The Space for Will:

Suicide and the Reformation in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*

by

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For Cooper, who made a choice.

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To acknowledge everyone who has influenced me during this endeavor would require an additional sixty pages. However, there are several people to whom I owe my endless gratitude.

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*   *   *   *

Abstract

       In 1517, German theologian, Martin Luther aired his grievances with the Catholic Church in his *Ninety-five Theses*, launching a conflict within Roman Catholicism that led to the rise of Protestantism. The years that followed are referred to as the Reformation—a period of turmoil that gave rise to a culture of ambiguity, particularly regarding the limitations of faith. Protestantism rejected Purgatory, due to its corrupt exploitation within Catholicism, eliminating the possibility of amelioration after death and prompting the urgent question: Where is the room for individual will in faith?

       The Reformation sparked theological as well as secular changes. The understanding of suicide—self-slaughter, as it was called—incorporated both. What had been previously construed as a sin against God began to integrate elements of modern psychology, accounting for interiority—the quality and state of one's mind.

       The literature of the period tapped into these changes, as well. Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* (1590) and William Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (1599) deal directly with the complicated issue of self-slaughter. Employing psychomachy—a conflict between two minds—both the poem and play depict a man of faith engaged in the spiritual struggle and grappling with the temptation of suicide.

       Using *The Faerie Queene* and *Hamlet*, this thesis will address the problem of free will in early modern faith. Spenser's work will serve as a lens for analysis of *Hamlet*. While Spenser aims to conform to Protestant orthodoxy, Shakespeare creates an ambiguous representation of early modern suicide, incorporating both the theological and secular understandings. Conflating Catholic and Protestant doctrines as well as divine and natural laws, *Hamlet* allows both perspectives to exist as possibilities.

       The generic differences between the two texts—allegory and drama, respectively—lend themselves to different strategies of meaning making and thus create varying interiority effects. The effect is the readers' or audience's perceived access to a character's interior. Drama produces a model of interiority more familiar to modern readers. Thus, *Hamlet* is a more accessible representation of a man struggling with earthly pains and anxieties of eternity. The Prince's debate between life, death, and what is to come—Heaven, Hell, or the end of consciousness—emphasizes the willfulness at work within the mind.

       As a result, Hamlet's struggle seems plausible, and possibly practical. Amidst the confusion, the strength of the interiority effect and willful work of the mind are most prominent. Effectively, Shakespeare emphasizes the authority of will within faith, and situates it precisely within the mind.

Keywords: *Hamlet*, Shakespeare, *The Faerie Queene*, Spenser, suicide, the Reformation, free will, interiority, Purgatory

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To be, or not to be: that is the question.
Hamlet

Introduction

Early modern England was plagued by the turmoil of a religious schism formally known

as the Reformation, which spanned the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In 1517, Martin

Luther posted his *Ninety-five Theses* on the doors of Castle Church in Wittenberg, Germany,

launching a conflict within Roman Catholicism that led to the rise of Protestantism.[1] Beginning

with King Henry VIII, the English monarchy swung like a pendulum in its religious allegiances,

propelling the nation further into an arena of hostility. After five decades of monarchical

inconsistency, Elizabeth I ascended the throne. In the wake of Mary Tudor's violent persecution

of English Protestants, the new queen was a welcomed relief to members of the reformed church.

What followed, however, was a period of uncertainty. Four rulers in fifty years had left the

nation bloodstained and mentally bruised. The repeal and restoration of distinctive religious

doctrines as well as the fact that Queen Elizabeth "intentionally avoided theological precision on

contentious issues" in the *Thirty-nine Articles of Religion* (1571) gave rise to a culture of

religious ambiguity that prompted the urgent question, Where is the space for will in faith?[2]

In addition to altering the early modern system of religion, the Reformation also

prompted significant secular changes. Specifically, early modern thought began to resemble

modern cognitive psychology as a large-scale conceptual shift occurred and more consideration

was given to the quality and state of the mind. This development was reflected in the literature of

the period. Audiences and readers were granted access to character interiors—internal thoughts,

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[1] Luther's work was formally titled *Disputation on the Power and Efficacy of Indulgences.*
[2] Carlos M.N. Eire, *Reformations: The Early Modern World, 1450-1650* (London: Yale
University Press, 2016) 337.

emotions, and struggles. Known as interiority, this notion refers to both the inner nature of an individual as well as the subjectivity of the human mind. While a seemingly secular idea, interiority had profound implications for the development of early modern theology, particularly for how suicide was understood.

Prior to the Reformation, suicide—then called self-slaughter—was indisputably a spiritually incriminating act of defiance against God. A "heinous crime," self-slaughter had both earthly and spiritual consequences; self-murderers received non-Christian burial rites, their families faced the redistribution of assets, and the departed were forced to wander in eternal liminality.[3] A self-killer was ostracized both "from the community of the living and the dead."[4] As Burton R. Pollin suggests, the late-sixteenth and early-seventeenth century was "marked by gloom," plagued by violent wars, death of statesmen, and fear for England's future.[5] One might assume it was the darkness that hung over the nation that most forcibly ushered suicide into the world of thought. Regardless, doctrinal ambiguities left the bounds of faith undefined, and as a result the consequences of self-slaughter became unclear, giving rise to a secularization of suicidal discourse.

No other piece of early modern literature deals more directly with the emerging issue of self-slaughter than William Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (1599). Lamenting that "the Everlasting" had "fixed / His canon 'gainst self-slaughter," the young Prince confronts the temptation of suicide and challenges of faith head on.[6] Stricken with grief and fury, and skeptical of his father's ghost,

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[3] Michael MacDonald, "Ophelia's Maiméd Rites," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 38, no. 3 (1986): 310.
[4] Michael MacDonald and Terrance R. Murphy. *Sleepless Souls: Suicide in Early Modern England* (Clarendon Press, 1993),18. Note: Hereon referred to as *Sleepless Souls*.
[5] *Sleepless Souls*, 240.
[6] William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, in *The Norton Shakespeare*, ed Stephen Greenblatt (London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2016), 1766-1853.

Hamlet appears mentally unstable. The question of Hamlet's madness that has confounded

scholars for centuries is at its core a question of will—one deeply entrenched in the

secularization of suicidal discourse that Michael MacDonald and Terrance R. Murphy so aptly

unravel in their compendium of early modern suicide, *Sleepless Souls: Suicide in Early Modern*

England (1993). In this thesis, I will argue that Hamlet is not mad—at least no more mad than

the rest of us. Rather, I argue that Shakespeare adduces interiority—the quality, state, and

subjectivity of the mind—as evidence of the willfulness at work in Hamlet's "madness." This

manufactured interiority (what I refer to as the "interiority effect") blends together the separate

worlds of secular thought and theology, presenting a model of the human psyche that aligns with

modern cognitive psychology. As a result, the Prince's dilemma is easily accessed by modern

readers and one realizes that Hamlet's mental battle is evidence of the individual will in faith.

In order to simultaneously contextualize and evaluate Shakespeare's play, I will use

Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* (1590) as a lens for analysis. Spenser's allegorical poem

was intended to instruct readers in the cardinal virtues of Christianity, and Book I specifically

addresses the problem suicide posed to early modern faith. Spenser includes a "despair episode,"

a common feature of morality plays that depicts a man of faith—Redcrosse Knight—in the

clutches of despair. Spenser's episode employs psychomachy—a literary "conflict of the soul"

manifested in the separation of two minds—to create a representative embodiment of

Redcrosse's psyche.[7] The antagonist, Despayre, is understood by scholars to be a projection of

the knight's psyche, and Despayre poses a threat to Redcrosse's faith by tempting him to take his

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[7] "psychomachia, n." OED Online. January 2018. Oxford University Press.
http://www.oed.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/view/Entry/153908?redirectedFrom=psychomachy
(accessed February 16, 2018).

own life.[8] The characters grapple with one another's mind, which is in fact one mind. However, allegory limits the dimensionality of the characters according to modern-day standards. As a result, the interiority effect reads as flat, or at least more flat than *Hamlet*.

Like Redcrosse, Hamlet is a man of faith struggling with the temptation of self-slaughter, what we may call Shakespeare's modified despair scene. The play, however, is a drama equipped with all the potential a live performance has to offer. Because the characters are unfolded on stage in front of an audience, their minds grow in scope and the interiority effect is strengthened; Hamlet appears as one man wrestling with his own mind as opposed to the two characters shown in *The Faerie Queene*. Thus, as aforementioned, Hamlet's struggle is more familiar to modern readers than Redcrosse's, making it more accessible to audience members and readers alike. Furthermore, *The Faerie Queene* deals solely with the theological implications of self-slaughter and, through a complex model of the human psyche, affirms that faith is both the affliction and antidote to human struggle.

Using the context of the Reformation, its conflict and ambiguities, my thesis will use *The Faerie Queene* to unfold the Shakespearean model of human psychology presented in *Hamlet*. I will adduce the generic differences between the texts to demonstrate how Shakespeare's interiority effect surpasses that of Spenser in regard to modern cognitive psychology. In doing so, I will point to the ways Shakespeare conflates doctrines as well as divine and natural laws concerning self-slaughter in order to deliberately manipulate the components of the Reformation and open up a space for Will in early modern faith.

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[8] Spenser provides multiple spellings of Despayre's name: "Despayre" and "Despaire." I use "Despayre," the spelling in Spenser's first instance of naming the character, for consistency and clarity. Spenser also uses these spellings and derivatives of "despair" interchangeably: "despairing"; "despaire"; "despeire."

Chapter One will provide contextual information on the monarchies of the Reformation through a digest of Carlos M. N. Eire's astute summary, *Reformations: The Early Modern World, 1450-1650* (2016).[9] Incorporating key ideas of relevant primary texts—John Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1536); the post-1517 work of Martin Luther; the Elizabethan *Thirty-nine Articles of Religion* and the Book of Common Prayer—I will unfold the dominant theological theories of the period. Using the sacrament of the Eucharist as an example, I will show that Elizabeth deliberately blurred her position between Catholic and Protestant doctrine and argue that her doing so reflected and contributed to the widespread confusion regarding the true limitations of faith. Relying on Stephen Greenblatt's historical analysis, *Hamlet in Purgatory* (2001), I will also outline the invention, intention, and corruption of Purgatory, positioning it as the crux of the Protestant polemic. Without Purgatory, there was no opportunity for amelioration after death in Protestantism. Alongside the Lutheran doctrines of *sola fide* and *sola scriptura* that asserted the authority of good works and God's grace, the rejection of Purgatory further confounded the bounds of individual will in faith. Ultimately, this chapter will detail the Reformation's propensity for vagueness.

Chapter Two will transition from the religious context of the Reformation to a fundamental example of the emerging relationship between theology and secular thought: early modern suicide. Using MacDonald and Murphy's *Sleepless Souls*, I will elucidate the theological origins of self-slaughter vis-á-vis the sin of despair. Construed as "the very antithesis to Christian hope," despair was a common snare in the spiritual struggle—signifying hopelessness in the face of God—and was believed to be the precursor to self-murder.[10] As Donald Beecher asserts,

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[9] Hereon referred to as *Reformations*.
[10] *Sleepless Souls*, 31.

though despair was deeply rooted in faith, secular "theories of melancholy [were] called upon to explain despair—that persistent condition of the religious life, and condition central to the Protestant religious experience."[11] Melancholy was described according to humoral theory (also known as Galenism), an early modern theory of medicine that had little to do with faith. Humoral theory asserted that the human body consisted of four distinct temperaments, or humors: blood, yellow bile, black bile, and phlegm. Health was preserved by maintaining balance among the four humors, while their fluctuations caused disease and illness; melancholy was the result of excess black bile. However, several scholars—I mention Douglas Trevor, Jennifer Radden, Donald Beecher, Burton R. Pollin, and Michael MacDonald—relate melancholy to despair and suicide. Beecher expressly outlines the emerging connection between the separate notions via the sin of acedia, which was construed as "inexplicable sadness in the face of spiritual good."[12] The sin of acedia bridges the gap between the religious implications of despair and the emotional state of melancholy, emphasizing the overlap between the distinct spheres of theology and secular thought. These changes emphasize the reshaping of the way early modern England understood suicide; as physiological causes met theological implications, self-slaughter began to move toward modern cognitive psychology by accounting for the role of the mind.

This secularization of early modern suicide is also reflected in changes to the judicial system concerning the laws of self-slaughter. In cases of suicide, juries were forced to choose between two verdicts: *felo de se* ("felon of himself") and *non compos mentis* ("not of sound mind").[13] The phrase "of sound mind" implicates the mind in the ability to carry out suicide.

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[11] Donald Beecher, "Spenser's Redcrosse Knight: Despair and the Elizabethan Malady," *Renaissance and Reformation* 11, no. 1 (1987): 114. Note: Beecher's spelling of "persistent."
[12] Beecher, 112.
[13] *Sleepless Souls*, 16.

Furthermore, *compos mentis* refers to "having control of one's mind."[14] That persons judged *non compos mentis* were found innocent indicates that one had to be in control of his or her own mind in order to be convicted; to be sane was to be guilty. Thus, taking one's own life was an act of will, one that required a sharp mind and deliberate decision. The reformed judicial rulings implicated will within suicide, linking the theological sphere of understanding to psychology.

After the discussion of despair, melancholy, and suicidal discourse, I will use Chapter Three to build the Spenserian lens. Here, I will once again engage MacDonald and Murphy in conversation with Beecher to demonstrate the complicated relationship between theology and secular thought that Spenser presents his readers with. Drawing upon the preceding chapter's discussion of melancholy, I will illuminate Spenser's complex representation of despair. Allegory, as MacDonald and Murphy state, lends itself to the "integrat[ion] of theology and psychology," as shown in the bodying of interiors through psychomachy.[15] The effect of employing psychcomachy is an amalgamation of faith and subjectivity; Despayre is read as a projection of Redcrosse's psyche and Spenser effectively models the spiritual struggle. Linda Gregerson's astute analysis in "*The Faerie Queene* (1590)" (2010) refers to Spenser's despair motif as "personation," a one-dimensional manifestation of interiority that inhabits a nether terrain.[16] This is not to say that Spenser's work is not an achievement, rather a comment on the genre of allegory; psychology is not lodged within one character but distributed in fragmented portions across the cast of *The Faerie Queene*. A fractured representational system, the

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[14] "compos mentis, adj.". OED Online. January 2018. Oxford University Press. http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/37806?redirectedFrom=compos+mentis (accessed March 08, 2018).
[15] *Sleepless Souls*, 21.
[16] Linda Gregerson, "*The Faerie Queene* (1590)" in *The Oxford Handbook of Edmund Spenser*, ed Richard A. McCabe, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

Spenserian model of interiority challenges contemporary readers because of its unfamiliarity and complicates the readerly inclination to self-recognition.

This, too, contributes to Spenser's theological model of suicide; a man of faith faces the devil's temptation, nearly submits, but is saved through "prayer and conversion to a godly life."[17] Editor A.C. Hamilton claims that the poem teaches this manner of thought by "showing a hero fashioning or fashioned by [virtue]."[18] Through Despayre's seductive rhetoric, Spenser confuses the minds of his Christian readers by making self-slaughter seem alluring. My analysis will demonstrate that the use of psychomachy forces Spenser's reader to engage with the dialogue and wrestle with the consequences of faith, ultimately achieving the poet's intended goal of instructing the Protestant virtues.

In Chapter Four, I will turn to *Hamlet*. The course of my analysis for this chapter will be three-fold. First, continuing the discussion of despair from Chapter Three, I will perform multiple close readings to demonstrate how Shakespeare represents despair and melancholy. Using the recordings of Richard Napier—an astrological physician who, between 1597 and 1634, documented the symptoms of 139 suicidal men and women—as well as Trevor and Radden's descriptions of Galenic physiology detailed in Chapter Two, I will illustrate how Shakespeare seemingly folds theses separate entities into one.[19] Furthermore, I will elucidate the problem the ghost poses to the play and return to the issue of Purgatory. Simply put, the presence of a specter thrusts Catholic and Protestant doctrine into conflict with one another. As a result, Hamlet's embarks on an urgent mission for metaphysical truth, asking, "Be thou a spirit of health or goblin

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[17] *Sleepless Souls*, 53.
[18] A.C. Hamilton, 714.
[19] *Sleepless Souls*, 51.

damned / […] Be thy intents wicked or charitable."[20] Most notable, however, is the effect of

Shakespeare's depiction of the ghost, as well as the relationship between despair and melancholy

he presents. By collapsing opposing doctrines and ideas into one another, Shakespeare blurs the

lines between secular and theological principles, creating a purposefully ambiguous framework

of faith. That he presents both positions without affirming one over the other enables

Shakespeare to present both theology and secular thought as possibilities.

My textual analysis will lead into the second component of my argument: a comparison

of the psychomachies Spenser and Shakespeare present. A.C. Hamilton calls Spenser's despair

scene his "allegorical version of Hamlet's 'To be or not to be' soliloquy": Shakespeare actually

reconfigures Spenser's internal dialogue into outward monologue.[21] Adducing the generic

differences between the two texts, I will reveal the different strategies of meaning making

employed by *The Faerie Queen* and *Hamlet* respectively. While allegory depends on

personification "whereby abstract qualities are given human shape," the performative aspect of

drama lends itself to the creation of multi-dimensional characters through temperaments and

accidentals—the intricate nuances of the human condition.[22] Moreover, early modern drama

relied predominantly on characters to adduce meaning, while allegory made use of other systems

of representation. Hamlet appears as a real man deeply engaged in the spiritual struggle, making

self-slaughter seem as tempting to the audience as it did to Redcrosse. However, while Spenser's

readers are forced to grapple with Despayre and his alluring proposal, Shakespeare's audience is

transported into the battlefield of Hamlet's mind, at war with their own thoughts and without a

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[20] William Shakespeare, *Hamlet,* in *The Norton Shakespeare,* ed. Stephen Greenblatt (2014), 1.4.40-2.
[21] A.C. Hamilton, 120.
[22] Chris Baldick, *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* (London: Oxford University Press, 2015), 8.

divine voice of reason, ultimately unable to make sense of the solution for peace. I argue that Shakespeare's play adapts Spenserian psychomachy and that its effect within a drama creates a space in faith for will.

Ultimately in Chapter Four, I will juxtapose the examples of self-slaughter Shakespeare presents his audience with: Hamlet and Ophelia. Shakespeare illustrates the conflicting groups of thought regarding suicide through these two characters. Both possibly mad, possibly sane, Ophelia and Hamlet seemingly come undone "driven into desperate terms."[23] Individually, their characters are complex—Hamlet's "To be or not to be" and "this too, too sullied flesh" soliloquies are evidence of the Prince's internal conflict, and Ophelia's death is "doubtful" despite Gertrude's lines that describe Ophelia as "incapable of her own distress" and position her "garments, heavy with their drink" as the culprit in her drowning.[24] Together, Ophelia and Hamlet offer the clashing theological and secular perspectives of self-slaughter; Hamlet's complex interiority directly counters the gravediggers' question of Ophelia's Christian burial in Act V.[25] However, the characters also complement one another, providing the audience with two halves of a disjointed whole that create a complete representation of early modern suicide. The play's strong interiority effect furthers this representation. The presence of both the secular and theological understandings of self-slaughter within Hamlet's mind and the Hamlet-Ophelia dynamic causes the two frameworks to become nearly indiscernible. As a result, the mechanics of deciding between the two positions become more pronounced and urgent than the positions themselves.

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[23] *Hamlet*, V.i.205-6; IV.vii.26.

[24] Ibid., IV.vii.178-9, 175, 179-180.

[25] Ibid.*,* V.i.1-58.

Within the judicial context of the period—recall *felo de se* and *non compos mentis* verdicts—and the culture of religious ambiguity, Shakespeare's interiority effect implicates the authority of the mind in self-slaughter. As previously mentioned, guilty persons were ostracized from both earthly and spiritual communities, while innocent people were considered deranged and absolved of their sin. The juxtaposition of Hamlet and Ophelia as examples of suicide as well as the indeterminate nature of Purgatory cultivate the play's critical questions of self-slaughter and the bounds of faith. By bringing the audience into Hamlet's mind through psychomachy and dramatic performance that generate a powerful interiority effect, Shakespeare emphasizes the power of choice—the ability to discern between possibilities—and provides evidence of the willfulness at work within Hamlet. As a result, the play hinges on the Prince's internal debate between life and death and search for truth in faith amidst the culture of ambiguity—all which occurs within the confines of his own mind. Thus, *Hamlet* asserts the mind as the space for will.

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Chapter One: The Reformation in Context

<u>The Culture of Ambiguity</u>

Scholars typically reference 1517 as the beginning of the Reformation.[26] However, the prolonged period of conflict was not unprecedented; there existed an undercurrent of discontent long before Luther publicized his *Ninety-five Theses*. Author Carlos M. N. Eire suggests that in 1450, Rome was on "the edge of a new era" and includes these sixty-seven years prior to Luther's *Theses* in his analysis, *Reformations*.[27] I owe much gratitude to Eire for his work on the early modern period, as this chapter will later provide a digest of his compendium and further his historical observation to address the pertinent claims of my argument.

Martin Luther's *Ninety-five Theses* were the defining launch point of the Reformation. Challenging the Catholic Church, Martin Luther protested the legitimacy of indulgences, pardons clergy members sold to the laity with the promise of eternal mediation. Indulgences were the key to expedite passage through Purgatory, a divine realm that served as the middle-ground between Heaven and Hell. This exploitation, also criticized by earlier authors, became the cornerstone of Luther's *Ninety-five Theses*. Purgatory was designed for those souls deemed neither completely good nor completely bad. One of the earliest accounts of Purgatory, Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of England* recounts the 696 A.D. "eyewitness" testimony of Drihthelm, a pious Englishman whose death was divinely reversed by God's will.[28] As Greenblatt states, Drihthelm's testimony suggests that "purgation is sharply bifurcated" and can take the form of a

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[26] Eire, xi. Note: Eire analyses the Reformation as a series of reformations that occurred between 1450 and 1600. While this has become more common among scholars, I refer to the period as "the Reformation."

[27] Ibid., 2.

[28] Greenblatt, 73.

space as horrific as a demonic torture chamber for the nearly-wicked, or as idyllic as a sweet-smelling meadow for the nearly-good.[29] Souls entered Purgatory to "be readied for bliss."[30] Giambattista Vico, an early eighteenth century philosopher, gave thoughtful consideration to the idea that gods, and presumably their realms of habitation, were created out of fear—"not fear awakened in men by other men, but fear awakened in men by men themselves."[31] What he called the "divine fable" of eternity cultivated horrific consequences which provide instruction for a life of virtue. In short, the idea of the Divine was created as a standard for men out of fear of their own malicious tendencies. In *Hamlet in Purgatory*, Greenblatt relates Vico's hypothesis to purgatorial art and suggests the "effort of the imagination to body forth" the unknown manifested in "differentiations in misery."[32] Early modern purgatorial art made use of skull and crossbones to symbolize the fate of the body, while the fate of the soul was depicted as a young woman "half-immersed in a cauldron lapped by flames" with her hands "clasped in prayer or her eyes raised to heaven."[33] This portrayal of the soul describes the liminality of Purgatory—the image simultaneously alludes to the fiery torments of Hell and the divine devotion of Heaven, underscoring the intermediary nature of Purgatory. Greenblatt says it best: "The ultimate goal is to provoke action, the pious action needed to obtain supernatural assistance [to] lift the souls out of their suffering."[34]

This supernatural assistance came in the form of quasi-divine clerical intervention. To expedite passage through Purgatory, Catholicism encouraged the laity to purchase indulgences

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[29] Ibid., 73.
[30] Ibid., 61.
[31] Ibid., 46.
[32] Ibid., 50, 53.
[33] Ibid., 56.
[34] Ibid., 57.

and alms. As Greenblatt notes, this system created a steady cash-flow for clergy members, so-called "soulspecialists."[35] It became clear to "heretics and orthodox believers alike" that Purgatory was "essential to the institutional structure, authority, and power of the Catholic Church."[36] Luther charged the Church with corruption for its exploitation of the laity's faith. However, though wielded unjustly, Purgatory did mediate the harsh extremes of salvation and expanded a space for individual action within faith. It provided a source of hope by suggesting that one could still reach salvation despite having sinned on earth; Purgatory offered the possibility of amelioration after death. Instead of the absolute binary of Heaven and Hell, Purgatory made the afterlife less formidable by allowing for a posthumous realm of penance.

Even the monarchy quite literally bought into Purgatory. Fearful for the fate of their souls and purgatorial torture, the wealthy "were willing to part with a great deal of money, particularly at the moment that they were forced to part with the world itself."[37] In an effort to render their souls "mostly good" and enter Purgatory as one of those meant for idyllic liminality, the aristocracy purchased prayers. Henry VII ordered the construction of a new chapel at Westminster which housed three chantry priests—priests financially compensated to sing a stipulated number of prayers for benefit of another's soul—"perpetually praying for Henry's soul."[38] Henry also inaugurated a hospital and almshouse whose inhabitants were expected to raise prayers in the king's name. Most notably, Henry VII's will outlined the immediate recitation of ten thousand masses "for the remission of his sins and the good of his soul."[39] His son, Henry VIII similarly drafted his will to call for the giving of "one thousand marks of lawful

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[35] Ibid., 60.
[36] Ibid., 14.
[37] Ibid., 22.
[38] Ibid..
[39] Ibid., 23.

money of England" to "the most poor and needy people […] to pray heartily unto God for the remission of our offenses and the wealth of our soul."[40] As Vico hypothesized, Purgatory succeeded in instilling fear of eternity within the hearts and souls of all men, royalty included. The actions of both Henry VII and VIII demonstrated the appeal of alms and indulgences, exemplifying the system to which the laity subscribed, and implicating the Catholic Church in exploitation for monetary gain.

Protestantism rejected Purgatory and omitted it entirely from its doctrine. In fact, Article 22 of the *Thirty-nine Articles of Religion* referred to Purgatory as "a fonde thing, vainly inuented, and grounded vpon no warrantie of Scripture, but rather repugnant to the worde of God."[41] With this pushback, early modern England reverted to the grim understanding of fate as either peaceful salvation or an eternity of brutality and torture. Central to the Reformation were Luther's ideas of *sola fide* and *sola scriptura*, which asserted the authority of God; the justification of man—the divine declaration of righteousness that begot salvation—was determined by *faith alone*, and theology was derived from *Scripture alone*.[42] Salvation was a gift of God's grace and was "never earned; it is simply and freely granted by God to those who have faith in the saving sacrifice of Jesus Christ."[43] These ideas further widened the gap between Heaven and Hell, completely removing a space for the laity to *act* externally. While repeatedly

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[40] Ibid., 23.

[41] Church of England, *Thirty-nine Articles of Religion.* British Library. *Early English Books Online* (London: Richard Jugge and John Cawood, 1571), Article 22. Accessed September 6, 2017.

[42] The *Oxford English Dictionary* states that "scripture" is written "usually with [a] capital initial" to denote "the sacred writings of the Old or New Testament." I use "Scripture" when referring to the written works of the Bible.
"scripture, n." OED Online. January 2018. Oxford University Press. http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/173593?rskey=Cx4ylo&result=2 (accessed March 08, 2018).

[43] Eire, 174.

called to faith in worship and daily prayer, belief in the effect of good works on salvation was considered a failure of faith for assuming control over the divine force of God's authority. Good works were seen as a symptom of being chosen for salvation, as manifestations of God's grace. Paradoxically, the community developed a consciousness that called for morality and good works, prompting the question, Where's the room for will?

Following Luther, the French theologian John Calvin introduced the concept of double predestination, emphasizing God's authority over salvation by stating that individuals were divinely determined, prior to birth, to be either saved or damned. Calvin considered this to be a comfort since salvation was taken care of by a loving, gracious God. However, like Luther's ideas against the justification of good works, double predestination emphasized the detached, bifurcated nature of religion. Despite that, the force of double predestination seemed to confirm Luther's idea that good works might be manifestations of God's grace. Even so, the logic appears contradictory. To be chosen for salvation and instilled with the power of God's grace suggest that human intervention in the face of divine election is futile; good works seem hopeless, at least to those not blessed with the grace of God. The culture of theological innovation in early modern England allowed for the development of contradictory ideas (like those of Luther and Calvin) which contributed to the uncertain authority of individual will.

Calvin also described Christian life as a pilgrimage, which connotes an active movement toward a goal that encourages daily progress. William J. Bouwsma describes Calvin's pilgrimage as "a strenuous progress in holiness."[44] In his book, *John Calvin: A Sixteenth Century Portrait* (1988), Bouwsma aptly synthesizes Calvinistic doctrine. Integrating Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1536) with commentary on New Testament passages, Bouwsma writes:

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[44] William J. Bouwsma, "John Calvin," *Britannica Academic* (2017), accessed October 3, 2017.

"Our life is like a journey," he declared, "and it is not God's will that we should march along casually as we please, but he sets the goal before us, and also directs us on the right way to it." The journey is no less arduous than military combat: "no one moves easily forward," and most are so weak that, "wavering and limping and even creeping along the ground, they move at a feeble pace" and "groan with weariness."[45]

As Bouwsma describes, the journey Calvin imagines for Christians is akin to trudging injured across a battlefield. Despite wavering and limping at a feeble pace, Calvin asserts that the faithful must "endeavor to be free from every distraction and apply [themselves] exclusively to God's call."[46] God's call is to endure the journey, no matter how arduous, and continually move toward the goal He sets. That Calvin portrays Christian life as a grueling expedition suggests that faith requires the active participation of the individual. This idea echoes the Lutheran concept of *sola fide*—justification by "faith alone." It is the responsibility of the individual to remain resolute in his or her faith and continually exert effort to achieve holiness; redemption was a product of devout faith in God. However, as previously mentioned Calvin also developed the idea of double predestination, which asserts divine authority as the sole determinant of salvation. Because Calvin's doctrine conflates the ideas of predestination and *sola fide* reflects the confused nature of early modern theology; his words evoke the ideas of separate doctrines and blur them into one ideology without defined limits. Chapter Three will continue the discussion of the instruction of the virtues and the spiritual struggle in Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*.

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[45] William J. Bouwsma, *John Calvin: A Sixteenth Century Portrait* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 177.
[46] Ibid.

Monarchies of the Reformation: A Pendulum of Faith

The posting of Luther's *Ninety-five Theses* launched a series of events that ultimately contributed to the theologically unsettled climate of early modern England. The English monarchs that reigned between 1509 and 1603 cultivated religious conflict with their varying doctrines and practices.[47] In 1530, King Henry VIII created a dispute between the monarchy and the Catholic Church when he requested an annulment from Catherine of Aragon on the grounds of marital illegitimacy. Catherine was first married to Henry's older brother Arthur, but after Arthur's sudden death in 1502, Catherine was wed to Henry in 1509 in order to secure the dynastic relationship between England and Aragon. Despite the papal dispensation and blessing which granted the marriage, Henry believed the lack of a male heir was "divine retribution for having married his brother's widow, as spelled out in the biblical curse of Leviticus 20:21: 'if a man shall take his brother's wife, it is an unclean thing … [and] they shall be childless.'"[48] England broke from the Roman Catholic Church. The Act of Uniformity (1534) "granted the crown complete control of the Church of England," and was followed shortly after by the Act of Supremacy, which declared Henry VIII as the supreme head of the Church.[49] I open on the Reformation here just as Shakespeare opens *Hamlet* after Claudius marries his brother's widow, further evidence of Shakespeare's use of the Reformation and its events in his play.

Following Henry VIII, the English monarchy swung like a pendulum between Protestant and Catholic allegiance. After the king's death in 1547, the crown passed to nine-year-old Prince

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[47] This section provides an overview of the religious doctrines and practices of King Henry VIII (reigned: 1509-1547), King Edward VI (1547-1553), Queen Mary I (1553-1558), and Queen Elizabeth I (1558-1603).
[48] Eire, 323.
[49] Ibid.

Edward and England underwent more drastic religious reforms. 1549 saw the issuance of the

Book of Common Prayer, which unified vernacular worship—the language of the laity—across

the country. Moreover, the Book "redefined the roles of the laity and clergy" by stating that "the

clergy were ministers of the Word rather than intercessory priests."[50] Edward's reign refuted the

clerical distribution of alms and indulgences ("intercessory" pardons) and further rejected

Purgatory and purgatorial intervention. Over the course of these changes, England began to

resemble a Protestant nation.[51]

Edward's untimely death in 1553 gave rise to dark times. At age fifteen, the young Prince

passed without a direct heir to assume the throne, so the monarchy turned to Mary, the only

daughter of Henry and Catherine. Mary wasted no time repealing all the changes of Edward's

reign: she threw out the Book of Common Prayer, reinstated traditional Latin liturgy, outlawed

Protestantism, did away with every bishop who opposed her authority and restored those Edward

had removed. However, it was the violent persecution and executions of Protestants that earned

the Queen her nickname: Bloody Mary. In total, some three hundred Protestant English men and

women were executed during Mary's reign, which modern scholars often acknowledge as a

"tragic failure" on the Queen's part; Mary "unwillingly helped the Protestant cause by creating

three hundred martyrs" and sending hundreds of religious refugees out of England toward

reformed towns and provinces.[52] Mary's death in 1558 left the nation battered by tyranny and

hungry for tolerance.

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[50] Ibid., 329.
[51] At least in legislation. As Erie puts is, whether English citizens willingly accepted these
reforms is "the burning question that continues to obsess historians of the Reformation" (331).
[52] Ibid., 336.

In 1558, Elizabeth I ascended to the throne and the new Queen of England was "greeted by jubilant crowds, blazing bonfires, and ringing bells."[53] Just as Mary undid Edward's reign, Elizabeth quickly repealed Mary's religious policies and swung the pendulum back towards the Protestant side. Elizabeth reintroduced the Book of Common Prayer and vernacular worship. However, modifications were made to the Book that deliberately avoided controversial subjects. By writing in vague language, Elizabethan reform ushered in an era of religious uncertainty. Effectively, Elizabeth blurred the lines between Catholicism and Protestantism, bringing the pendulum into an undefined grey area that left the laity skeptical of the true parameters of faith. Elizabeth intentionally "fold[ed] contrary points of view into one neanother" to avoid making too fine a point on any polarizing topic.[54] While Elizabeth's theological equivocation attempted to soften the transition from violent Catholicism to a moderate Protestant ideology, her vagueness contributed to the widespread confusion surrounding faith and an individual's role in it.

The sacrament of the Eucharist was left to straddle the line between doctrines, evidence of Elizabeth's vagueness. Catholicism professed the role of transubstantiation in the Eucharist, which asserts transformation of the elements into the physical body and blood of Christ. Martin Luther first took issue with the belief of transubstantiation, arguing that it was not supported by Scripture and therefore could not be adopted. Furthermore, Luther professed that Christ was physically present in the elements prior to the ceremony because Christ is everywhere. The *Thirty-nine Articles of Religion* plainly state:

> Transubstantiation […] can not be proued by holye writ: but is re-pugnaunt to the playne words of Scripture, ouerthroweth the nature of a Sacrament, and hath geuen occasion to many Superstitions. (Article 28)

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[53] Ibid., 337.

[54] Ibid.

While the stance of the *Thirty-nine Articles* (1571) is overtly Protestant, the Elizabethan Book of

Common Prayer (1552) "spoke with intentional fuzziness," blurring the lines of physical and

spiritual significance of the Eucharist.[55] Upon distributing bread to the congregation, the minister

would profess:

> 'The bodie of our lord Jesus Christ, which was geven for thee, preserve they body
> and soule into everlastinge life: and Take and eate this in remembraunce that
> Christe died for thee, feede on him in thine heart by faith, with thanksegevyng.'
> (Eire 337-338)

The line "feede on him in thine heart by faith" both alludes to and refutes the idea of

transubstantiation. Calling the congregation to "feede on him" suggests that the bread *is* the body

of Christ, while "in thine heart by faith" modifies the previous statement into a metaphor of

living as a Christian. The nearly two decades that separated the publications of Elizabeth's Book

of Common Prayer and her *Thirty-nine Articles* emphasize the transformation of the national

religion. Though Elizabeth painted troublesome topics with a broad brush, her reign was

decidedly Protestant. She did away with most ecclesiastical ornamentation, mitigated clerical

influence, and refocused religious practice on Scripture, the idea first articulated by Luther as

sola scriptura. Elizabeth reinstated her father's reduction of clerical responsibility to pure and

unadulterated declaration of Scripture and repealed the authority of indulgences, developing an

anti-Catholic doctrine which moved the nation toward Protestantism.

Without indulgences, the laity had fewer ways to effect change in their salvation; though

indulgences invested the priesthood with authority, the active purchasing of these pardons gave

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[55] Ibid.

the laity a small degree of autonomy in their faith. As a result, the problem of will was

introduced into the foreground of faith. Thus, the influence of ambiguous legislation and

doctrine, as well as the continuation of Catholic-Protestant theological conflict, clouded the

parameters of faith.

Elizabeth continued to navigate the religious minefield and issue reforms, calling for

legislation that fused "Catholic ritualism with codification of Protestant theology."[56] However,

the goal of developing a new nation forced the queen to make some personal sacrifices. Unwed

and without a biological heir, Elizabeth began to speak of England has her true spouse and was

affectionately called "'Gloriana,' 'Good Queen Bess" and "The Virgin Queene,' esteemed as a

selfless woman who always placed her nation first."[57] Though not a time of prosperity, the

Elizabethan "golden age" was a time of cultural innovation, as demonstrated by the idea of

interiority and challenges to received theological tenets. Still, with the state of the nation ever on

her mind, Elizabeth dared not act too forcefully; she meant to establish peace, and after decades

of a violent pendulum swing, peace was not going to be willed by an iron fist of God. Thus, as

evident in her ambiguous modifications to the Book of Common Prayer and the amalgamation of

Catholic and Protestant practices, Elizabeth sought a middle ground, one that would favor

Protestantism while allowing Catholics time to conform. In the next chapter, I will introduce a

discussion of early modern suicidal discourse, demonstrating how the secular shift that modern

scholars identify developed as a result of Elizabethan religious and judicial reforms.

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[56] Stephen King, "Spenser's Religion," *The Cambridge Companion to Spenser*, ed. Andrew
Hayfield. (Cambridge: University Press, 2001), 200.
[57] Eire, 341.

Chapter Two: Suicide in Early Modern England

<u>Melancholy and The Sin of Despair</u>

In order to illustrate the evolving relationship between theology and secular thought, here I provide an examination of melancholy and despair, and demonstrate how the two began to resemble one another in the early modern era. First, we must begin by understanding the early modern conceptualization of despair. Understood to be the gravest sin, despair was construed as an admission of hopelessness in the face of God. As MacDonald and Murphy state, despair was "the very antithesis of Christian hope."[58] As previously mentioned, Calvin described the life of a Christian as an arduous journey; the spiritual struggle was rooted in faith and focused on God. To despair was to refute God's gift of grace, and the *Thirty-nine Articles of Religion* expressly state we have "no power to do good works pleasaunt and acceptable to God" without divine grace.[59] The *Articles*, in conjunction with Calvin's doctrine, affirm the following: to have hope in God was to endure the spiritual struggle by way of divine grace, and to despair was to reject God's grace and abandon faith.

Conversely, melancholy was rooted deeply in secular discourse. A prevailing medical practice of the early modern era, humoral theory asserted the correlation of bodily fluids with the four elements, and those with qualities of temperature and moisture: earth was associated with black bile (cold/dry), water with phlegm (cold/wet), air with blood (hot/wet), and fire with yellow bile (hot/dry).[60] According to humoral theory, melancholy is the product of excess black bile in the body, a chronic cold-dry disease. Jennifer Radden and Douglas Trevor analyze

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[58] *Sleepless Souls*, p 31.
[59] *Thirty-nine Articles of Religion*, Article 10.
[60] For more information on humoral theory and melancholy in particular: Radden, Jennifer, ed. *The nature of melancholy: From Aristotle to Kristeva*. Oxford University Press, 2002.

melancholy within the context of Galenism (humoral theory). Citing Galen and Aretaeus—another Greek physician—Radden states that "unreasonable fears" seize the minds of those suffering from melancholy, and if the disease worsens, "'They complain of life and desire to die.'"[61] According to this logic, melancholy progresses like despair does, and perhaps even precedes despair. Thus, there exists a connection between the two ideas that must be fully fleshed out in order to understand each separately.

Prior to the sixteenth century, despair and melancholy inhabit separate spheres of theology and secular thought, respectively. However, largely as a result of the Reformation and its ensuing judicial and social changes, there occurred a shift that brought the two ideas closer together. Though MacDonald and Murphy conceptualize this shift as a secularization of despair, Beecher presents the theologizing of melancholy via the idea of joylessness that more aptly illuminates the relationship between the two ideas. Related to joylessness, he argues, is the sin of acedia, which was considered "both the sin of the will and the idiosyncratic state of the psyche."[62] Describing the psyche as "idiosyncratic" connotes an individual mode of thought, while "sin of the will" alludes to a deliberate transgression. Shifting from humoral imbalance, joylessness began to be construed as an intentional lack of will to engage with the spiritual struggle; to be joyless was to resign from active faith in God, echoing the significance of despair. Melancholy was understood to be a disease of the complexions, of which "no state of sin can be a condition of."[63] However, by theologizing melancholy as joylessness, a want of will is revealed and melancholy, like despair, becomes part of the spiritual struggle; both require active will to

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[61] Jennifer Radden, *The nature of melancholy: From Aristotle to Kristeva*. (London: Oxford University Press, 2002), 63.
[62] Beecher, 112.
[63] Ibid., 114.

withstand temptation and maintain faith in God. Beecher's analysis of melancholy within the context of the early modern despair motif (which will be discussed further in Chapter Three) demonstrates that the move to the psychology of despair did not occur in and of itself, but as a product of the secularization of the broader period discourse. In the next section, I will examine MacDonald and Murphy's approach to the secularization of despair through their analysis of self-slaughter judicial ruling.

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<p style="text-align:center">The Secularization of Suicide in Early Modern England</p>

This section presents a digest of MacDonald and Murphy's *Sleepless Souls*. As the two authors assert, early modern self-slaughter was situated in the context of "conventional religious psychology […] that stressed the sinfulness of the act, rather than the situation that mitigated it."[64] In the Elizabethan era, church officials were convinced suicide was instigated by the Devil, and self-slaughter was "ungodly and diabolical."[65] Self-murder was understood as an expression of despair, and "the devil was the literal symbol of despair."[66] The bifurcated nature of religion helps to illuminate how despair fits into the framework of early modern Christian theology: just as evil challenged good, the Devil opposed God, and despair was the opposite of hope as well as the enemy of faith.

Because the early modern era asserted the "absolute unlawfulness of suicide" within the context of faith, self-murderers received desecrated burials and the fate of their souls hung in the balance of eternal liminality. The self-killer was "ostracized symbolically" from both worlds—

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[64] *Sleepless Souls*, 20.
[65] Ibid., 50.
[66] Ibid., 31.

living and dead.[67] However, the Christian Church had denounced self-slaughter long before

Elizabeth rose to power. In 672, the Council of Hertford—a synod of the English church—

excommunicated all suicides from "normal" burial rites.[68] Sometime after the year 1000, King

Edgar exonerated "madmen" from the crimes of self-slaughter.[69] This is the first instance of

insanity and the state of the mind being implicated in suicide, a glimpse at the evolution of

psychology to occur in the late sixteenth century. By the mid-thirteenth century, however, Henry

de Bracton articulated the verdicts of *felo de se* ("a felon of himself"), and *non compos mentis*

("not of sound mind") in his great legal treatise, *De Legibus Et Consuetudinibus Angliæ*, *On the*

Laws and Customs of England.[70] As a judge and member of the clergy, Bracton aptly embodied

the union of court and church concerning suicide. Though an invention of the thirteenth century,

few *felo de se* verdicts were returned by juries before 1500.[71] While some scholars interpret this

information to be indicative of few instances of suicide in medieval England, MacDonald and

Murphy thoughtfully maintain that "medieval juries were less hesitant to bring in *non compos*

mentis then their Tudor and Stuart successors," suggesting that suicides were often "concealed as

accidents" in an effort to protect the family of the deceased.[72]

The religious and political revolutions of the Tudor era greatly impacted the extent to

which laws against suicide were enforced. Pay and performance laws were enacted to regulate

coroners, and Henry VIII's greedy nature encouraged juries to return guilty verdicts to "ensure

that the crown collected all the profits of justice to which it was entitled."[73] The Court of Star

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[67] Ibid., 18.
[68] Ibid., 19.
[69] Ibid.
[70] *Bracton Online*. Harvard Law School Library, 2003, accessed January 29, 2018.
[71] *Sleepless Souls*, 22.
[72] Ibid., 23.
[73] Ibid., 24.

Chamber was the cornerstone of the Tudor judicial system concerning suicide, and with its inception the guilty count began to rise. Between 1590-1599, the Elizabethan Star Chamber returned 811 suicide verdicts to Queen's Bench—the English court of common law.[74] Of those, an astounding 797 (98.3%) were returned *felo de se*, a stark contrast to the six total returned verdicts in 1485-1499.[75]

This history of law against suicide proves that while not native to the sixteenth century, the enactment of *felo de se* and *non compos mentis* verdicts secularized the cultural understanding of self-slaughter that was sharpened by early modern reform. As MacDonald and Murphy so state: "to be judged guilty of felonious suicide, one had to be sane."[76] Felons faced the lot of secular and religious consequences while "idiots and lunatics" were spared as victims of insanity who took their lives unwillingly.[77] The two verdicts cultivated an understanding of despair outside of religion: rather than being just a state of hopelessness in the face of God, despair became a condition of the psyche. To be of sound mind (*compos mentis*) means possessing control and authority over the idiosyncratic state of the psyche. The increase in returns of *non compos mentis* verdicts during the early modern era helped develop the idea of interiority. As a result, self-slaughter more clearly took form as a mental act, willfully carried out by the body.

As suicidal discourse changed and ideas of interiority developed, self-slaughter began to pose a problem for early modern theology. Specifically, self-slaughter confounded the limitations of an individual's role in faith; if a soul is born damned, does self-slaughter have any

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[74] Ibid., 29.
[75] Ibid.
[76] Ibid., 15.
[77] Ibid., 16.

effect? If the crown was unsure how to address theological conflict, how were English citizens supposed to make sense of polarizing issues like suicide? And most pressingly, that culpability of suicide hung in the balance of sanity prompted the question, "What does it mean to be *willing*?"

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Chapter 3: *The Faerie Queene*

This analysis focuses on Book I, the Book of Holiness and the tale of Redcrosse Knight. As Spenserian scholar Stephen King notes, Spenser wrote to "serve the Virgin Queen."[78] In doing so, Spenser aligned himself with Elizabeth and the religious reforms she made during her reign. This is evident in his character Gloriana, representative of Queen Elizabeth I (recall her epithets from Chapter One): "That greatest *Gloriana* […] / That greatest Glorious Queene of *Faery* lond."[79] In his letter to Sir Walter Raleigh, Spenser sates: "In that Faery Queen […] I conceiue the most excellent and glorious person of our soueraine the Queen."[80] Because Spenser modeled Gloriana after the Queen, the poem itself emerged as an impression of the Elizabethan era. In short, Spenser's work was a poem of service to Queen Elizabeth and a model of the times.

In his introduction, A.C. Hamilton argues that readers have always recognized the poem as "uniquely 'literary' in creating its own reality in faery land rather than reflecting ordinary reality."[81] Hamilton cites C.S. Lewis' *An Allegory of Love: A Study in Medieval Tradition* (1936), in which Lewis asserts that *The Faerie Queene* is "not like life, but the experience of reading it is like living."[82] Both Hamilton and Lewis give thoughtful consideration to the inventions of Spenser's imagination, and Lewis's assertion addresses Spenser's attempt to "fashion" a gentleman of virtue; reading the poem does not show the reader what life is like, but rather how to live in accordance with the Christian virtues. Writing during the Reformation on the virtues of Christianity, Hamilton argues that a "Protestant poet […] had no choice but to

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[78] King, 200.
[79] *The Faerie Queene,* I.i.3.
[80] *Letter to Raleigh.*
[81] A.C. Hamilton, 1.
[82] Ibid.

begin with holiness."[83] Hamilton further argues that, in order to write effectively on the virtue of holiness, Spenser had to avoid "religious controversy as much as possible."[84] However, I argue that, and as my analysis will show, Spenser meets controversy head on and sides with Protestant orthodoxy. In the scene between Despayre and Redcrosse Knight, Spenser tackles the dubious matter of self-slaughter and presents a model of temptation and restoration in order to properly instruct the Protestant virtues laid forth during Elizabeth's reign. As Hamilton aptly states, "The virtues do not exist apart from the story, nor the story apart from our active participation in it."[85] Spenser's poem not only describes the virtues by way of Redcrosse's spiritual struggle, he instructs his readers in the virtues by making them experience the struggle, and he does this through psychomachy. Spenser's spiritual struggle is devoutly Protestant and rigidly adheres to doctrinal prescriptions of suicide. Thus, *The Faerie Queene* engages with the controversy of early modern suicide by juxtaposing the theological and secular interpretations and ultimately professes the authority of religion in the case of self-slaughter.

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[83] Ibid., 8.
[84] Ibid.
[85] Ibid., 6.

An Instigation of the Devil: Spenser's Characterization of Despayre

The clear antagonist of Book I and embodiment of despair, Despayre is described as a "cursed man," "Musing full sadly in his sullein mind," with a "Looke deadly dull" and "raw-bone checkes […] as he did neuer dyne."[86] While melancholy was a result of a physiological imbalance, the disease manifested in physical symptoms which Despayre seems to possess. Angus Gowland notes the symptoms of "solitariness, leanness and paleness," and states that melancholic persons were likely to suffer "a range of internal and external […] factors – such as diet."[87] In *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621), Rober Burton cites the Greek physician Hippocrates, who describes melancholic persons as such: "lean, withered, hollow-eyed, look old, and [with] a gripping in their bellies."[88] Spenser uses these physical symptoms of melancholy to describe Despayre. His "sullein" (sullen) musing mind suggests that Despayre sits alone while brooding and his "Looke deadly dull" not only suggests a quality of death in his eyes, but a wan, or pale, appearance. Finally, the "raw-bone checkes" and "his hollow eyne," suggest his lack of appetite ("he did neuer dyne") is causing him to waste away and sink into an unhealthy leanness.

Thus, Spenser's description of Despayre provides evidence of the villain's melancholic state, blending the secular and religious spheres by uniting melancholy and Despayre (despair). The importance of Despayre's portrayal, however, is its epitomization of the spiritual struggle. As Gowland notes, melancholy was "given a location within the schemes of virtue and holiness or of vice and sinfulness."[89] In this case, Spenser's readers associate the physical symptoms of

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[86] *The Faerie Queene,* I.ix.35.
[87] Angus Gowland, "The Problem of Early Modern Melancholy." *Past & Present*, no. 191 (2006), 94, 98.
[88] Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, printed for Thomas Tegg (London: Whitefriars Printers, 1845), 250.
[89] Ibid., 99.

melancholy with the internal affliction of despair, creating an even more obviously villainous character. As a result, Spenser's moral instruction is made more effective by providing a clear embodiment to caution against.

Not only is Despayre emblematic of despair and melancholy, he is also representative of the Devil. Spenser describes Despayre's home—"Whereon nor fruite, nor leafe was eur seene"— as the antithesis to the Garden of Eden.[90] Despayre is also described as "a Snake in hidden weedes," which references the serpent in Eden that tempts Adam and Eve to take of the Tree of Knowledge.[91] However, it is Despayre's "subtile tong, like dropping honny" which crafts "his charmed speaches" that most aptly characterizes the "wicked wight" as demonic.[92] Recall the discussion of Chapter Two: the inclination to self-slaughter was often described as a temptation, which connotes a seduction or enticement. Despayre performs a temptation to suicide through his seductive rhetoric that in "hellish anguish did [Redcrosse's] soule assail."[93] An assault of the "soule" suggests that Redcrosse is victim to Despayre's charmed speech and at risk of his head being "vnarmed," which Hamilton suggests is evidence of despair as "an error of reason."[94] As mentioned in Chapter Two, persons *felo de se* were guilty because they were judged to be of sound mind, suggesting that self-slaughter was an error of reason. Thus, through the description of Despayre and his seductive rhetoric, Spenser seems to conform to the secularized understanding of suicide, presenting despair as a disease of the mind that threatens to unarm the good knights of faith. However, Despayre is Redcrosse's antagonist, the antithesis to holiness. As will be demonstrated later, it is Una's intervention that thwarts Despayre's efforts and reveals

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[90] *The Faerie Queene,* I.ix.34.
[91] Ibid., I.ix.28.
[92] Ibid., I.ix.28.
[93] Ibid., I.ix.49.
[94] A.C. Hamilton, 117.

Spenser's true agenda: Despayre serves to challenge and provoke the reader's mind, while Una

reaffirms the theological perspective and authority of religion.

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<u>Despayre's Temptation to Suicide</u>

Despayre's speech is alluring because he takes up the language of faith and appears to

endorse it by referencing Biblical passages as evidence of the merits of suicide. In stanza 39,

Despayre makes his case:

> Who trauailes by the wearie wandring way,
>   To come vnto his wished home in haste,
>   And meetes a flood, that doth his passage stay,
>   Is not great grace to helpe him ouer past,
>   Or free his feet, that in the myre sticke fast. (*The Faerie Queene*, I.ix.39)

Hamilton notes that lines three through five evoke Psalm 69:1-2: "'Saue me, O God: for the

waters are entred euen to my soule. I sticke fast in the depe myre, where no staie is: I am come

into depe waters, and the streames runne ouer me.'"[95] Just as the speaker in the Book of Psalms

cries out, "Saue me, O God," Despayre's "wearie" traveler looks to God's "great grace" to

overcome the "depe waters." "Flood" and "streames [that] runne ouer me" both connote an

obstacle or threat, and because the grace of God is depicted as the solution, the threat can be

interpreted as one of evil that opposes the faithful in their spiritual struggle. To Redcrosse,

hearing the words of Scripture used as evidence for self-slaughter trips up his mind, forcing him

to entertain the possibility that the "villen" and "cursed […] man of hell" might be right.[96]

Despayre alludes to such Biblical passages in order to pose as an advocate of faith. While his

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[95] Ibid., 120.
[96] *The Faerie Queene*, I.ix.28.

speech passes for a theological argument, the effect is that of disconnection of the action of suicide from the context of faith.

Spenser makes additional use of Despayre's honey tongue to capture the movement toward the psychology of despair. In response to Redcrosse's call for justice for Sir Terwin's death, Despayre argues that "None els to death this man [Sir Terwin] despairing driue, / But his owne guiltie mind deseruing death."[97] That Despayre paints Terwin's mind as "guiltie" and thus deserving of death echoes the theological understanding of despair as a sin. However, "guiltie" also mimics judicial jargon, referencing the role of the Star Chamber. While Despayre's words seem to endorse theology by deploying its language against Redcrosse, the villain actually wrenches despair from the purely theological context to the judicial, creating a slippage imperceptible to the knight's mind.

Spenser further illustrates the psychological understanding of suicide by blurring Redcrosse and Despayer's interiorities. The effect is two-fold: not only does it present "an utterly realistic picture of a mind rent by powerful and conflicting emotions," but it also performs a temptation to suicide as described in Napier's records.[98] Despayre presents a convincing case for suicide, describing a traveler on his "wearing wandring way," claiming that "For he, that once hath missed the right way, / the further he doth goe, the further he doth stray."[99] Despayre suggests that the knight's sins will only get worse, signaling to Redcrosse that he end his life before they do, an argument made more apparent in the villain's following statement: "The lenger life, I wote the greater sin, / The greater sin, the greater punishment."[100] Despayre

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[97] Ibid., I.ix.38.
[98] *Sleepless Souls,* 333.
[99] *The Faerie Queene,* I.ix.39, 43.
[100] Ibid., I.ix.43.

suggests quite convincingly that a longer life is bound to accrue a "greater sin," thus receive

"greater punishment" by "almightie doome."[101] Again, this signals to Redcrosse that cutting off

his life soon is to the benefit of his soul in eternity.

Redcrosse stumbles over the authority of Despayre's voice and the allure of the villain's

speech. The whole of my discussion is best represented in the following three stanzas:

> He there does now enjoy eternall rest,
>   And happy ease, which thou doest want and craue,
>   And further from it daily wandrest:
>   What if some little payne the passage haue,
>   That makes frayle flesh to feare the bitter waue?
>   Is not short payne well borne, that brings long ease,
>   And layes the soule to sleepe in quite graue?
>   Sleepe after toyle, port after stormie sea,
> Ease after warre, death after life does greatly please.
>
> The knight much wondred at his suddeine wit,
>   And sayd, The terme of life is limited,
>   Ne may a man prolong, nor shorten it;
>   The souldier may not moue from watchfull sted,
>   Nor leaue his stand, vntill his Captaine bed.
>   Who life did limit by almightie doome,
>   (Quoth he) knows best the termes established;
>   And he, that points the Centonell his roome,
> Doth License him depart at sound of morning droome.
>
> Is not his deed, what euer thing is donne,
>   In heauen and earth? did not he all create,
>   To dies againe? all ends that was begonne.
>   Their times in his eternall booke of fate
>   Are written sure, and haue their certain date.
>   Who then can striue with strong necessitie,
>   That holds the world in his still chaunging state,
>   Or shunne the death ordaynd by destinie?
> When houre of death is come, let none aske whence, nor why. (I.ix.40-42)

The first quoted shows the peak of Despayre's seduction and assault on the knight's mind.

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[101] Ibid., I.ix.41.

Despayre states that Sir Terwin now "[enjoys] eternall rest" and "happy ease" after taking his life. Despayre tactfully exploits the anxiety of Redcrosse's mind by suggesting the happy ease of eternity is the result of self-slaughter, the solution to all those that "loatheth liuing breath." Effectively, Despayre plays to the aforementioned anxiety of salvation. Furthermore, his metaphor of life's challenges as a tumultuous sea makes "short payne" in exchange for "long ease" seem "well borne," or worth bearing. Calling flesh "frayle" suggests not only that Redcrosse is feebly equipped to brace the "stormie seas," but gives reason to the "short payne"; if flesh is really as frail as Despayre says, death will be brief and happy ease will quickly follow. The questions Despayre poses in stanza 42 show the caliber of his rhetoric, and force Redcrosse to consider the answer. In a comparison of the "bitter waue" that stays the traveler's path, "toyle", and the "warre" of life with the "sleepe in [a] quite graue," the choice is clear: self-slaughter is the knight's solution to earthly turmoil and fear of eternal suffering.

That Despayre knows what the knight "doest want and craue" proves that the villain has access to Redcrosse's mind and exploits it as a test of the spiritual struggle. The *Thrity-nine Articles* expressly scold persons that "haue continually before theyr eyes the sentence of Gods predestination."[102] These people were inclined to despair only because they "[lack] the Spirite of Christe." Thus, dwelling on eternity violates the code of predestination as a good and comforting work of God. Furthermore, it calls into question the state of one's faith by suggesting that the individual may be lacking the Spirit of Christ or losing hope in God's grace. Not only does Spenser's reference to Elizabethan doctrine echo Despayre's use of the language of faith, it also reinforces the challenge of the spiritual struggle. Thus, Redcrosse's response to Despayre is the knight's reaction to a test of faith.

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[102] *The Thirty-nine Articles of Religion*. Article 12.

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<u>Redcrosse Unarmed: The Knight's Response</u>

Redcrosse marvels at Despayre's "suddein wit"—reference to the villain's cleverness—suggesting that the knight finds logic in Despayre's argument. As Hamilton argues, Spenser's use of "wondred" puns "wandered," suggesting that by listening to and entertaining Despayre's speech, the knight slips further into sin.[103] Thus, Spenser affirms both despair and self-slaughter as sins against God. Redcrosse declares the duration of life "limited," alluding to God's divine authority over both life and death. In doing so, he seems to draw upon Calvin's idea of double predestination; God determines the limit of one's "terme of life." Death is the natural and only shortener of life, and to attempt to "prolong" or to "shorten" life is to go against the divine authority of God. Thus, Redcrosse refutes Despayre's enticement by declaring self-slaughter as a transgression of God's grace and divinity.

Redcrosse counters Despayre's words with a metaphor of his own. Stating that "The souldier may not moue from watchfull sted, / Nor leaue his stand, vntill his Captaine bed," Redcrosse underscores the obedience that God demands and in that the culpability of self-slaughter. "Watchfull sted" describes the duty of the faithful to endure the spiritual struggle, suggesting that one must be vigilant in his commitment to God. Moreover, "watchful" also connotes ideas of sleeplessness, drawing upon Despayre's rhetoric to contradict the villain's temptation.[104] While Despayre asserts that a peaceful sleep follows suicide, Redcrosse argues that it is the responsibility of an obedient and faithful servant to put off sleep and maintain his

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[103] Hamilton, 121.
[104] "watchful, adj." OED Online. January 2018. Oxford University Press. http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/226092?redirectedFrom=watchful (accessed March 08, 2018).

post at God's will. Furthermore, waiting until one's "Captaine bed" has a deeper meaning than

first appears. While "bed" suggests that the soldier must wait to sleep (remain "watchfull") until

his captain leaves to sleep, it also denotes laying or putting one to bed, again drawing upon

Despayre's words that death "layes the soule to sleepe."[105] Thus, we can also interpret the lines

to mean that the solider may not sleep until his captain has prepared his bed for him; a man may

not die until God has willed it and readied his grave. As the eponymous knight of holiness and in

accordance with Elizabethan doctrine, Redcrosse's words attempt to navigate Despayre's

intentional linguistic slippage, affirming the theological understanding of suicide in the early

modern era.

What's most interesting about the exchange is that, as Hamilton points out, "the knight is

given only these four lines" (lines two-five of stanza 41) to respond Despayre.[106] Consequently,

Redcrosse seems powerless against Despayre's temptation, suggesting that Redcrosse is a victim

of his own mind, or *non compos mentis*, since powerless denotes being defenseless and not in

control. Thus, Spenser further undercuts the secularized understanding of self-slaughter in his

poem by making it a part of Despayre's deceptive rhetoric. Moreover, the lack of pronoun use

confuses the dialogue. All Spenser provides the reader with is the parenthetical denotation

"(Quoth he)" to show the change in speaker. Both Redcrosse and Despayre are men, and "he"

could refer to either character. This confuses the dialogue, blurring the distinction between

Redcrosse and Despayre. As a result, both Redcrosse and the reader become "lost in a mental

labyrinth" of the villain's charm.[107] The knight grapples with Despayre's ideas, and the subtle

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[105] "bed, v." OED Online. January 2018. Oxford University Press.
http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/16802?rskey=XIhWXW&result=3 (accessed March 08, 2018).
[106] A.C. Hamilton, 121.
[107] Ibid.

blur of the two minds suggest that Redcrosse is considering the possibility of suicide. Eventually, we see the knight "wauer weake and fraile," willing to take the "dagger sharpe and keene."[108]

* * * *

<u>The Rescue: Una's Divine Intervention</u>

At his direst point, the knight must either take his life or be saved and "drawn away by some loyal companion, some affirmative voice of the psyche."[109] This rescue comes in the form of Una, the embodiment of oneness, wholeness, and truth. As with the spiritual struggle, the answer to Redcrosse's despair and desire to die is truth. Thus, Una intervenes:

> Out of his hand she snatcht the cursed knight,
> And threw it to the ground, enraged rife,
> And to him said, Fie fie, faint hearted knight,
> What meanest thou by this reprochfull strife?
> […]
> Come, come away, fraile, feebly, fleshly wight,
> Ne let vaine words bewitch thy manly hart,
> Ne diuelish thoughts dismay thy constant spright. (*The Faerie Queene* I.ix.52-53)

Una represents the word of God, and the true meaning of faith. "Frail, feebly, fleshy wight" addresses Redcrosse's humanity, his susceptibility to "vaine words" and "diuelish thoughts"; Redcrosse is just a man who requires a stronger force to oppose Despayre's bewitching. That his actions are "reprochfull" equates despair with sin, which "dismay[s] [Redcrosse's] constant spright." In the face of despair and temptation of self-slaughter, one must remain "constant"— true to the struggle of faith, and virtuous in constancy, "which all the heroes must uphold."[110] Church officials taught that thoughts of suicide required "prayer and conversion to a godly

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[108] *The Faerie Queene,* I.ix.49, 51.
[109] Beecher, 106.
[110] A.C. Hamilton, 123.

life."[111] In accordance with doctrine, Una takes Redcrosse to the House of Holiness for spiritual rehabilitation.

Spenser writes: "Her faithfull knight faire Vna brings / To house of Holinesse, / Where he is taught repentaunce, and / The way to heuenly blesse," evidence of the poet's adherence to the theological representation of self-slaughter and course of treatment.[112] Being "too feeble, and too faint," Redcrosse relies on Caelia and her three daughters—Fidelia, Speranza, and Charissa—to achieve redemption after sin.[113] There, in the House of Holiness, "The faithfull knight now grew […] To such perfection of all heuenly grace."[114] Speranza "gaue him comfort sweet, / And taught him how to take assured hold / Vpon her siluer anchor, as was meet."[115] Hamilton notes that silver is a distinctive choice of color, emblematic of purity.[116] However, the true significance of the image is the anchor itself, a weight that literally moors a vessel to the floor of the sea. As the embodiment of hope, the image of Speranza's silver anchor is a direct counter to Despayre's "stormie seas"; by being steadfast in his hope in God, Redcrosse is able to face the bitter waves of life and endure the spiritual struggle.

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[111] *Sleepless Souls*, 53.
[112] *The Faerie Queene,* I.x.
[113] Fidelia, Speranza, and Charissa are representative of faith, hope, and charity, repectively.
[114] Ibid., I.x.21.
[115] Ibid., I.x.22.
[116] A.C. Hamilton, 126.

Spenser's Despair Motif and the Spiritual Struggle

By recalling once again Beecher's analysis of the sin of acedia, one can more clearly see the complex nature of Spenser's episode of despair. The despair motif, a common fixture in the morality play, served as what Beecher calls "the pivotal event in the education of [a] Christian Warrior."[117] At first glance, the scene requires no explanation; "is it not the abandonment of hope which leads to despondency and suicide, much as the term would be understood in any age?"[118] For this reason, the despair motif operated both as a trial and a caution; the test of despair was intensified by a warning of its consequences, often shown as self-slaughter and its subsequent damnation. Despite its deeply rooted spiritual implications, Elizabethan thinkers also gave significance to despair through humoral theory. Predicated on the balance of temperaments, humoral theory ascribed the word melancholy to what theologians would have interpreted to be despair. Beecher used the sin of acedia as a bridge between despair and melancholy, but also stated that the sin of acedia "can have no direct influence upon Spenser" or his work, arguing that the idea "had lost its force as an explanation of experience and behaviour well before the sixteenth century."[119]

The connection between these two concepts indicates the overlap between their respective fields of thought. Beecher registers this connection, arguing that "melancholy was allowed to play its part in the creation of that ambiguous but essential crisis which was at the centre of Protestant theology."[120] Beecher cites Timothy Bright, an early modern physician and clergyman—two occupations pertinent to our discussion here—who wrote extensively on

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[117] Beecher, 103.
[118] Ibid.
[119] Ibid., 111.
[120] Ibid., 115.

melancholy. Beecher describes Bright's 1586 treatise on "religious depression" as the understanding "between the despair of the Protestant conscience tormented by God's ire and the medical theories concerning the psyche."[121] This analysis substantiates the secularization of thought which provoked a complicated intermingling of theology and psychology. Spenser's work gestures at the secular understanding of suicide as it is understood outside of the realm of theology by way of Despayre's seductive rhetoric, but ultimately asserts the authority of religion. For Spenser, despair is a trial that characterizes the spiritual struggle. To be faithful, one must truly struggle with God ever on his or her mind. In the next chapter, I will discuss *Hamlet*, and the ways Shakespeare embraces the secularized understanding of suicide via displays of interiority, ultimately opening up a space for will.

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[121] Ibid., 115.

Chapter 4: *Hamlet*

Now, to *Hamlet*. Like Spenser, Shakespeare's play addresses the problem of self-slaughter within the context of early modern faith. Both *Hamlet* and *The Faerie Queene* depict a man of faith deep in the throes of despair and at war with the depths of his own mind. Though both works present readers and audiences with modified despair motifs, *The Faerie Queene* includes a rescue scene, which affirms despair as a sin and ultimately links Spenser's poem to the theological understanding of self-slaughter. *Hamlet* lacks this secondary component, and instead of anxiety in the face of self-slaughter, Hamlet exudes fury, remorse, and apprehension. Furthermore, while Spenser illustrates one man's descent into despair, Shakespeare provides his audience with two examples. Both Hamlet and Ophelia are (seemingly) mad and their respective downfalls simultaneously compliment and contradict one another which allows for the consideration of multiple perspectives of self-slaughter.

While Hamlet and Ophelia both appear to be mentally disturbed, from "the poison of deep grief" prompted by their fathers' deaths, Hamlet announces his madness, stating his intention "To put an antic disposition on."[122] This statement indicates that Hamlet's ostensible temperament is in fact a potential ruse meant to deceive the other characters, and that the Prince possesses control over his own mind. Conversely, Ophelia acts as she is suffering, riddled with grief of her father's death and deranged by her lover's rejection. Hamlet's madness is a front skillfully concocted to conceal his search for the truth—of Claudius's guilt, of the ghost's purpose, and of the metaphysical status of self-slaughter. His dilemma is a matter of will, as he deliberately seeks answers and discerns between possibilities. By enacting a plan and debating

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[122] *Hamlet*, 4.2.74; 1.5.172-3.

the potential merits and demerits of suicide, Hamlet demonstrates the willfulness at work in complicated matters of faith. It is important to note that Shakespeare does not simply secularize suicide and fully wretch self-slaughter from its theological context. Rather, he presents his audience with distinct possibilities and an open-ended resolution to the play. Doing so allows the spectators to identify with Hamlet, insert themselves in his struggle, and execute their own degree of will on the matter. Thus, amidst the speculation, deceit, and dual expressions of madness, Shakespeare deliberately carves out a space for will within early modern faith.

This chapter will analyze Shakespeare's representation and examination of early modern suicide in *Hamlet*—with respect to Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*—through three primary components: the relationship between despair and melancholy; the generic differences of allegory and drama and the subsequent distinction in characterization; and Shakespeare's representations of Hamlet and Ophelia in regard to self-slaughter. Ultimately, this chapter will conclude my argument on the effect of Shakespeare's double representation of suicide in a drama. By creating an example and counterexample, Shakespeare offers suicide as a possible personal solution to the turmoil of the spiritual struggle, and manipulates the ambiguous elements of the Reformation—double predestination, Purgatory, and judicial ruling—in order to purposefully make space for will in faith. Furthermore, the juxtaposition of the two characters emphasizes Hamlet's willfulness and interiority, an important distinction that will be discussed in greater detail later on. Ultimately, in the problem of faith, *Hamlet* presents self-slaughter as the example and will as the solution.

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Hamlet's Melancholy:

Folding Together the Theological and Secular Worlds

As described in Chapter Two, the early modern era witnessed a change in how despair and melancholy were understood. These distinct entities that had previously inhabited separate spheres of thought began to mirror one another and share points of significance. Coinciding with the series of changes brought on by the Reformation, the amalgamation of despair and melancholy occurred as part of a feedback loop; as challenges to the Catholic Church were made and judicial regulations enforced in cases of self-slaughter, the secular became more theological, and vice versa. Shakespeare, like Spenser, reflected this occurrence in his work and weaved together the attributes of despair and melancholy in his characterization of Hamlet.

Shakespeare introduces melancholy early in the play, with Hamlet as one of the first orators on the subject. On the platform waiting for the ghost to appear, Hamlet says to Horatio and Marcellus that the "[…] o'er-growth of some complexion / Oft break[s] down the pales and forts of reason."[123] Greenblatt comments on "complexion," stating that "o'er-growth" specifically refers to "the disproportionate amount of one humor […] and thus an unbalanced personality."[124] Hamlet's words suggest that an imbalance of humors leads to mental instability, as indicated by the broken down "pales and forts of reason." Thus, Shakespeare suggests that one's mental state is the product of physiological forces.

Unlike the Galenic humoral melancholy Hamlet alludes to, Horatio's lines that shortly follow introduce what MacDonald and Murphy adduce as despair. As opposed to the inward imbalance of humoral theory, Horatio posits an externalized force that tempts one to madness.

[123] Ibid, 1.4.27-8.
[124] Greenblatt, 1778.

After the ghost appears and Hamlet is pressed to follow it, Horatio attempts to dissuade the

Prince:

> What if it tempt you toward the flood, my lord,
> […]
> And there assume some other horrible form
> Which might deprive your sovereignty of reason
> And draw you into madness? Think of it:
> The very place puts toys of desperation,
> Without more motive, into every brain. (1.4.72-6)

Evoking the idea of an embodied tempter bent on drawing one into madness and desperation,

Horatio's caution against the ghost echoes Richard Napier's records. Moreover, Horatio's lines

compliment Hamlet's comment on temperament. While Hamlet evokes humoral theory, Horatio

illustrates MacDonald and Murphy's "instigation of the Devil." Thus, Shakespeare presents his

audience with both a secular and theological perspective on one's mental state in very close

proximity to one another; Hamlet suggests that madness is brought on by a physiological

imbalance, while Horatio's warning indicates that insanity may be the result of demonic

temptation and unwilling submission. Though subtle, the effect is profound. To apply

contradicting theological and secular notions to the same idea of madness suggests not that one is

right and the other wrong, but that both have potential.

This goes against the pre-Reformation divide between melancholy and despair, secular

and theological. Shakespeare's decision to present both views may at first confuse the reader—

Well, which is it?—but that is the point. Like Spenser, Shakespeare weaves together the separate

spheres to implicate the reader's thought processes. Spenser, however, does so in order to affirm

the spiritual struggle. Shakespeare presents both positions without judgement, simply allowing

both to exist as possibilities.

The arrival of the ghost coincides with the introduction of another complication of the play that is closely tied to Hamlet's melancholy. Upon seeing the ghost, Hamlet asks of it, "Be thou a spirit of health or goblin damned / Bring with thee airs from heaven or blasts from hell, / Be thy intents wicked or charitable."[125] These lines demonstrate the indeterminate nature and origins of the ghost. Because Hamlet attends school in Wittenberg—the posting site of Luther's *Ninety-five Theses* which Greenblatt refers to as "The birthplace of Protestantism"—it is logical to conclude that Hamlet's world would be a Protestant one. [126] As a result, the corresponding eternal realm would exist without Purgatory and thus without amelioration after death. As William Hamilton notes, since Protestants "geographically and theologically abolished" Purgatory, ghosts "were not considered spirits of the departed" as they were understood in Catholicism.[127] Rather, ghosts were believed to be "the Devil or devils who assumed the forms of departed friends or relatives in order to work some sort of harm on those to whom they appeared."[128] Conversely, Catholicism professed that souls of the departed may return to earth "from purgatory for some special purpose."[129] It was usually the responsibility of a devout relative or close friend to assist the spirit on their earthly expedition and help them find eternal rest.

Thus, the problem the ghost poses is not just ethical—though his request for his brother's murder does call into question moral and divine standards—but also metaphysical. The ghost's unknown origins complicate the play's ruling ideology and serve as a central part of Hamlet's

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[125] Hamlet, 1.4.40-2.
[126] Gertrude says to Hamlet, "I pray thee stay with us; go not to Wittenberg" (*Hamlet*, 1.2.113). For Greenblatt's notes, see *The Norton Anthology of Shakespeare*, 1771.
[127] Willaim Hamilton, "Hamlet and Providence" *The Christian Scholar*, vol. 47, no. 3 (1964) 200.
[128] Ibid.
[129] Ibid., 200.

search for truth. Furthermore, the open-ended question contributes to the Prince's complex

disposition. When laying out his plan to confirm Claudius's guilt through the performance of *The*

Mousetrap, Hamlet muses:

> The spirit I have seen
> May be a dev'l, and the dev'l 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. (3.1.517-21)

Here, Hamlet integrates the aforementioned problem of the ghost with the notions of despair and

melancholy. Like the testimonies Napier documented, Hamlet imagines a figure capable of

deceit by transforming its "shape" and wielding its "potent" forces against its victim's

"weakness" to "Abuse" and "damn" him or her.[130] The key distinction between Napier's records

and Hamlet's concern lies in Shakespeare's use of melancholy; Napier's records describe the

descent into despair, while Hamlet's melancholy is the assumed crux of his downfall. By

employing a trope of early modern self-slaughter and reconfiguring it to evoke the implications

of humoral theory, Shakespeare, once again, seamlessly weaves together the secular and

theological interpretations. Yet, as Trevor asserts, "the witnessing of spirits was yet another

phenomenon commonly attributed to melancholic vapors."[131] Thus, not only does Shakespeare

implicate despair and the instigation of the Devil in his description of the ghost, he also suggests

that the apparition may simply be a conjuring of Hamlet's existing melancholic disposition. This

seems less likely, given that the Prince is not the only eye witness to the ghost's appearance.

Nonetheless, the use of "melancholy" in Hamlet's speech alludes to all its causes and symptoms

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[130] Greenblatt's annotations: "Abuses" means "Deceives" (p 1800).
[131] Trevor, 83.

as defined by humoral theory. However, Shakespeare removes melancholy from its place in Galenic discourse and posits it within the early modern context of despair. Again, Shakespeare blurs the dichotomy of secular and theological thought to open up the possibility for a more ambiguous middle ground.

* * * *

Allegory, Drama, and the Interiority Effect

Interiority is an integral component of modern cognitive psychology. Derived from the Latin *interiōritās*, interiority goes hand in hand with subjectivity, which describes not only the influence of one's own personal feelings or bias, but also refers to the quality of existence within one's mind. Interiority, like subjectivity, articulates the separation of an individual's internal and external world. Modern psychologists, however, consider interiority to be much more complicated than simply possessing an interior. In *Pyschology as the Discipline of Interiority* (2017), Jennifer M. Sandoval and John C. Knapp use German psychoanalyst Wolfgang Giegerich's work to describe interiority as a "syntactical level of the soul."[132] The authors elucidate this idea, explaining that interiority is not "that part of the human person that resides 'inside,'" but rather "the interior life of the soul," the soul's "inwardness in itself."[133] This definition does more to illuminate the self-reflexive functions of interiority; however, for the discussion of literary texts, interiority can be aptly reduced to an individual's interior self.

Within literature, interiority is a fiction, a manufactured impression of an individual's subjectivity. The characters are not multidimensional beings with complex emotions, yet the

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[132] Jennifer M. Sandoval and John C. Knapp, *Psychology as the Discipline of Interiority: 'The Psychological Difference' in the work of Wolfgang Giegerich* (New York: Routledge, 2017), 7.
[133] Ibid.

reader is left with a sense that they are privy to the characters' internal thoughts and feelings. This I refer to as "the interiority effect," and the effect largely hinges on the text's character development. Characters with nuanced accidentals most closely resemble real human beings, and subsequently create the strongest interiority effect. This is to say that readers can more readily identify with characters of this nature and judge them of their motives, thus creating a sense of access to the character's interior. Genre plays an important role in character development. Though linked in more ways than one, *Hamlet* and *The Faerie Queene* are examples of distinct literary genres, and their respective interiority effects subsequently vary.

As a drama, *Hamlet* creates a far more intricate effect—for audiences trained to assess complexity in characterlogical "interiority"—than its counterpart in *The Faerie Queene*. That is not to say that Spenser's work is not sophisticated or noteworthy, though it is tempting to make a straw man out of his poem. There is something to be said for the authentic difference between allegory and drama. Or rather, not to be said. As separate categories or writing, the works they generate are simply different, and this difference does not entail nor require a judgment. However, this thesis aims to unveil the aspects of *Hamlet* that enable it to create a space for will in early modern faith, and its genre is an important element. Thus, a discussion of the generic differences between the two texts of is not only revealing, but necessary.

Early modern drama, unlike allegory, was invested in characters for meaning making. Consequently, character is the more salient vehicle for adducing meaning in *Hamlet*. As previously mentioned, the performative aspect of drama allows for the creation of more nuanced characters. With both public and private ("aside") lines, the audience members are privy to Hamlet's personal thoughts and are well-positioned to negotiate between the two personas presented. Redcrosse Knight, on the other hand, is Spenser's archetypal Christian, the perfect

embodiment of what a knight of faith should act like, despite his tendency to wander. Redcrosse lacks the incidentals that are integral to Hamlet's nature. The audience is aware of Hamlet's revulsion toward life as soon as he is, or at least as soon as he vocalizes it. Spenser's reader, on the other hand, gains access to Redcrosse's thoughts of suicide only when the knight is engaged in a mental struggle with Despayre. This need for interaction in order for interiority to be visible indicates that, within *The Faerie Queene*, psychology is not lodged within a single character. Rather, it is segmented and distributed among multiple characters resembling a mosaic that, when completely assembled, depicts a character as fragmented as man.

This fragmented nature is what makes Spenser's work simultaneously challenging and uncomplicated. In a poem constructed on the premise of vice and virtue, readers can easily identify the simplistic nature of each character: Redcrosse, good; Despayre, bad; Una, good, and so on and so forth. These characters represent stable signs of faith. However, when viewed as a larger composition, the three aforementioned characters begin to resemble Hamlet. Redcrosse is the man grappling between the two worlds of thought: the secular (Despayre), and the theological (Una). Unlike drama wherein the characters are whole embodiments of human temperament, allegory is a fractured representational system that makes the relationship between the personal and the theological challenging. In multidimensional characters like those of *Hamlet,* however, the relationship is acted out in terms of personal affect, casting doubt on the very existence of the divine. This character dimensionality is what makes drama so compelling: it echoes the confusion of life itself.

The interiority effect in drama is more accessible and recognizable because it is more familiar to modern readers. In addition to its resemblance to modern cognitive psychology, drama addressed the urgent question about the relationship of conscience to morality dictated by

faith, creating an interiority effect in and of itself. As Linda Gregerson writes, the Elizabethan

"drama was conducting experiments within individuated temperament, motive, and conflict that

decisively shaped our later conventions of psychological 'depth.'"[134] The movement gestured at

the connection between psychology and character dimensionality. Spenser's allegoric poem

"willfully disaggregates psychology and character," creating distinctly flat characters with little

semblance to human beings.[135] However, when construed as a summative account of human

temperament, the individual characters can be understood as simple fragments of the whole. This

model is less familiar to modern readers. As a result, it is easy to misrepresent the weight of

Spenser's work within the larger context of Elizabethan literature.

The model of psychology that Shakespeare creates in *Hamlet* is comparable to recent

models of the human psyche and how they are understood in modern cognitive science. Allegory

generates an interiority effect of a seemingly lesser caliber; however, this better serves *The*

Faerie Queene's purpose. Intended to instruct Elizabethan readers in the Protestant virtues,

Spenser's poem necessitates clear types and antitypes, self-evident examples of good (virtue) and

evil (vice). While allegory allows for the coalescence of theology and psychology, the genre does

so in more straightforward terms. While scenes in *The Faerie Queene* can be challenging to

interpret—Spenser creates a long list of characters to keep track of and often complicates action

by confusing subject-pronoun relationships—the individual interiority effects of each character

are easier to decipher because psychology is dispersed among the entire cast. Thus, though

Redcrosse Knight wanders in sin and wavers in his faith, it is still understood that he is a knight

of faith, a force of good to oppose Despayre's demonic threats. As a result, Spenser's work

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[134] Linda Gregerson, "Faerie Queene (1590)," *The Oxford Handbook to Spenser*: (Oxford, 2010), 7.

[135] Ibid., 7.

presents readers with two positions on self-slaughter within the context of faith and affirms one over the other. *Hamlet*, by comparison, blurs these distinct positions by positing them both within the mind of a single individual. Doing so removes their respective connotations: Despayre's case for self-slaughter no longer seems entirely unsound when lodged within Hamlet's mind and without Una's corrective measures. Ultimately, the Shakespearean interiority effect in *Hamlet* allows the audience to quickly identify with the Prince, engage in the struggle of his mind, and explore the potentials of self-slaughter.

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<p align="center">Hamlet and Ophelia</p>

The amorphous relationship between despair and melancholy links *The Faerie Queene* and *Hamlet* together, and the difference in genre distinguishes between the two works of literature. While the interiority effect does exist within and is generated by the text, it is more pronounced within the mind of the reader or audience member. For this reason and those mentioned in the previous section, Hamlet is a stronger representation of the human psyche than Redcrosse Knight. It is within Hamlet that the audience members witness the self-creating, self-abasing struggle of one's mind over matters of religious doctrine. Hamlet embodies both of the 'minds' that Spenser puts forth in Redcrosse and Despayre, blending the two sides of the theological debate of self-slaughter. Furthermore, Shakespeare creates a counterpart in Ophelia's doubtful death, allowing the secular interpretation of self-slaughter to meld with the theological. By presenting the audience (hereon representative of both audience members of performances and readers of the play) with two cases of self-slaughter within a drama, Shakespeare rearranges the fragments of the Reformation to gesture towards the possibility for deliberate, willful action in faith. Amidst the conflict and ambiguity, Shakespeare actively engages the minds of his

audience, reminding its members that the ability to discern and consider is an act of will, one that is deeply involved in faith.

Suicide is a key fixture in the play from Act I on. After agreeing to Gertrude's request to remain in Denmark and "go not to Wittenberg," Hamlet laments that "the Everlasting […] fixed / His canon 'gainst self-slaughter."[136] These lines not only introduce the problem of suicide in the play, they also immediately situate it within the context of faith and adduce Hamlet's preoccupation with his death. "Everlasting" makes reference to eternal life, and the capital 'E' in the middle of the line is indicative of a proper noun, a name. Here, Everlasting refers to God and His law "'gainst self-slaughter." Hamlet bemoans that God has declared suicide a sin, suggesting that if it were permissible—without divine retribution—Hamlet would seek to escape his life of pain in his own death. The rest of the lines are telling:

> Oh, that this too, too sullied flesh would melt,
> Thaw, and resolve itself into a dew,
> Or that the Everlasting had not fixed
> His canon 'gainst self-slaughter. O God, God,
> How weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable
> Seem to me all the uses of this world. (*The Faerie Queene*, 1.2.129-34)

Hamlet finds pain and turmoil in the earthly realm, and spends more time inventorying the series of pain than Redcrosse does. Despayre does tap into what Spenser imagines his readership would recognize as the pain of earthy suffering: "toyle," "warre," "stormie sea." Yet, Redcrosse gives more attention to suffering after death, creating a distinction between the characters. Hamlet despairs in the reality of "this world," which at times he finds stagnant and valueless, while at others it provokes him to become violent with fury. Redcrosse, on the other hand, is incited more

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[136] *Hamlet*, 1.2.119, 131-2.

by the images of Hell that Despayre lays before his eyes. After he "Perceived [Redcrosse] to waver weake and fraile," Despayre showed the knight the "righteous sentence of th' Almighties law," which Spenser describes:

> He shew'd him painted in a table plaine,
> The damned ghosts, that doe in torments waile,
> And thousand feends that doe them endlesse paine
> With fire and brimstone, which for ever shall remaine. (I.ix.49)

Here, Spenser presents us with a paradox. Only after seeing the image of perdition does Redcrosse accept the "dagger sharpe and keene" Despayre offers him, suggesting that Redcrosse was compelled to self-slaughter by fear of what was to come; afraid of the "ever burning wrath" of God the knight would face for his sins, Redcrosse succumbed to Despayre's seduction—"The lenger life, I wote the greater sin, / The greater sin, the greater punishment"—and ventured to end his life before his sins escalated. Despayre's logic is inconsistent, presenting the knight with a conundrum of a worsening situation, one that—through Una—Spenser rejects as false. Conversely, Hamlet complains about life itself, which at times seems to lead to a studied rejection of the world and all it stands for; he calls all the "uses of this world" "weary, stale, flat and unprofitable." Moreover, "*this* world" suggests that Hamlet is cognizant of another world, one that may be endowed with better attributes.[137] Thus, while Redcrosse fears divine retribution, Hamlet fears mortal oppression. The latter aligns with Spenser's religious aspirations for his poem, while Hamlet's apathy introduces a novel search for escape by way of what was commonly considered to be sacreligious.

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[137] My emphasis.

An analysis of Hamlet's most famous soliloquy, "To be or not to be," elucidates this point. Using Spenser's scene as a lens for analysis, Shakespeare's interiority effect and Hamlet's inner turmoil become more visible. Deeply troubled by the ghost's visitation and demand that Hamlet murder Claudius, Hamlet bemoans:

> To be or not to be: that is the question.
> Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
> The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune
> Or to take arms against a sea of troubles
> And by opposing, end them. To die, to sleep […] (3.1.55-9)

The question is simple: to live, or to die? Hamlet views himself at war with the challenges life poses, and he positions his mind as the battlefield. He wonders whether it is better—"nobler": righteous; worthy—to allow the "mind to suffer" the "slings and arrows" of life, or to fight back. To do so, he says, is to "end them," and there is a finality in his words that can only be reference to death. Thus, Hamlet presents himself with two choices, much like Redcrosse faced through Despayre and Una: endure or die. However, unlike Redcrosse, Hamlet is not guided to the correct answer by a force of faith. In fact, his question seems to be unanswerable:

> To die, to sleep;
> To sleep, perchance to dream—ay, there's the rub:
> For in that sleep of death what dreams may come
> When we have shuffled off this mortal coil
> Must give us pause.
> […] the dread of something after death,
> The undiscovered country from whose bourn
> No traveler returns, puzzles the will
> And makes us rather bear those ills we have
> Than fly to others that we know not of? (3.1.63-7; 77-81)

Hamlet adduces sleep as a clue to the nature of death; it is impossible to determine whether one's mind will be filled with sweet dreams or plagued by terrors. Here "dream" is representative of

eternal life, and "what dreams may come" indicates the uncertainty of eternity; Hamlet does not

know whether his fate is salvation or damnation. What's more, Hamlet's "perchance" indicates

that he wonders if there is an afterlife at all. Might death just be the end of consciousness? This

uncertainty, Hamlet states, "Must give us pause."

While Spenser definitively states that one must endure the struggles of life, Hamlet is

concerned with the fate of his soul. As in this soliloquy and his "Too, too sullied flesh"

monologue, Hamlet elicits the evils of the earthly realm in comparison to those of eternity.[138]

Because death is the "undiscovered country from whose bourn / No traveler returns," Hamlet

fears the "dread of something after death"; without testimonies of eternity, who is to say what is

to come?[139] This fact alone "puzzles the will" and favors the "ills" of mortality rather than

"others that we know not of" in eternity. Thus, Hamlet leaves the question rather open-ended,

unsure which perspective is right and where he may (if at all) execute his "will." While

Spenser's work tries to conform to the authority of religious doctrine, *Hamlet* opens up and

interrogates the problem that self-slaughter posed to early modern faith.

Shakespeare further complicates the notion of suicide by introducing its early modern

secular context. As previously mentioned in Chapter Two, a prolonged series of reforms made

self-slaughter a matter of judicial review in England. *Felo de se* (guilty) and *non compos mentis*

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[138] "Sullied" denotes something stained or defiled. The Second Quarto, however, reads as "sallied," which refers to a warlike force. "Sallied" thus suggests that Hamlet's flesh is too often attacked. Both spellings contribute to appropriate readings of the text.
"sally, v.2" OED Online. January 2018. Oxford University Press.
http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/170078?rskey=rvaRPk&result=2&isAdvanced=false (accessed March 08, 2018).
William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, ed. Barbara A. Mowat and Paul Westine (New York: Simon & Schuster Paperpacks, 2012), 28.
[139] I mention Drihthelm in the Introduction; however, the validity of his 696 A.D. testimony cannot be confirmed. Despite the other various accounts of Purgatory, the lack of empirical evidence on the matter makes it more accurate to say that no such factual testimonies exist.

(innocent) verdicts determined the fate of the individual whose death was in question. Though the court operated outside the Church, the verdicts had profound implications for the individual's spiritual destiny. Shakespeare examines these consequences through Ophelia's death. While preparing her grave, one gravedigger asks of the other, "Is she to be buried in Christian burial when she willfully seeks her own salvation?"[140] The second responds, "I tell thee she is. Therefore make her grave straight. The crowner hath sat on her and finds it Christian burial."[141] The first gravedigger's supposition that Ophelia "willfully [sought] her own salvation" is evidence that he suspects her of willful suicide; it is not clear whether Ophelia intentionally drowned herself or if "her garments, heavy with their drink, / Pulled the poor wretch from her melodious lay" as Gertrude states.[142] That Ophelia would not receive a Christian burial had she willfully committed suicide echoes the consequences of a returned *felo de se* verdict; self-murderers received "maiméd rites."[143]

Shakespeare further implicates judicial ruling through the gravedigger's statement that "the crowner has sat on her," which Greenblatt neatly translates to mean that the coroner has "conducted an inquest on the cause of her death."[144] A coroner's investigation adduces the ambiguity of Ophelia's death; however, that "he find[s] it [a] Christian burial" indicates that Ophelia's verdict was returned *non compos mentis*. Shakespeare invents a "curtailed Christian burial" for Ophelia's contaminated *non compos mentis* verdict; the priest himself claims that "Her death was doubtful," and her burial rites had "been as far enlarged / As we [the Church]

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[140] *Hamlet*, 5.1.1-2.
[141] Ibid., 5.1.3-4.
[142] Ibid., 5.1.180-1.
[143] Ibid., 5.1.198.
[144] Greenblatt, 1837.

have warranty."[145] Ophelia's burial is evidence of Shakespeare's ambivalent theological middle ground. Theology and judicial ruling both maintained rigid binaries: a soul was either saved or damned; a death either innocent or guilty. Persons *felo de se* took their lives "for want of Grace'" while "evidence of godliness" gave reason to believe "that doubtful deaths were not self-murders."[146] Shakespeare imagines something more ambiguous.

One could assume that Ophelia's social status influenced the Church's "warranty" to extend her burial rites. A lord in the King's Court, Polonius's power and reputation may have been used to sway judges or church officials on the matter of his daughter's funeral rites, echoing the corruption of priesthood familiar to the early modern period. However, as previously mentioned, juries often found ways to return a *non compos mentis* verdict—concealing the death as an accident—in order to protect the family from forfeiting their financial assets and land to the crown.[147] Thus, through Ophelia's funeral rites, Shakespeare acknowledges the times—addressing both the tendency toward corruption and persistence of compassion. In doing so, he toys with the idea of ambiguous consequences of self-slaughter, uniting the prominent theological and secular theories to suggest both have potential.

Thus, Ophelia's both death parses the relationship between and unites the secular and theological understandings of suicide, furthering Hamlet's inquiry of eternal life. Hamlet's "To be or not to be" soliloquy echoes Spenser's despair episode, directly addressing the consequences of self-slaughter within the context of early modern faith. Shakespeare supplements this scene in *Hamlet* by including a second example of self-slaughter. Ophelia introduces another instance of mental instability, further conflating the relationship between

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[145] Hamlet, V.i.205-6.
[146] *Sleepless Souls,* 56.
[147] Ibid., 23.

despair and melancholy, and their respective fields of theology and secular thought. Moreover, Ophelia's death calls attention to the secularization of suicidal discourse that occurred in the early modern period. These challenges to tradition, along with the performative qualities of drama, create a three-dimensional model of suicide, including its potential merits, demerits, and the active struggle to decide.

That the audience is privy to the private thoughts and emotions of *Hamlet*'s seemingly deranged characters enhances the play's interiority effect, allowing for the generation of multidimensional characters deeply engaged in the spiritual struggle. While audience members decipher Hamlet's mental state through his words, Ophelia's is less apparent. However, Shakespeare provides clues to her madness as symptoms of the flowers she distributes in Act IV:

> There's fennel for you and columbines; there's rue for you, and here's some for me. We may call it herb of grace o'Sundays. You may wear your rue with a difference. There's a daisy. I would give you some violets, but they withered all when my father died. They say 'a made a good end. (IV.ii.174-178)

The breeds of flowers have important significance to Ophelia's words. Fennel was associated with flattery and columbines with "ingratitude and marital infidelity," a potential gesture at the "many tenders / Of his affection" Hamlet showed towards Ophelia and his "naught," or indecent, behavior that followed.[148, 149] Rue was commonly associated with repentance, which further imbues the religious implications of death "since penitence depended on and enabled God's blessing."[150] Most telling, however, is her mention of violets and daisies. Greenblatt notes that violets represented faithfulness, which gives potential significance to daisies as "dissembling

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[148] Greenblatt in *The Norton Shakespeare*, 1831.
[149] *Hamlet*, I.iii.98-99; III.ii.131.
[150] Greenblatt in *The Norton Shakespeare*, 1831.

seduction."[151] Again, Ophelia's flowers provide another indication of the cause of her mental instability; she is not afflicted by "the poison of deep grief" that "springs / All from her father's death" as Claudius believes. Rather, she is a heartbroken lover, driven mad by Hamlet's warmhearted affections turned cold.

Amidst the repeated overlap of theology and secular thought and the conflation of religious doctrines, Shakespeare profoundly blurs the line between the cases for life and death. What's more, the examples he provides within Hamlet and Ophelia both compliment and contradict one another, obscuring the fixed binaries of theology and judicial ruling and generating a less harsh middle ground that allows for the potential of both secular and religious application. Shakespeare manipulates additional binaries—Protestant and Catholic doctrine; divine and natural law. That Shakespeare takes accepted secular and theological theories and juxtaposes them without judgement confuses their respective meanings, disaggregates their collective relationship, and presents them each as possibilities. The play's urgent question goes unanswered—What comes after death, if anything?—but what remains is Shakespeare's purposeful space among the fragments. In the face of multiple possibilities, one always has the space for will.

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[151] Ibid.

Conclusion

While Hamlet's soliloquies are fruitful in adducing the willfulness at work in the Prince's mind, Shakespeare provides additional scenes that further complicate the play's understanding of will in faith. A more expansive project would take care to analyze Claudius's prayer scene and attempt to answer the King's pressing questions: "And what's in prayer by this twofold force, / To be forestalléd ere we come to fall, / Or pardoned being down?"; "May one be pardoned and retain th' offence?"[152] The implications of prayer are unclear, and Claudius's lines confront the problem directly. Additionally, Hamlet's last lines are worthy of discussion. Aside from seeming to address the uncertainty of eternal life, "the rest is silence" appears to suggest that Hamlet has made his decision: there is nothing after death, simply silence.

<p align="center">*   *   *   *</p>

Shakespeare provides us with a telling exposé on the intricacies of faith through the lenses of human psychology and suicide, yet he leaves us with another unanswered question: What are we to do? Religion can be rather daunting. Consider a monarchy, which asserts the supreme authority of one individual over the entire governed state. Though several countries currently have monarchs as heads of states, this system of government feels rather antiquated among the throng of democratic leagues and governments. Belief in an unelected single ruler complicates the understanding of individual autonomy: Why am I not allowed a say? What gives him or her the authority to rule? If I do not believe in what he or she does, why am I not allowed any power to make a change? and so on and so forth. Religion prompts the same questions, only in this case there is not a visible head of state. Believing in God, Heaven, Hell, and all that the Christian religion purports to be is even more of a challenge since there is not any empirical

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[152] *Hamlet*, 3.3.52-54; 3.3.60.

evidence of its existence. The unanswerable nature of God and salvation is what gave purpose to Purgatory; in a system that challenged individual autonomy and seemed to allow little room for human error, Purgatory was a second chance for eternal bliss. Without amelioration after death, life began to seem impossible: who could lead a life entirely free of sin, unless they were destined to be saved? And if that—predestination—is truly the case for existence, then is one sin on earth indicative of endless pain in Hell? And if *that* is the case, what is the point of existence at all?

The questions are innumerable, and some would argue the essence of faith—belief in something without knowing absolutely of its existence. Still, questions make nonbelievers out of some and skeptics out of most. Spenser would say that doubt is simply another trial in the spiritual struggle and we must endure to maintain our faith. As described throughout the course of this thesis, doubt can be powerful and all consuming. While Redcrosse was able to escape with Una's help, Sir Terwin fell to Despayre's clutches, and Hamlet lost his life to his search for truth. Shakespeare, on the other hand, provides us once again with the light of hope. When it comes to faith, we always have a choice, and it is our free will that redeems us.

Of course, there is the obvious choice: to believe or not to believe. We can decide not to believe in God, though life without a higher power can seem as weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable as Hamlet sometimes makes it out to be. Nonetheless, it is our indisputable *choice*. Shakespeare expands the idea of free will to extend into the folds of faith. In *Hamlet*, will does not start and end at the gates of religion; we are free to navigate the terrain on our own terms. The synthesis of contradictory ideas gives rise to a plethora of potentialities, and *Hamlet* confounds more than it elucidates of early modern theology. Within that confusion is where we find our personal space to act freely. On the subject of the ghost, the choice between a "spirit of

health" or "goblin damned" is left to the reader. As is the nature of Ophelia's death, and the sleep (if any) that she met. Shakespeare not only suggests that one is free to choose faith or not, but also capable of assembling one's own conditions for it.

Free will both creates solution and poses problems to faith, as it does to most things. The implications are uncertain; Does having will make us more or less likely to achieve salvation? Does free will make people more pious, or does it make murderers out of us all, as evidenced by the mass of bodies at the end of the play? The ambiguous laws of ethics come into play as moral boundaries are blurred, and we are at risk of using will to justify heinous or barbaric acts. Free will is not meant as a scapegoat, nor is it defense for selfish behavior. Rather, it is Shakespeare's anchor of hope. To some, the anchor Spenser depicts can seem like a restraint, one that forces an individual into a life dictated by an imperceptible monarch. Instead, free will grounds us within ourselves. The choices are ours, and ours alone. These choices make murderers of some, and ministers of others, and such is life. It may seem trite, yet this is the truth: we will find few answers in life, but a legion of choices. It is within those moments of choice, of possibility, where we are born into eternity, whether that be death, sleep, nothingness, or simply tomorrow.

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