.313-314). This is Shakespeare's greatest subversion of the parable, where a prodigal character seeks to be acknowledged by the public as someone who has made an amendment to

their life but ultimately does not make the necessary changes within themselves. Prospero expects to return to Milan to see his daughter get married, and despite keeping the king and Duke of Milan captive, still manages to fall in Alonso's good graces. He asks to return to Milan in a way that is reminiscent of the prodigal son in Luke 15; he simply wants to see his daughter marry and return to his home country to die. He is met with forgiveness from Alonso and his title of Duke of Milan is returned to him.

Prospero's final speech in the Epilogue comes after a messy ending with no real redemption arc for him as a father:

And my ending is despair

Unless I be relieved by prayer.

Which pierces so, that it assaults

Mercy itself, and frees all faults.

As you from crimes would pardoned be,

Let your indulgence set me free. (Epilogue 15-20)

He pardons his captives because that is what is expected of him, not because their human suffering truly stirs anything in his heart. His revenge plot has been foiled, he claims to renounce his magic, and Caliban remains a slave despite the clear injustice Prospero has put him through. His final remarks in the epilogue come more like a peacock showing off his beautiful feathers than a phoenix rising from the ashes. He requests forgiveness at the end as a performance of his redemption, to meet the expectations of his audience— much like the citizens of Shakespeare's England who were caught between the expectations of the throne and their own religious loyalties.

Shakespeare does not give Prospero a true amendment of life. Instead he utilizes the expectations set forth by the unspoken understanding that to be human is to be forgiving as a way to question the act of begging for forgiveness. Prospero's performative plea serves as a theatrical device to bring the play to an end, but on the social, cultural level it reflects what many English citizens experienced during Queen Elizabeth's reign. In order to be accepted by a society that would otherwise imprison one for their beliefs, one must play the part of a prodigal seeking an amendment to their life.

Shakespeare's use of biblical allusion in many of his works created a common understanding for the audience members of his time. Through his implementation and reimagining of the Parable of the Prodigal Son in Luke 15, Shakespeare crafted prodigal son/forgiving father relationships in four of his greatest works. His ability to use the parable in its most literal sense in *Henry IV* and *The Merchant of Venice* opened the door for his imaginative subversions of the parable in *King Lear* and *The Tempest* nearing the end of his career. In the most traditional sense, Prince Hal and King Henry, Antonio and Bassanio, and Shylock and Jessica, fit nicely into the roles of prodigal children and forgiving fathers. Each prodigal child seeks, and ultimately accomplishes, an amendment to their life as they seek forgiveness from their fathers, anchored in endless mercy and grace. Shakespeare then turns the parable on its head with the relationships between Lear and Cordelia and Miranda and Prospero. Aside from crafting key father/daughter relationships in heavily patriarchal society, Shakespeare introduces the character of a forgiving father. Prospero and Lear both need an amendment to their lives in order for them to remedy their relationships with their daughter's. These plays are

where Shakespeare truly begins to question the cost of forgiveness, and to what ends any human should have to go in order to forgive and be forgiven. In a society so focused on religious sanctity, Shakespeare shifted the narrative to define what it means to be human, both inside and outside of the Elizabethan church.

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