

“Against Either Scale” :
Analyzing Jesuitical Equivocation in the Porter Scene
in
William Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*
By
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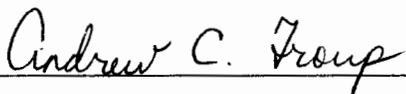
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Abstract: A study of equivocation will yield that this practice commanded a vast amount of attention during the Renaissance, the time period of 1450–1600, in which Jesuitical equivocation was an ongoing phenomenon. The practice became part of the Renaissance era’s ideology; however, since the Greek suffix “logy” signifies “the study of,” the term ideology is not as specific, nor does it explain the role of Jesuitical equivocation in relation to the Renaissance as accurately as another term: the episteme. A brief discussion of the episteme is necessary to discover its relevancy to the puns William Shakespeare used in his Porter Scene in the tragedy *Macbeth*. An episteme (Greek for “knowledge”) is most clearly defined by the new historicist scholar Michel Foucault as a verbal device that involves “[a] network of discursive practices—of thoughts, concepts, and cultural codes—dominant during a given historical period; and . . . the rules governing the transformation of those practices” (Murfin 149). Placing an emphasis on the phrase “rules governing” is extremely illuminating in identifying the interplay between the Jacobean monarchy that held public disdain, and executions of, Jesuits. The persecutions forced subjugated Jesuits to the point that ordinances, such as confessions, needed some form of protection, hence Father Henry Garnet’s treatise regarding equivocation . This imbalanced reciprocity of a monarchy instilling fear in religious leaders illustrates Foucault’s “transformation of . . . practices” and is the basis of the Foucauldian concept of the episteme. Applying Foucault’s theory to the Porter Scene reveals the way Shakespeare’s satirical puns mirrored the Jacobean episteme of the blatant hatred directed at Catholics and the Jesuits.

This thesis is for my beloved, Danny

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“Against Either Scale”: Analyzing Jesuitical Equivocation

in the Porter Scene in William Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*

Imagine having lived in London during the Elizabethan and Jacobean eras when a Catholic’s spiritual devotion was not only scrutinized, but oppressed and silenced. During the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, Queen Elizabeth I and King James I decreed that Catholics attend the Church of England a minimum of one Sunday each month (Greenblatt 61). This mandate did more than force Catholics to attend a Protestant worship service, however. The decree also prohibited priests from performing mass and administering communion: two foundational tenets of the Catholic religion that often instilled inspiration, faith, identity, and hope in the faith’s followers. For some Jesuit priests, the testament of their faith was challenged to the utmost, resulting in the loss of their lives. Such is the case of Father Henry Garnet, a Jesuitical priest executed for his covert knowledge of the foiled Gunpowder Plot of 5 November 1605. This terrorist attempt to bomb Parliament and kill those who were to be inside—such as King James I, his family, and the Members of Parliament—can be traced to a band of thirteen Catholic conspirators. The most noted terrorists were Guy Fawkes, Robert Catesby, and Sir Everard Digby, who led ten other men stoked by animosity and angst

toward the Protestant King James I (336-341). After 5 November 1605, the names of Fawkes, Catesby, and Digby became just as notorious concerning their Gunpowder Plot attempt as Osama Bin Laden and Khalid Sheikh Mohammed would become 396 years later after the World Trade Center holocaust. Similar to America's collective consciousness in the twenty-first century after 9/11, the fifth of November evoked just as ominous a tone to Londoners in the early seventeenth-century. Therefore, William Shakespeare undoubtedly would have known of this attempted terrorist plot. Additionally, most Shakespearean audience members, who, in the summer of 1606 would have seen *Macbeth*, probably would have recognized the allusions directed at events and persons associated with the Gunpowder Plot. Even up until the late twentieth century, many international calendars noted "Guy Fawkes Day" in red letters. Ask a Protestant the merit of a Guy Fawkes holiday, and the familiar adage is that the fifth of November is remembered because the British arrested a Catholic trying to bomb Parliament. Conversely, if a Catholic is asked the same question, some may respond that the day is celebrated because Fawkes tried. To memorialize the success in halting the attack, commemorative medals were quickly minted featuring an embossed picture of a snake hidden beneath a tiny cluster of flowers (Gibson 165). Just like the initial massive publicity that would have kept Londoners informed—and reminded—of the terrorist attempt, Shakespeare would undoubtedly have seen these medals being circulated throughout London celebrating King James's escape. However, the aftermath of the foiled Gunpowder Plot reveals more than souvenir coins. Barbaric cross examinations, tortures, and executions were ordered for nearly all the terrorists; however, of especial portent was one Jesuit's gruesome doom and his hanging because he knew of the plot due to the conspirators' confessions (Greenblatt 336). This particular priest, Father Henry

Garnet, was arrested and detained as if he had personally excavated the subterranean tunnels and rolled the thirty-six barrels of gunpowder to detonate and murder England's monarchy and the MPs present at a November opening session of Parliament. Out of deference to his faith and his vow of confidentiality to protect the conspirators' confessions, Garnet adamantly refused to reveal the names of Guy Fawkes *et al* until after he was put on the infamous "rack." When Garnet first entered the Tower of London for questioning in March 1606, he wasn't initially mistreated. However, once Garnet refused to divulge the conspirators' confessions, magistrates knew he wasn't about to reveal any information regarding the plot and he was methodically and excruciatingly tortured. Throughout his nightmarish ordeal, Garnet's plea of innocence was ignored; his execution date was set for 3 May 1606. King James I ordered the renowned Garnet, "[a] learned, pious, and very important man," be left to "[h]ang until he was dead" (Huntley 391). Unlike the other conspirators who "[w]ere quartered in horrible haste" (391), Garnet's hanging was deliberately slow and agonizing. To add bitter irony and hypocrisy to this public spectacle, the execution scaffolding was built just adjacent to St. Paul's Cathedral. King James silently watched the horrific execution from a nearby courtyard window (Greenblatt 336). Garnet, the priest in charge of a "clandestine Jesuit mission in England" (336), wasn't executed for anything he did to assist the bombing of Parliament; Father Henry Garnet was executed for what he knew and what he didn't say. Call Garnet's involvement in the Gunpowder Plot a case of mistaken duplicity. The term duplicity is used here to complement the practice of Jesuitical Equivocation. While the term equivocation is often associated with the act of lying, Jesuits were more inclined to commit half-truths, to conceal or refuse to tell "the whole truth," or even camouflage the truth by saying one thing while meaning another. The latter example is most closely

identified with duplicity and the Jesuits further practiced this form of avoiding reporting the truth.

The Origins and Early Practices of Equivocation

The Jesuits' manipulation of language, or ambiguity, coupled with delaying or withholding knowledge from those in authority became so prevalent during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries that whenever a priest withheld the confessed information, the practice was called "equivocation." In order to explain and defend this practice, Garnet wrote *A Treatise of Equivocation*. Father Garnet's text piously defended "[t]he morality of giving misleading or ambiguous answers under oath" (336-337). Additionally, Garnet argues that Jesuits were pressured into revealing what they heard in the confessional; therefore, Father Garnet believed some sort of legal protection for the act of confession itself and for the religious leaders who were faced with this onus of responsibility was necessary.

When Garnet faced trial interviews in March 1606 regarding his complicity in the Gunpowder Plot, he referred back to his treatise by positing that this law regarding interrogation was unjust (Muir xx). And since Garnet considered this law that defined and prohibited complicity strictly temporal, Garnet firmly believed "[t]here is no treason" (qtd. in Muir xx). According to the document *State Trials*, Garnet, "[p]rayed 'for the good success of the great Action, concerning the Catholick Cause in the beginning of the Parliament'" (qtd. in Muir xx). After his utterance, Garnet then "[d]enied that this referred to the Gunpowder Plot" (xx). When questioning continued, Garnet "[c]laimed that he could not reveal the plot because he was told of it in confession" (xx).

Jesuits practiced equivocation to alleviate or improve what could be a detrimental situation for a Catholic who had confessed incriminating information. The first recorded instance of equivocation can be traced to St. Francis of Assisi in an almost farcical scene reminiscent of a slapstick comedy sketch a la the Three Stooges or the Marx Brothers. During the 1560s, several constabulary officers were chasing a fugitive robbery suspect when they suddenly saw St. Francis, stopped, and asked: "Which way did he go?" St. Francis tunneled his arms into his robe sleeves, and with one concealed finger he pointed it in the direction where the suspect fled. The anecdote states, "[b]ut looking in the opposite direction said, 'He went that way'" (qtd. in Huntley 391). St. Francis may have thought he was being "charitable" toward the man on the run, but he also was equivocating when "[h]e told the truth in the sight of God, though of course the police never caught their man" (391). Little did St. Francis know his action of telling a "half-truth," a euphemism for lying, would set a precedent for further court cases and an entire practice Anglicans would later vilify and wield as a tool for prosecutions and executions. The act of equivocation, of double talk, or lying for a principle, trebled during the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries as the subversion of Catholics further assimilated into politics. Jesuit priests then were faced with the dilemma of protecting their Catholic parishioners who were suppressed and persecuted by Protestants in power. Equivocation became a matter of emotional attachment for fellow Catholics subjected to caustic political investigations. Once the practice of equivocation became predominant in London's culture, an astute playwright such as William Shakespeare would have been eager to draw attention to this disdained (especially by the Jacobean monarchy) practice through his plays to further accentuate the polarity between Protestants and Catholics. This rift that lasted for more than a century couldn't be ignored by future historians and critics, either. Thus, equivocation that left

in its wake atrocious punishments and subjugation has caused many literary critics, especially New Historicist critics, to generate more intensive analyses surrounding this Jesuitical practice.

Equivocation: An Honest Term for Specific *Macbeth* Characters

William O. Scott, in his article “Macbeth’s—and Our—Self-Equivocations,” created a more glaring term for equivocation: “liar paradox” (Scott 161). As Scott explains, “[s]upposedly hidden actions can disclose themselves and to an extent function like liar paradoxes, challenging the beholder in turn to enter in a ‘knowing’ self-deception” (168). Scott’s article also traces the public’s Jesuitical dubiousness directly to Father Henry Garnet and his treatise. Scott asserts Garnet’s argument centered upon the premise that “[a] Catholic under oath could ‘admitte the oath with thes intention, that he will answere directly and trewelye (and so if they vrge hym), without all equivocation, so farre as he is assured” (162). [Original spelling has been retained.] The Jesuits aligned with Garnet’s philosophy that as long as the deception would aid a Catholic being held under governmental, or monarchical scrutiny, then a little equivocation was understandable. However, the Protestants weren’t buying this interpretation, and neither did William Shakespeare.

In William Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*, when the witches announce “fair is foul and foul is fair” their chiasmus not only confounds the main character, but the sisters’ duplicitous chant also serves as a prophecy that almost stirs a scant amount of pity for Macbeth had he been able to arrest his escalating madness. And when Malcolm feigns his ineptness at reclaiming Scotland, he tells Macduff he possesses “none” of the “[k]ing-becoming graces” (4.3.91). Equivocation is peppered throughout Shakespeare’s tragedy, and Scott’s “liar paradox” is blatantly apparent in Act Two, just prior to the Porter Scene, when Macbeth murders King Duncan, and his remorse quickly surfaces as both he and Lady Macbeth are scrambling about trying to return the bloody

daggers. As Lady Macbeth hastily suggests that she smear Duncan's blood on the servants' faces, they suddenly hear a continuous knocking "At the south entry" (2.2.65). Lady Macbeth believes "A little water clears us of this deed: How easy is it then!" (2.2.66-67); however, even though Macbeth has already forsaken his obeisance and loyalty, he still has some semblance of a conscience. Lady Macbeth does not. Macbeth remains transfixed and "lost" in his own thoughts as he states, "To know my deed, 'twere best not know myself" (2.2.72.). The only way he can assuage his remorse is to dissemble, to cast off his identity of the "noble Macbeth" (1.3.69) he once had after defeating "that Thane of Cawdor" (1.2.65). Macbeth then feigns surprise and horror at the announcement of King Duncan's murder, and a form of the "liar paradox," or equivocation, is now in place. Macbeth yearned for the power of the crown, but he didn't weigh the aftermath. His inner fortitude and courage have dissipated into obscurity as the knocking persists while he feebly utters his regretful "Wake Duncan with thy knocking: I would thou couldst" (2.2.73-74). Macbeth has forfeited his integrity and the admiration of King Duncan and his kinsmen, such as Ross, in exchange for a life that will forever be ensnared in regret and self-loathing. His self-inflicted abhorrence will wreak an exponential animosity toward all within his sphere and beyond as he sadly realizes no amount of rationalization can diminish his capital crime. Macbeth must now immerse himself in deceit; otherwise, the emotional attachment and affection that he once held for the king will eclipse the fortitude he must soon exercise as he becomes King of Scotland. For Macbeth, his equivocation soon manifests itself not only in a personality disorder, but also in an eerie, escalating mental meltdown. In the first four acts of *Macbeth*, audiences see an exuberant, victorious soldier rapidly disintegrate into a neurotic political leader and a psychotic delegator who coerces others to kill for him. Exercising equivocation by hiding his murderous act and convincing himself that certain people are thwarting his mission to rule Scotland ultimately will propel

Macbeth to later assign the slaughter of Macduff's entire family to other ruthless killers. Thus, Shakespeare's theme of equivocation first takes on a duality via the stage by revealing Macbeth's practice of deceit. Then, in the next scene, Shakespeare patently uses the term "equivocator" with deliberate dominance to shift the attention from Macbeth's dilemma to the real-life recent method of Jesuitical Equivocation that Father Garnet used to protect the Gunpowder Plot conspirators. Father Garnet didn't divulge all the details and by monarchical standards his refusal to confess was considered treasonous. The seriousness of this issue is lessened by using a comical character to publicly broadcast this seventeenth-century controversial practice of equivocation. Shakespeare also deftly weaves the Porter scene in just the right place to mirror the devious nature of Macbeth and his equivocal conflict between being a heroic soldier versus being king and a Jesuit's desire to defend a fellow Catholic while also silently defying King James.

"Remember the Porter": An Admonition

to Also Recall Equivocation

So, enter the Porter who stumbles across the stage as he entertains an audience that, due to the notoriety of the Gunpowder Plot and Father Garnet's involvement with the conspirators, would already have been familiar with the term "equivocator":

Knock, knock. Who's there, I'th'other devil's name?—

Faith, here's an equivocator, that could swear in

both the scales against either scale. (2.3.7-9)

Two forms of equivocation can be discerned in this scene. The first instance of equivocation occurs as Macbeth weighs the consequences in his soliloquy in act 1 scene 7.

Macbeth thinks to “quickly” perform the “assassination,” would be better until he begins to ponder the “consequence.” Now he knows that the murderous act will be witnessed even by God as “[h]eaven’s horsed/Upon the sightless couriers of the air,/Shall blow the horrid deed in every eye/That tears shall drown the wind” (1.7.21-25). Here, Shakespeare reveals Macbeth’s inner conscience that is bisected between retaining his loyalty to King Duncan, yet edging precipitously close to ruination as he ponders the consequences of “universal condemnation.” Macbeth wavers, “Besides, this Duncan/ Hath borne his faculties so meek, hath been /So clear in his great office” (1.7. 16-17). However, the admiration soon wanes as Macbeth recognizes his only virtue is ambition “[w]hich o’erleaps itself/And falls on th’other” (1.7. 27-28). Once King Duncan grants Macbeth the title of Thane of Cawdor, Macbeth gains further favor with Duncan. However, suddenly Macbeth’s title isn’t enough. Waiting to become king would take too much humility and patience. And Macbeth wanted power immediately. Macbeth equivocates between admiring Duncan and pondering Duncan’s assassination. Here, Macbeth’s trepidation provides a wisp of hope as Macbeth seems to ponder ethical boundaries, and for an instant the audience is led to believe Macbeth just might regain his senses and abandon the assassination plot. Once Macbeth illogically rationalizes his ambition as the cause for the irrational and psychotic behavior of committing murder, King Duncan’s life will be finished, and so will Macbeth’s. Macbeth knows this, yet the ephemeral rush he will feel as King of Scotland “o’erleaps” a life of subservient deference; and this is the truth Macbeth is ashamed to admit openly, yet confronts inwardly. Macbeth’s internal conflict versus his outward appearance of the dutiful officer becomes Macbeth’s crucible of equivocation. Any hesitation Macbeth may have felt is now lost as he heeds Lady Macbeth’s admonition to “screw” his “courage to the sticking-place” (1.7.61). Macbeth obeys his wife’s admonitions. He obeys his addiction to power. He slays King Duncan. Immediately, Macbeth

feels remorse and knows his soul won't ascend to paradise; he is now damned. Thus, Macbeth's hybridity reveals any initial admiration for Duncan has dissolved as he proceeds to murder Scotland's king. Now, Macbeth has donned his own masque of a hypocritical "two-headed Janus" (*Merchant of Venice* 1.1.50) that alternates between his own equivocation of a feigned respect versus his insatiable need to rule Scotland.

In *The Arden Shakespeare Macbeth*, edited by Kenneth Muir, literary scholar Anthony Kellett suggests that the Porter scene has a "punning link between [Garnet] and equivocator. . . a reader might "ask whether Shakespeare did not make the porter use this word. . . with unconscious reference to Macbeth, who even then had begun to find that he could not "equivocate to heaven"" (qtd. in Muir 59). Therefore, yet another interpretation can be applied by noticing the pun of "equivocator" can relate to Macbeth himself and also Father Henry Garnet for their abilities to pursue their personal objectives. Jesuit priests often failed to tell the entire truth in situations where a Catholic was accused of a crime due to the omniscient power of a Catholic-intolerant monarchy. But equivocation wasn't considered overt lying from the Jesuits' perspective; this matter of opinion is why the continual rivalry remained in stasis throughout the early modern age of history. Monarchical rule didn't hold sway over the priests' vows because the Jesuits were continually "[a]sserting their belief that God (and his Vicegerent on earth) are above the king" (Huntley 397). Like the ancient Sophoclean heroine Antigone, who defied King Creon's orders and gave her brother Polyneices a proper burial, the Jesuits "placed their religious loyalty above their political" (397).

Equivocation and Its Relevancy to the Episteme of the Renaissance

A study of equivocation will yield that this practice commanded a vast amount of attention during the Renaissance, the time period of 1450-1600, in which Jesuitical equivocation was an ongoing phenomenon. The practice became part of the Renaissance era's ideology; however, since the Greek suffix "logy" signifies "the study of," the term ideology is not as specific, nor does it explain the role of Jesuitical equivocation in relation to the Renaissance as accurately as another term: the episteme. A brief discussion of the episteme is necessary to discover its relevancy to the puns Shakespeare used in his Porter Scene. An episteme (Greek for "knowledge") is most clearly defined by the new historicist scholar Michel Foucault as a verbal device that involves "[a] network of discursive practices—of thoughts, concepts, and cultural codes—dominant during a given historical period; and . . . the rules governing the transformation of those practices" (Murfin 149). Placing an emphasis on the phrase "rules governing" is extremely illuminating in identifying the interplay between the Jacobean monarchy that held public disdain, and executions of, Jesuits. The persecutions forced subjugated Jesuits to the point that ordinances, such as confessions, needed some form of protection, hence Father Henry Garnet's treatise regarding equivocation. This imbalanced reciprocity of a monarchy instilling fear in religious leaders illustrates Foucault's "transformation of . . . practices" and is the basis of the Foucauldian concept of the episteme. Applying Foucault's theory to the Porter Scene reveals the way Shakespeare's satirical puns mirrored the Jacobean episteme of the blatant hatred directed at Catholics and the Jesuits.

In order to subvert this enmity, the Jesuits rationalized one of the most basic commandments: "Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour" (*King James Version Bible*, Ex. 20:16). King James commissioned a bible in which "The Epistle

Dedicatory” preceding the bible’s text contained anti-Catholic rhetoric illustrating the anti-Catholic episteme of the early seventeenth century:

And now at last, by the mercy of God, and the continuance of our labours, it being brought unto such a conclusion, as that we have hopes that the Church of England shall reap good fruit thereby; we hold it our duty to offer it to Your Majesty, not only as to our King and Sovereign, but as to the principal Mover and Author of the work...whose allowance and acceptance of our labours shall more honour and encourage us, than all the calumniations and hard interpretations of other men shall dismay us. So that if, on the one side, we shall be traduced by Popish Persons at home or abroad, who therefore will malign us, because we are poor instruments to make God’s holy Truth to be yet more and more known unto the people, whom they desire still to keep in ignorance and darkness...(*King James Version Bible* iv)

Note the reciprocity the Protestant writers are so desperately seeking. As they are humbly, of course, submitting the epistle to King James, they exalt the king as the “principal Mover and Author of the work” (iv). This esteemed title didn’t leave much praise for the apostles and prophets who also wrote many of the books of the New and Old Testaments; however, the authors weren’t trying to win the approval of dead prophets. Their desire was for the king to continue to “encourage” them to uphold the Anglican faith. The epistle’s excessive verbiage and praise for King James I juxtaposed against the disdain for “Popish Persons” would have been considered perfectly acceptable during the 1600s, even laudable. Through the authors’ use of codifying the Protestants and Catholics and pitting them against each other, the epistle (and other popular Jacobean works such as Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*) enables a new historicist reading,

especially when the findings of French philosopher and new historicist critic Michel Foucault are applied. As M. H. Abrams has argued,

Foucault's view that the discourse of an era, instead of reflecting pre-existing entities and orders, brings into being the concepts, oppositions, and hierarchies. . . (and) these elements are both products and propagators of 'power,' or social forces; and...the particular discursive formations of an era determine what is at the time accounted to be 'knowledge' and 'truth.' (Abrams and Harpham 245)

Greenblatt's Subversion-Containment Dialectic:

How His Twentieth Century Theory Applies to Jesuitical Equivocation

Reading this dedicatory proclamation four hundred years after its publication through the lens of new historicism magnifies not only the excessive laudatory rhetoric the authors used, but also the omniscient prejudicial hierarchy in existence. America's esteemed new historicist critic Stephen Greenblatt would critique treatises such as "The Epistle Dedicatory" as "[t]he Machiavellian hypothesis of the origin of princely power in force and fraud,' but the rhetoric nonetheless draws its 'audience irresistibly toward the celebration of that power'" (qtd. in Abrams and Harpham 249). Any "power discourse," as Greenblatt posits, can ensue for decades due to submissiveness to those in authority (especially Divine Right authority) as being the social norm. Especially unsettling are the legions of subjects who subjugated themselves into silencing their devotion to God because of King James's thwarting his "princely power." Greenblatt defines this phenomenon as the "subversion-containment dialectic" (Abrams and Harpham 249), and it manifests itself when a specific episteme in history reveals people forcibly adhering to mandates that subverted their pursuits, their passions, and their identities. Some of Shakespeare's plays, more specifically the Henry plays, and the Porter Scene in *Macbeth*, feature

this “subversion-containment dialectic.” Greenblatt’s research has gained the attention of new historicist critics who study Renaissance literature (249) and the link between the basic tenet of new historicism that encompasses a nation’s socio-political makeup and an imposing government in which any effective political and cultural order had to implement subversive elements, but in a method intentionally designed to “contain” any opposition in an already established order (249).

Greenblatt’s use of the term “new historicism” in 1982 supports Michel Foucault’s claim of the submissive relationship between power and the means necessary to survive: “[u]nder a dominating ‘regimen of truth,’ all attempts at opposition to power cannot but be ‘complicitous’ with it” (249). For a Jesuit, complicity during the Renaissance was vital for survival. Father Garnet didn’t want violence, and he probably didn’t want his severed head impaled on the London Bridge alongside the other Gunpowder Plot conspirators, either. Yet the public display of severed heads was one more subversion-containment ploy that kept Catholics submissive and Anglicans even more, well, Anglican. However, oppression only lasts until those subverted reject those in power, and the paradigm, or the episteme, shifts. Each successive century has experienced a paradigm shift. In the 1700s, France and Colonial America revolted; in the 1800s, America finally ended slavery with the Civil War; and in the early 1900s, the Bolshevik uprising pushed for greater democracy. In the past four months, countries such as Egypt and Libya have experienced upheavals and oustings of decades-long oppressive regimes. The timelessness of society’s progression and digression is why the study of historicism continues to remain strong in literary criticism and in the study of Shakespeare. These uprisings have served as the impetus for novelists, playwrights, and poets to be the chroniclers of opposition and suppression. Unlike the deconstructionist theories where the text is analyzed within its own context, new historicist theory encompasses the social and political

aspects that are occurring during the time the authors are writing their works. Greenblatt, for example, fuses literature, the arts, and other “social practices” into what he terms the “cultural poetics” that comprise “[t]he general culture of an era” (249). In his article “Self, Subversion, and the New Historicism,” G. W. Pigman III asserts, “To begin to understand the Renaissance we have to assume some similarity between ourselves and the men and women of that period; otherwise, we will have no point of reference for our translations of Renaissance concern into our own” (Pigman 503). The author further argues, “[s]ome new historicists give extraordinary prominence to the political, subversive influence of poets and playwrights. For some new historicists the poets are still the unacknowledged legislators of mankind, not for all time, but for their own times” (504). To deem Shakespeare as an “unacknowledged [legislator]s of mankind” is too radical; however, he does focus, albeit briefly, on the highly controversial Renaissance practice of equivocation.

Shakespeare’s Skill in Combining Historical, Cultural, and

Political Events and Literature: Cultural Poetics

For source materials, especially when he wrote plays that were anchored in historical events, Shakespeare did some extensive archival excavating. This kind of research later became foundational for present-day New Historicists who examine the political, social, and cultural realms within a given epoch and its parallels to a particular work. Shakespeare is renowned for being ahead of his time with regards to exposing human nature and the psychology behind characters’ motives. What Shakespeare also demonstrated was his erudite attention to the world around him; this encompassing knowledge, or the “cultural poetics” he included in his plays, deem him an archetypal New Historicist in the sense that the conflicts and motives threading throughout his tragedies and histories continue to transcend beyond the stage and

into present day casual and classroom conversations, scholarly debate, and literary texts. Shakespearean plays serve as a political and societal album from whatever setting his particular play chronicles. Shakespeare's delving into research led him to use historical and literary works for plot ideas. For example, Shakespeare's primary source for *The Tragedy of Romeo and Juliet* was a long poem entitled *Romeus and Juliet* by Arthur Brooke, which was based on a true story first published in 1476 (Saliani, Ferguson, and Scott 6). For *Macbeth*, Shakespeare consulted Raphael Holinshed's *The Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland* (Greenblatt 169). Shakespeare's study of Holinshed yielded the fascinating and true account of King Duncan, the King of Scotland, who was murdered in August 1040 by Macbeth. This "Scottish Play," so nicknamed to avert any further accidents due to mishaps that had occurred during past productions of *Macbeth*, continues to intrigue audiences today. Yet how many playgoers know King Duncan actually existed more than 970 years ago and he was once regarded as a noble monarch? Shakespeare's use of past works reveal his focus on the contemporary power structure, his knowledge of past events, and his ability to intersperse this knowledge by focusing on issues relevant to the Renaissance public.

One particular aspect of the Renaissance is the omniscient rhetorical power King James I commanded with the release of *The King James Version* of the Bible and its introductory Epistle Dedicatory (as previously addressed in this paper). The dedication is one such example of the Jacobean monarchy's influence over media. William Shakespeare was privy to this power, and he probably knew that addressing the recently averted Gunpowder Plot would win the approval of King James. So, whether the discourse addressed religious, theatrical, or political topics, Shakespeare employed what New Historicists term "cultural poetics" to his extreme advantage.

A New Historicist analysis of any form of literature requires an inclusive examination of not only the text being addressed, but the culture that was popular at the time the work was created. While a New Historicist analysis may initially seem fragmented as the analytical process embraces such a broad spectrum, think of a New Historicist reading as an exercise in synchronicity. The literature, in this case Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, becomes more than a tragedy. This haunting tale of regicide is a chronicle of an historical event, the murder of King Duncan, and a showcase of Shakespeare's sense of what interested his audiences. He interspersed contemporary, Renaissance events, and political viewpoints with facts. Astute audience members would have concluded these jests and jabs were leveled at authority, politics, and religion. Furthermore, a New Historicist reading of *Macbeth* reveals Shakespeare's adroitness at this "cultural poetics" method that demands from the reader a broader understanding of the epoch in which a work was created. However, like Francis Bacon's famous 1624 quote suggests, "Knowledge is power"; the more readers know of the work's culture milieu, the more they leave the work with an enriched experience overall. Examining Shakespeare's use of puns and the surrounding issues of equivocation will further illustrate the dynamics of New Historicism and thus yield added interpretations and understandings.

Publicizing and Parodying Jesuitical Equivocation

Equivocation was highly controversial in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries because priests rationalized their withholding of information, or saying one thing but meaning another. So Shakespeare may have even asked himself: What better way to publicize this often discussed and ridiculed phenomenon than in a play? Perhaps Shakespeare also may have believed that savvy audience members knowledgeable in political and religious issues would have understood the Porter's pun of "equivocator" and Shakespeare's target of this wordplay: Father Henry

Garnet. The Porter speaks only forty-six lines, yet his small humorous part cleverly illuminates the Gunpowder Plot of 1605 in connection with the controversial practice of Jesuitical equivocation, and his outward ridiculing of the term “equivocator” allows twenty-first century readers to apply William Shakespeare’s Porter Scene in *Macbeth* to the “subversion-containment dialectic”; furthermore, a conclusion can thus be drawn that two extremely famous monarchs in British history—Queen Elizabeth I and King James I—held an oppressive hatred for Catholics that resulted in subversions, tortures, and deaths.

Thus, by performing a closer new historicist study of the Porter Scene, the “subversion-containment dialectic” emerges through the Porter’s puns that would have evoked laughter, though mostly from the Protestants. Catholics would have possibly laughed so as not to divulge their faith, but some also probably remained subdued, even pensive, as the Porter invites Father Henry Garnet, the “equivocator,” into the gates of hell. Jesuitical pathos may have even surfaced as audience members watched the Porter deliver his sardonic welcome: “O, come in, equivocator” (2.3.12). For a Catholic member of the audience, the sarcasm would have been offensive to those who had received communions, blessings, and counsel from Garnet. Perhaps Catholics, as they heard the hung-over Porter deliver this line, would have heard loud laughter burst from a neighboring Protestant theatre patron, while deep pathos for the executed Garnet may have silenced any Catholic who held reverence for the priest.

The Jesuits and The Porter:

A New Historicist View of Fact and Fiction

Macbeth opens with a brief celebratory scene marking a victory over the death of Macdonwald (1.2.9-30). Macbeth’s elation at recent heroics sadly plummets into a descent that is fascinating yet frightening, powerful yet pitiful. Macbeth’s exponential madness, ambition,

rage, and revenge, that mirror his futility at quenching his insatiable lust for power, coupled with his uncontrollable inability to arrest his paranoia, make this tragedy “full of interesting problems” (Dean 58).

Despite the phantasmagoric elements of blood resembling oceans, witches’ prophecies, and moving forests in *Macbeth*, certain play elements are based on fact. Macbeth’s murder of King Duncan and the departures of sons Malcolm and Donalbain to seek asylum, yes, those events did occur in August 1040, but the banquet scene and Banquo’s ghost are Shakespeare’s skillful, ethereal inventions.

I studied this scene through the lens of New Historicism, and the highly publicized plight of Jesuitical Priests who practiced equivocation, and then I performed a close reading of Act 2, scene 3 as it opens with a hung-over Porter who is abruptly awakened by a persistent knocking. The annoyance of this urgent rapping rattles Macbeth, who has just murdered King Duncan. Lady Macbeth urgently tells her husband, “Get on your night-gown, lest occasion call us, /And show us to be watchers” (2.2.69-70), while the Porter stumbles about. Then, the Porter begins to fantasize that he isn’t a porter at all but the gatekeeper of hell: “Here’s a knocking, indeed! If a man were Porter of Hell Gate, he should have old turning the key” (2.3.1-2). As the only comedic scene in Shakespeare’s dark and dreary *Macbeth*, the play has quickly shifted from a murder to levity as the Porter begins alluding to Father Henry Garnet by way of an alias: Farmer. “Here’s a farmer, that hang’d himself on th’ expectation of plenty: come in, time-pleaser; have napkins enow about you;” (2.3. 4-5). At the Porter’s mention of the word “farmer,” he isn’t referring to a country peasant; he is stating just one of about half a dozen aliases Garnet employed to duck the constabulary’s continual surveillance. So the “farmer” allusion to Garnet further illustrates the measures Jesuits took in hiding their identity from a

spying monarchy and prosecutors such as Sir Edward Coke. Nearly five months after the gunpowder plot, when Father Henry Garnet's arraignment began at 9:30 on 28 March 1606, he was introduced as "Henry Garnet, of the profession of the Jesuits, otherwise Walley, otherwise Darcy, otherwise Roberts, otherwise Farmer, otherwise Philips (for by all those names he called himself)" (qtd. in Hogge 368). In *The Arden Shakespeare Macbeth*, editor Kenneth Muir in reference to the Porter Scene notes a "[c]onnection between this passage and the trial of Garnet, who went under the name of 'Farmer'" (Muir 59).

The Jacobean episteme dictated that Jesuits, especially those of a high profile like Garnet, were forced to adopt different names to avoid the ubiquitous officials bent on performing impromptu "priest raids." What is particularly disconcerting is the very accusers (e.g. Coke) who condemned and ridiculed Garnet for using aliases were the original reasons for Jesuits like Garnet to use new monikers in the first place. Thus, ironically, yet another form of equivocation is at play here with the Porter's use of aliases as he ridicules Garnet, though Garnet used the aliases as necessary measures of protection. Proof of Garnet using the necessary alias "Farmer" thus gives credence to the anti-Jesuitical sentiment with the Porter welcoming the "Farmer" into the Gates of Hell and the fact the Anglicans were prevailing by ridding England of one more Jesuit who had the audacity to rearrange the hierarchy of estates by putting his parishioners, or commoners, above the monarchy.

Are there any other elements in the Porter's salutations that would link the "farmer" with Father Henry Garnet? Once the Porter has caught the audience's attention with Garnet's alias, his next allusion involves "napkins." The Porter continues his mockery: "[c]ome in time-pleaser; have napkins enow about you;" (2.3.5-6). The napkins symbolize the reverence other Jesuits and Catholics exhibited to priests such as Garnet. According to Gary Wills's *Witches*

and Jesuits, “The Porter sees a figure arriving with handkerchiefs. Why? Handkerchiefs were associated with the public execution of Jesuits, since the emptying of all a man’s blood in the savage disemboweling, castrating, and quartering of the hanged bodies of traitors prompted pious Catholics to dip handkerchiefs. . . in the martyrs’ saving blood” (Wills 99). The “napkins enow” will serve a dual role: a poignant reminder of the public executions many Jesuits suffered and (according to the Porter) a functional object to wipe away the sweaty effects of hell’s bonfire. These swatches of cloth were revered because some believed they held restorative, miraculous powers (100). Thus, the Porter is mocking, as Garry Wills posits in *Jesuits and Witches*, “Farmer Garnet arriving in hell with some of his signature bloody handkerchiefs—which will not work miracles in hell but can be used to wipe his sweat. . . by the ‘bonfire’” (100).

Shakespeare’s allusion to this common “bloody handkerchief” phenomenon would have probably evoked pathos from Catholics in the audience. Jesuitical executions were public, so these gruesome displays would have enabled a bystander to dip the cloth into the spilled blood. The Porter’s glib comment “have napkins enow about you” (2.3.6) transforms an atrocious act into a gesture of reverence for the martyred Garnet. Thus, the Porter’s beckoning and comical puns become, according to the new historicist paradigms, a “representation” or “cultural construct” of “the historical conditions specific to an era” (Abrams and Harpham 245). Just as scholars can interpret the meanings and nuances of the Porter’s role in providing the brief comic relief to an otherwise dark tragedy, the seventeenth century historicity itself begs interpretation for the monarchy’s profound impact on the way Jesuits were forced to clandestinely worship their God. Additionally, Protestant audience members would have laughed at yet another Catholic joke leveled at a Jesuit, secure in the fact that this Catholic “conspirator” had already been caught, tried, executed, and drawn and quartered. By the time *Macbeth* was first publicly performed in 1606, Garnet had been executed on 3 May 1606. Dating

of the play has been problematic, but scholars Kenneth Muir, Gary Taylor, Garry Wills, and Nicholas Brooke collectively have argued that 1606 is the correct year after studying Shakespeare's style and noting that Henry Garnet's trial began on 28 March 1606. Thus, hearing a drunken porter stumbling about using words like "Farmer" and "equivocator" would have, again, invoked infectious laughter due to the immediacy of the aborted plot and the public executions. In *Gunpowder, Treason and Plot*, C. Northcote Parkinson writes, "What to a modern audience may seem a little tedious was screamingly funny when written. All London knew about equivocation before Garnet's trial was over, but Lord Salisbury (Robert Cecil, aide to King James I) had made Garnet known as an equivocator before the trial had well begun" (102). When first performed before King James I, no doubt, he would have especially liked the repeated use of the pun "equivocator" because the practice James loathed had been silenced, at least by one Jesuit Priest.

The Porter continues his humorous entreaty to the audience, "[w]ho committed treason enough for God's sake yet could not equivocate to heaven" (2.3.10). Besides the loaded term "equivocator," which has already been discussed, the other stinging word that links Garnet to the Gunpowder plot is the term "treason." The Porter is suggesting that even a Catholic priest who claims he was using the practice of equivocation to shelter Fawkes, Catesby, and Digby for their protection was still a traitor to the crown. Garnet didn't obstruct justice; almost all the conspirators were executed within one month of the attempt. But the Porter makes his message clear: Garnet was more of a hypocrite than a Jesuit, and no amount of double talk will allow him into heaven. The Porter's jokes would also have caused Protestants to remember the appalling gunpowder scandal that was less than a year old and still in many Londoners' minds—while Catholics would have silently loathed this political reminder knowing Garnet was the object of the derision. Shakespeare's satire wasn't intended solely to produce a laugh; it

was used to fortify the monarchy, to bolster King James' victory over terrorism. King James also would have liked that the three witches are compared to devilish beings as he was fascinated with witches, and the play's shorter duration than other Shakespearean tragedies were two advantageous elements since the king did not like lengthy plays (Wills 40).

Christianity's basic tenets: love, charity, and faith have long been practiced by many who have devoted their lives to revering and following Jesus Christ. Translating the bible from the original Greek and Hebrew languages meant the bible could be read by anyone who could read the English language. The bible which bears the name, King James Version, has given this monarch a closer association with Christianity than any other English king. Granted, the printing of the King James Version of the Bible in 1611, was an undertaking; however, James merely commissioned the translation of the Bible. Commissioning scholars is quite different from exhibiting a sterling character. Throughout the sources researched for this thesis, not once is King James I noted for his benevolence and altruism; however, Jesuits tending to Londoners' and villagers' needs is a recurring theme. Yet the magistrates and the monarchy claimed Protestantism was more divine. Furthermore, James I believed in 'the divine right of kings' (Williamson 110). So even though he believed he was ordained by God to rule, any spiritual, reverential behaviors that would indicate some sort of devotion to God ends there. And when his wife, Queen Anne, died on 4 March 1619, James was "[l]ittle moved by her death, his affections by then being entirely centered on George Villiers, a young man he had met in 1614 (111).

Studying the lives of the Jesuits reveals Greenblatt's "subversion-containment dialect" in use, especially with regard to Henry Garnet. Both Queen Elizabeth and King James hated the Jesuits, and the Church of England Protestants reinforced their loyalty to the monarchy by ridiculing the Jesuits. Catholic subversives became increasingly frustrated, and soon riots and

violence ensued. The Gunpowder Plot conspirators acted quickly by concocting their explosive scheme, but the plot was circumvented by intercepting a conspirator's letter that was shown to King James (Greenblatt 336). In the middle of the night, Guy Fawkes was caught in a cellar beneath Parliament House as he was readying to ignite thirty-six barrels of gunpowder. Fawkes, who would have become the first suicide bomber had the plot been uninterrupted, was immediately tortured. Fawkes identified the other conspirators, and a massive manhunt began. Most were arrested, but those who resisted were killed that night. Others were tried, found guilty, and subsequently hanged. Those who were hanged didn't die from the noose. They were lowered from the scaffolding before they died, and then they were slit from the navel to the "chaps," and their bodies were quartered (336). Guy Fawkes's head was the first to be spiked atop London Bridge.

The Age of Exploration and the Age of Catholic and Protestant Enmity

Enmity such as this between Catholics and Protestants didn't develop overnight. This animosity was engineered through decades of subversion by targeting individuals to the point where assassination plots exceeded any potential consequences. The hostility that reached such pandemic proportions began nearly one hundred years prior to the Gunpowder Plot and involved monarchies and European explorers.

To understand more clearly the Porter scene in *Macbeth*, we need to backtrack one hundred years into English history. Impatient for his divorce from Catherine of Aragon, King Henry VIII denounced Catholicism and declared himself "Supreme Head of The Church of England" in 1533 in order to obtain his divorce and marry Anne Boleyn. Henry and Anne had a daughter, Elizabeth, who perpetuated the tradition of holding public disdain for Catholics throughout her reign from 1558-1603. King James I from 1603-1625, followed this same anti-Catholic pattern;

therefore, the episteme of Catholic intolerance had been practiced for more than seventy years before the foiled Gunpowder Plot of November 1605.

The Catholic-Protestant derision started forming with British-sponsored explorations into Spain. By 1569, English explorer Sir Francis Drake “[h]ad begun what was virtually his own private war against Spain” (Loades 199). A mounting rivalry began, and the appointment of Bernardino de Mendoza as Spanish monarch Philip II’s ambassador to London proved to be a huge mistake with regards to diplomacy and foreign policy.

In 1577 John Dee’s publication *The Perfect Arte of Navigation* pondered “the idea of a British empire” (Loades 201) by focusing on the New World of North America. Francis Drake’s historical circumnavigation of the globe wasn’t strictly for exploratory purposes; it could be classified as the precursor to British Imperialism of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. When Elizabeth I and James I further positioned England as the world power of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, they weren’t into colonialism. However, colonialism’s concept of taking over had been in practice by subverting any religion other than the Anglican faith.

Thus, with this particular Dee publication and England’s increasing interest in international exploration, by the time Francis Drake returned to the Thames in September 1580, Mendoza was “[s]immering with hatred for the people among whom he was constrained to serve.” Such actions were an insult to his king, but unless or until Drake reappeared, there was little that he could do (214). The gradual increase of missionary activity in 1578 and the arrival of the first Jesuits in 1580 from Spain to England (223) caused Elizabeth I further concern due to the mounting tensions between England and Spain and Mendoza’s patent disdain for England. Mendoza believed that “[t]he English would always make ridiculous demands” (215) such as

exercising their right to trade freely or “[w]orship God in their own way” (215). Plots of establishing a Catholic network through missionary efforts were interpreted as a threat to the English government, thus creating a sense of loyalist pride and inciting an “anti-Catholic and anti-Spanish” (223) atmosphere predicated on the belief that if a person was Catholic, s/he could also sympathize with the Spanish or French governments. Yet the Spanish, more specifically Mendoza, scoffed at the audaciousness of worshipping contrary to the “old faith.” All monarchs had to be on guard against conspirators, wars, and rumors of wars; however, this anti-Catholic climate was already developing throughout the 1570s and even before the start of the Anglo-Spanish War of 1585 (223). Later in the 1600s, Oliver Cromwell, Puritan leader and Commonwealth ruler, would label Spain England’s “Natural Enemy” (Marx 75).

The Renaissance Episteme and Catholic Subjugation

Thus, by the year 1606 when Shakespeare began writing *Macbeth*, the English Renaissance episteme was markedly anti-Catholic. Shakespeare’s Porter serves as the courier to deliver the anti-Jesuitical message of equivocation, and later in *Macbeth*, the witches’ famous chant, “Double, double toil and trouble/Fire burn and cauldron bubble” (4.1.10-11) includes a metaphoric cauldron to further represent the ongoing simmering strife between the English Protestants and Spanish Catholics. Moreover, the witches’ couplet reveals a dose of equivocation that mirrors the kind of linguistic manipulation the Jesuits used while avoiding priest raids and other subversion tactics. As Garry Wills explains in his text *Witches and Jesuits*, “The witches are Jesuits in the most thoroughgoing way. Like the Jesuits, they use words that are true at some level but not in the way their victim could understand” (Wills 142). But consider the fact that some magistrates sought to have allegiance to Catholicism deemed a treasonous act due to Catholicism’s close link to “foreign and hostile power” (Loades

223, e.g. Spain and France). Since priests are supposed to be exemplars, what does the invention, the act, and the defense of equivocation say about the Jesuits? They were downright clever in protecting their parishioners while evading an oppressive monarchy. Perhaps equivocation was necessary so priests desperately dodging the Protestants could still serve benevolently. Or maybe the priests thought that their unwavering service and devotion to their calling as priests and missionaries would supersede committing the occasional double-talk inherent within equivocation. Whatever the priests' reasoning, one element remains clear: a government that foists its religious persuasion upon a diverse citizenry cannot sway a person's spiritual devotion to God; religious preference is too personal and emotional to be silenced by a temporal law. Queen Elizabeth I wasn't entirely supportive of stigmatizing religious preference as a treasonous act; nonetheless, her *Statutes of the Realm* explicitly proclaims that any person who was caught trying to "withdraw" any subject away from "[n]atural obedience to Her Majesty, or...from the religion now by her Highness's...shall be to all intents judged to be traitors, and...suffer and forfeit as in cases of high treason" (qtd. in Loades 223). This harsh decree issued in 1579 certainly makes the practice of Jesuitical Equivocation understandable.

Within seven months after Elizabeth's new statute, Jesuit Edmund Campion was arrested, tried, and executed "with two others on 1 December 1581" (223) for proselytizing. When James ascended to the throne in 1603, he further vilified Catholics so that by the time the 1605 Gunpowder Plot occurred, intense Catholic oppression and religious prejudice had been ongoing. In fact, Catholic intolerance lasted throughout William Shakespeare's entire lifetime; he was born in 1564, a little more than a decade into Queen Elizabeth's reign, and died in 1616 midway through the rule of King James I (1603 - 1625). Within this social milieu of Catholic subversion an increased polarity existed between Protestants and Catholics. In some ways, this religious divisiveness can be paralleled to the Jim Crow laws of the deep U.S. South practiced

during the latter nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that made the marginalization of blacks the social norm to establish, and worse, perpetuate racial prejudice. The relegating of blacks to the back of the bus, designated drinking fountains, segregated restrooms, and a state of continual subjugation parallels the sixteenth and seventeenth century Jesuit priests who bore the brunt of ongoing suspicion, disdain, and derision. The racial epithets, lynchings, and jokes of the Jim Crow South are comparable to the negative characterizations, Jesuitical hunts by zealous pursuivants, and jokes, especially those regarding Jesuitical equivocation.

Religion and secularism collided during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and thus created a binary society whereby either people towed the religious line by adhering to the current preferred religion, or they died. Once a group has been targeted, as stated earlier, and jokes begin circulating, a marginalization occurs with the subverted group. The sociological landscape becomes marred with inequality and injustice. Thankfully, progressive, intelligent, compassionate writers will address this egregious practice against humanity. Other writers will join the imposing majority. What is intriguing is that Shakespeare was the most profound, prolific, intelligent writer of his time (some contend of all time), yet when given the opportunity to voice his opinion, he may have decided to let his Porter scene demonstrate a definite alliance with King James. Furthermore, Shakespeare wasn't the only Renaissance author to give ink to the Protestant side.

When Spenser created his character Malengin (Evil Deviser), he made sure his Jesuit was "full of windings" and "hidden ways" (Spenser qtd. in Wills 96). And Thomas Dekker, equally eager to join in the labeling of Jesuits as equivocators, ridiculed Jesuits with this couplet: "He's brown, he's grey, he's black, he's white—he's anything! A Jesuite! (Spenser qtd. in Wills 97).

As Alice Hogge has argued, a small but increasing London sentiment believed that the Catholic oppression was becoming excessive: “Henry Garnet reported Lord Grey as saying, ‘I was under the impression that our purpose hitherto was merely to keep the papists humbled and in subjection so that they should cause no trouble. We have sucked them dry . . . It is plain to me that we are persecuting religion’” (215). Lord Grey’s observation was accurate, for the Catholic intolerance was gaining such momentum that a hostile attitude was becoming a cultural product of England. Royalty wanted uniformity and felt Protestantism was the solution to the Catholic problem. As Kenneth Burke explains in his text *Attitudes Toward History*, “In many ways the Protestant community had much the same mystical homogeneity as the early Christian sects. Each time this uniformity was impaired, the sect itself tended to split, with a new ‘uncompromising’ offshoot reaffirming the need for a homogeneous community, all members alike in status” (139).

The language and the egregious rhetoric King James I repeatedly used to ridicule the Jesuits further perpetuated Protestant superiority over Catholicism, and this anti-Catholic environment marginalized priests such as Father Henry Garnet and left him without the necessary means of defense for his role in refusing to divulge the confessions of the Gunpowder Plot conspirators. Furthermore, William Shakespeare’s Porter in *Macbeth* serves as a new historicist messenger reminding Jacobean audiences to keep the status quo attitude of the prevailing anti-Jesuitical sentiments in the wake of the foiled Gunpowder Plot. By November 11, 1605, according to G.P.V. Akrigg, editor of *Letters of King James VI & I*, most of the conspirators had already been executed or taken into custody (Akrigg 275).

This conspiracy, and the sweeping obliteration of English government officials had the plot been successful, would have been published, posted, and discussed as well as the conspirators’

subsequent executions; therefore, Shakespeare would have at least had knowledge of the plot and probably read with a great deal of interest about the proceedings of not only the conspirators' fates, but also the ruin of the Jesuit priest, Father Henry Garnet, whose practice of equivocation further incited vehement hatred by King James I. Furthermore, this brief scene of levity reveals that Shakespeare's Porter Scene is more than rhetoric or political or religious parody. The scene was probably included for those who, ironically, "got the joke" of the tragic destinies of the Jesuit priests and England's deepening chasm between Catholicism and Protestantism.

Father Henry Garnet: Even His Benevolence and His Admirers Couldn't Save Him

Father Henry Garnet was the kind of Catholic who was a peacemaker. Father Garnet's involvement in the Gunpowder Plot wasn't intended to assist in the assassination of King James as much as it was to protect the thirteen Catholic plotters. Robert Catesby tried to confess to Father Garnet outside of confession, but Garnet "refused to listen" (Parkinson 104). King James I disagreed with Garnet's equivocation since his disdain for Catholicism was obvious. His vitriol against the plotters was just, but James's vehemence extended beyond the conspirators themselves to include all Catholic priests. In a letter dated 11 November 1605 to his brother-in-law Christian IV, King of Denmark, James I gave his account of the conspirators' treasonous act—and his opinion of their religion: "[i]t was to be undertaken by men professing themselves to be adherents and avengers of the Roman and papist religion (or rather of a most impure superstition)" (qtd. in Akrigg 276). Letters such as this are indelible representations of the inextricable fusion of politics and religion in 1605-1606. Thus, King James was zealous in accusing Jesuits like Garnet of complicity. However, the conspirators themselves were just as adamant in defending Garnet's innocence of any complicity in the gunpowder treason. The conspirators' exhibited their own brand of reciprocity. In a letter dated 4 December 1605,

nearly one month after the Gunpowder Plot, Sir Robert Cecil (Lord Salisbury) wrote to King James's clerk, Nicolas Vaunt, noting that for the plotters to confess their scheme was forced, so the Gunpowder Plot would be common knowledge for any priest who would have heard the conspirators' confessions; however, "[m]ost of the conspirators have willfully forsworn that the priests knew anything in particular and obstinately refuse to be accusers of them, yea what torture 'soever they be put to'" (qtd. in Hogge 351). This respect may have been out of guilt for the fact that Garnet would have to answer for his association with the conspirators, such as Robert Catesby, and for the situation involving the confession. Garnet's lack of reporting the crime and leaving London for Worcestershire (105) have labeled him a "coward" (105). Yet Garnet's firm belief was that "whatsoever is held contrary to the Church of Rome is heretical" (105). He also lived under a very strict discipline" (105). Couple this with a twenty-year fugitive lifestyle of ducking "priest raids" and performing mass secretly, and suddenly complicity or equivocation is understandable as a means for the Jesuits who felt an onus of responsibility to protect the Catholics who felt the need to confess to a priest for resolution of personal sin.

Priest Raids: Seeking Cover from the King and the King's Men

Priest raids became common once Henry VIII established the Church of England. By the late 1530s, the monarchy considered England no longer Catholic. A little more than two decades later, Queen Elizabeth I mandated in her new treason legislation that various fines be levied against English Catholics. Thus, house searches became common to stalk priests hidden in homes. During the latter half of the sixteenth century, the verb "hide" was also known as a noun indicating the excavated compartments within the walls of homes where Catholic families would harbor Jesuits. To further understand and empathize with Father Garnet and the pressure he was subjected to, the following examples will illustrate the tensions and, indeed,

dangers involved in being a Jesuit during the Renaissance. While these details may seem lengthy, identifying the overriding subversion-containment dialectic within the Elizabethan and Jacobean regimes is vital in proving how priests were treated as subalterns and to further analyze Shakespeare's ridiculing of Father Henry Garnet in the Porter scene.

One such papal incident involved the December 1592 Essex raid on an elderly Marian priest, Robert Jackson. The search was led by "an Essex magistrate named Nicholls" (Hogge 214). Jackson had been ordained during the previous reign of Henry VIII, and out of the mounting anti-Jesuit movement escalating under Elizabeth's reign he was not cavalier or obtuse in proclaiming his Catholicism, yet he continued to serve his God by offering counsel and recitations of mass to those who sought his spiritual guidance (214). One such family was that of William Wiseman. When a servant of William Wiseman, Edward Harrington, told officials that Jackson had recited mass for the Wiseman household at Broadoaks on two occasions, Wiseman was forced to pay a fine of 200 marks for both infractions (213-214).

The Continuous Persecutions of Father Henry Garnet *et al*

The book *God's Secret Agents: Queen Elizabeth's Forbidden Priests and the Hatching of the Gunpowder Plot* by Alice Hogge tells of an event that reveals Father Garnet's sense of responsibility to his priesthood duties. According to John Gerard, a Jesuitical colleague of Henry Garnet, Father Garnet was not implicated in this particular Jackson incident because no records exist indicating he was at Broadoaks during the raid; however, Gerard first introduced William Wiseman's brothers to the teachings of Ignatius Loyola from Loyola's *Spiritual Exercises to conquer oneself and regulate one's life*. These lessons not only changed the lives of Thomas and John, but William as well, for William was so moved by his own spiritual transformation that he invited Gerard to remain at his estate to further teach and inspire

members of his family (212). These charitable acts of kindness are what make Father Garnet's and other Jesuits' executions intensely tragic. Garnet and Gerard were members of the clandestine mission, and their calling was to teach those who felt inspired to learn more about God and Christ. The government officially disagreed.

The whereabouts of Gerard are unknown during this December 1592 raid, but the incident did force Gerard to seek lodgings away from Broadoaks. Could Gerard have been hidden away in one of the many hollowed walls that were excavated during Elizabeth's reign to harbor Jesuits? Did he run to a nearby wood for shelter? Questions such as these cannot be answered, but the fact that they are being pondered four hundred years later gives one reason to believe that the pervasive anti-Catholic sentiment incited angry young Catholics to the point where the Gunpowder Plot, first germinated in January of 1604, was a fomented revolt against the subversion of Catholic and Jesuitical oppression. But young mavericks bent on violence are far removed from the sage Jesuits whose primary life goal was duty to God first, with politics a distant second.

Hogge further chronicles another incident that lends detailed insights into the intensity of the Jesuitical persecutions and the priests' anxiety of being preyed upon. Less than eighteen months later in yet another raid on Easter Monday, 1 April 1594, John Gerard crouched underneath the foundation of a fireplace at the Broadoaks estate for four days subsisting on a jar of quince jelly that Mrs. Wiseman thrust into Gerard's hands as the early morning raid ensued (218). The officials used rods to plunge through the masonry in an attempt to determine which walls were hollow, thus indicating a hide (217-218). Officials never did locate Gerard and after four days ended the search, but just two weeks prior to Gerard's four-day concealment, on 15 March 1594, a raid organized by Richard Topcliffe scoured London neighborhoods rounding up "all known or suspected Catholic houses" (216). Gerard, who was

visiting Garnet's undisclosed home about five miles outside of London to escape the monotonous regularity of raids, was supposed to have traveled on to London that night to stay at a rented home on upper Golden Lane (216). Father Henry Garnet had a premonition and begged Gerard not to go in to London. Gerard took Garnet's advice, and in so doing this wise move proved to be the right course to take as "Local magistrates were called in to assist the priest-hunter, and overnight the city's churches were drafted into use as holding pens to contain all those arrested in the raids" (qtd. in Hogge 216). The continual raids, hidings, servants tattling where their lords' Catholic priests were housed, and some magistrates performing raids on a whim wreaked havoc upon Jesuits whose sole crime was practicing their religion. If Father Garnet was a bit paranoid or obsessed with protecting his Catholic brethren from raids such as those previously mentioned, his fears were understandable. By 1585, according to mandates, "[i]t was treason to *be* a Catholic priest, and by law it was illegal (and after 1585 a capital offense) to harbor priests or, knowingly, to give a priest aid or comfort" (Greenblatt 100).

Some of Elizabeth's anti-Catholic sentiments no doubt stemmed from Pope Gregory XIII's 1580 proclamation that the assassination of Elizabeth I would not be considered "a mortal sin" (99) if "England's heretic queen" (99) were murdered. Once the Pope issued this outlandish information, Pope Gregory III seemed as if he had "issued a license to kill" (99) the queen. Such a pronouncement would do nothing to help those priests who had entered England to establish missions in 1578 and to further proselytize in 1579-1581. Pope Gregory's issuance came one year before the 1 December 1581 execution of Edmund Campion, a noted scholarly priest who was accused of being the "Seditious Jesuit" (Hogge 90). His philosophy of service to God paralleled that of other Jesuits, such as the influential Robert Parsons who arrived in England just ahead of Campion. Eighteen months later, Campion had already been executed, and

Parsons had fled in exile, and he never returned to England. These instances illustrate that behind edicts and oppressive laws, people with aspirations exist. Such legislation makes twenty-first century readers wonder how such an episteme could have formed in the first place. A study of the past is vital in order to realize how utterly inhumane these practices were and can help avoid further hatred against certain groups whether these differences be ethnic, religious, or political.

The Religious Background of William Shakespeare's Family

Catholic persecution was rampant throughout Shakespeare's teenage years, the time when adolescents begin to formulate their opinions regarding politics and religion. His mother, Mary Arden Shakespeare, was the daughter of a devout Catholic, so we can be quite certain she was, also. However, during the 1570s and 1580s, the Church of England fined anyone a shilling who did not attend Sunday services (Catholics who refused were labeled "recusants"). "Mass was outlawed; it was made illegal to hold any service except those contained in the Book of Common Prayer" (100). Eventually, the fine for opting out of attending Sunday Protestant services escalated to twenty pounds (100). This law was not abolished until 1791, more than 200 years after its issuance. Draconian legislation such as this would have forced any devout Catholic to worship clandestinely. The hiding of crucifixes and rosary beads was not only understandable, but an exercise in common sense to avoid imprisonment or worse. William's mother would have been one such "closet Catholic," because Mary was related to the "Catholic Ardens" (118), a family of wealth and prominence.

But what of William Shakespeare's own religious affiliation? His father, John Shakespeare, is most often associated with the Protestant faith. Yet, he also left behind an important document, a "spiritual testament." This "insurance policy for the Catholic soul," as Stephen

Greenblatt notes, put into writing that if a person suddenly died, and due to the anti-Catholic climate if a burial ceremony wasn't allowed or possible, the "spiritual testament" would serve as a parchment passport to heaven, replete with the signature of the possessor along with relatives' and friends' signatures testifying that the deceased person was indeed a Catholic (Greenblatt 316). What is interesting to note is while Mary Arden Shakespeare is commonly believed to have been a Catholic, this "spiritual testament" discovered beneath roof tiles long after John Shakespeare's death in 1601 identifies him also as a Catholic:

I John Shakespeare do...beseech all my dear friends, parents, and kinsfolk, by the bowels of our Savior Jesus Christ, that since it is uncertain what lot will befall me, for fear notwithstanding lest by reasons of my sins I be to pass and stay a long while in Purgatory, they will vouchsafe to assist and succor me with their holy prayers and satisfactory works, especially with the holy Sacrifice of the Mass, as being the most effectual means to deliver souls from their torments and pains. (317)

These documents were distributed, secretly of course, by priests during the volatile 1580s, and were, in effect, proof that since the government had no mercy for Catholics, at least a proclamation might alert their God to grant the departed a little mercy as the soul journeyed to the afterlife.

So William's father, John, may have been a "spiritual hybrid"—part Catholic, part Protestant. And the only record scholars have to determine William Shakespeare's birthdate is the baptismal registry that is still on display at the Shakespeare Birthplace at Stratford-upon-Avon. During the Renaissance, a baptism was usually performed three days after one's birth. Thus since parish records of the Holy Trinity Church bear the date of 26 April 1564, William

Shakespeare's date of birth is recognized as 23 April 1564 (Dunton-Downer, Riding 9). Neither John's nor William's names ever appeared on any list of recusants, so we have no official record of John's allegiance to the Catholic faith. Shakespeare may not have aligned with one specific religion; he may have simply decided to dabble in both.

Shakespeare and His "Double Consciousness" Attitude Toward Religion

By the 1590s, all of Shakespeare's energies were devoted to writing, producing, and acting in plays, leaving little time for studying or rigidly practicing Protestantism or Catholicism. His plays certainly allude to what Greenblatt terms a "double consciousness." Aware that current religious doctrine espoused an afterlife, but not certain which sect was true, Shakespeare's religiosity, and his fused doctrinal knowledge, surface in his most famous protagonist, Hamlet, who "seems at once Catholic, Protestant, and deeply skeptical of both" (103). This "double consciousness" is most apparent when he proclaims he saw an "honest ghost" (1.5.42). Yet, soon Hamlet's assertion melds into skepticism (Greenblatt 320):

The spirit that I have seen
 May be the devil, and the devil hath power
 T'assume a pleasing shape; yea, and perhaps,
 Out of my weakness and my melancholy—
 As he is very potent with such spirits
 Abuses me to damn me. (2.2.575-80)

Hamlet's trepidation in this scene suggests Shakespeare may have been just as intrigued as King James I was with witches and haunts, but may have decided to let Protestant doctrine

hold sway here, and Shakespeare may be showing a repeated preference for Protestantism again in the Porter Scene in *Macbeth*. Whether Catholics cheered or silently pondered the doctrine of the soul's afterlife, think of the laughter that would have ensued from the Protestants when the Porter stumbled across the stage delivering his duplicitous lines regarding equivocation and Father Henry Garnet: "I had thought to have let in some of all professions, that go the primrose way to th' everlasting bonfire" (2.3. 18-19).

Perhaps Shakespeare here is not only referring to Father Henry Garnet, but also to the practice of so many people, like his own father, John Shakespeare, who adopted more of a religious hybrid role in order to escape being termed a recusant. Father Henry Garnet's deep and abiding devotion to the Catholic Church likewise is pitted against a government that vilifies the religion to which he has devoted himself. Garnet's religious adherence becomes his "Vaulting ambition" (1.7.27) in the sense that Garnet defied the monarchy when he refused, even under torture, to reveal any names of the confessors who were linked to the terrorist Gunpowder Plot.

Father Henry Garnet: The Antithesis of "Double Consciousness"

Garnet refused to cave to the "double consciousness" mode of belying his faith. He was given an opportunity to repent all the way up to the crowded public square and onto the scaffold, yet he held fast to his personal covenants. "Urged to endorse his own confession of complicity in the plot, he said he had confessed only to hearing about the Plot. 'You do but equivocate,' he was told (qtd. in Wills 101), which were virtually the last words Father Henry Garnet heard just before he was executed, yet he insisted he was not breaking any laws, at least any temporal laws. Garnet became so steadfast in his faith that no ridicule from a loyalist could deter him. Father Garnet was, like the famous song from *Man of La Mancha*, "willing to march into hell

for a heavenly cause.” Garnet knew he was right. But he was also wrong. Any adherence to a spiritual law would have been overshadowed had the plot not been thwarted, for many would have been killed had the massive stockpiling of explosives been ignited in Parliament.

The Sensationalism of Father Henry Garnet’s Execution

After the execution, sensationalism ensued. What followed is nothing short of theatrics, and it involves an object so minute, a person would have to wonder if it was real or fake: Father Garnet’s Straw. Straw, or grain, from the execution scaffolding became stained with Father Garnet’s blood, and according to some Londoners, the spot apparently transformed and took on the image of the victim's face. Catholics believed this “Straw Head” symbolized a miracle of Garnet’s martyrdom, although the Protestant king thought otherwise. During 1606, the “Straw Head” was paraded around London, and by the early months of 1607, King James ordered that it be removed from any public place.

Literary scholar H. L. Rogers notes that by the time of the “straw” incident, most Catholics had already distanced themselves from Garnet and the Jesuits in the wake of the Gunpowder Plot. London Catholics believed that if this martyrdom legend were to gain popularity and credence, it would further provoke the government (Rogers 45).

Shakespeare’s Porter: The Comedic Messenger

of the Garnet Execution

After generations of Catholics living in abject fear about how and when they could worship, perhaps Shakespeare thought it was time to satirize religion. He probably would have wanted the audience to interpret the humor with what was most popular, especially if it involved a drunken Porter and if the message was centered upon Jesuitical equivocation. Therefore, the

Porter Scene can also be left for other interpretations beyond Jesuitical Equivocation. At the literal level, the Porter is trying to awaken from a night of revelry, but he isn't hung over just from ale. He also represents the individual who is hung over from the ills of a nation so embedded in anti-Catholicism that the monarchy can only retaliate by executing more Catholics. But all the scaffolds in the kingdom couldn't thwart a Christian's reverence for his or her God. This spiritual objective was somewhat lost during the Elizabethan and Jacobean ages. Perhaps Shakespeare was performing his own version of the affable, yet drunken, Porter communicating with two voices. After all, *in vino veritas*. Shakespeare's own father, as previously mentioned, had trouble narrowing his religious preference down to one. Shakespeare may have also.

When the Porter answers the knocking, he greets Macduff and begins a banter that involves a series of equivocal examples of what drink does to the body. Macduff asks "What three things does drink especially provoke?" (2.3.26). To which the Porter replies, using the term "equivocator," in a brash comparison to sexual performance: "Lechery, Sir, it provokes, and unprovokes: it provokes the desire, but it takes away the performance" (2.3.28-29). The Porter, who by now has full audience attention at his double entendre, lists the manifestations of a drink. A closer study of the "drink" has a dual, equivocal message here as well. When the Porter refers to drink increasing "desire" but ruining "performance," he has abandoned the Jesuitical anecdotes, and now this scene serves as a foreshadowing of future events in the play. Here, Shakespeare uses the Porter to compare a now metaphorical "drink" to Macbeth, and Macbeth, like alcohol, can "provoke." He "provokes" Lady Macbeth in the sense that they must "[m]ake our faces vizards to our hearts,/Disguising what they are" (3.2.33-34); thus, the feigned flattery Macbeth and Lady Macbeth will extend to Banquo is nothing more than a ruse to deflect any suspicions Banquo may have as to King Duncan's murderer. The excessive

murders Macbeth will execute throughout the remainder of the play contrast sharply with one ephemeral scene when Macbeth feels “unprovoked” and an ethereal sliver of his conscience re-emerges. In a depressed, melancholy state after learning of the death of his wife and before his rage intervenes again, he ponders the multiplying disastrous consequences he has “provoked”:

Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow

Creeps in this petty pace from day to day

To the last syllable of recorded time,

And all our yesterdays have lighted fools

The way to dusty death. (5.5.18-21)

All the “ambition” Macbeth once prided himself as having has been superseded by his deep-rooted mental and personality disorders that cannot distinguish between good and evil. He admits the imbalance of his own contorted conscience when he says, “I have no spur / To prick the sides of my intent...” (1.7.24-25).

Continuing the scene’s levity, the Porter compounds his discussion of what “drink” does and does not do: “Therefore, much drink may be said to be an equivocator with lechery” (2.3.31). The Porter is correct. Sometimes too much drink, or excess, can be detrimental. As hapless and comical and bacchanalian as the Porter is, a serious double meaning exists here that warrants a connection to both Macbeth and Garnet. Back in act one, scene seven, when Macbeth blames his idea of murdering King Duncan on his “vaulting ambition,” his psychological assessment is wrong; he prefers to euphemistically refer to his premeditated murder as “ambition,” which really isn’t at the crux of his assassination attempt. Macbeth is “drunk “on his own lust for power, while Lady Macbeth is intoxicated as she resorts to drink to assuage her guilt while

Macbeth slays Duncan. She is “drunk” with the realization that she will soon become queen, but her aspirations are just as powerful as her husband’s.

Now, although the Porter appears only to be joking about excessive drinking, a close reading will reveal that the Porter’s comical dialogue can also be applied to Father Garnet. Suppose a man who chose to devote his life to God allowed himself to indulge in a little fibbing. Perhaps he had experienced one too many “priest raids” and heard one too many Catholic jokes and decided to turn the other figurative cheek (and ear) away from the incriminating confessions and let the conspirators’ plans go unobstructed, even though many other individuals, including James’s family members, would have perished in the explosion. To allow a catastrophe such as the Gunpowder Plot to occur all for the sake of finding an equivocal loophole would not have seemed such a pious practice had scores of innocent people been slaughtered.

The Porter continues his series of antithetical and equivocal statements as he further defines the merits and the demerits of drink: “[i]t makes him, and it mars him; it sets him on, and it takes him off; it persuades him, and disheartens him” (3.2.31-33). In each antithesis, the Porter could just as easily have been talking about Macbeth as drink. When Macbeth is triumphant as the valiant military hero, he is at his zenith of valor and hope, but when he is egregiously devoted to rule Scotland, even though all his soldiers are contemplating desertion, Macbeth is nowhere near his original potential of being the admired, capable leader he once was.

The Porter’s final words are the most poignant, especially for someone trying to slough off a hangover. He says that drink “[p]ersuades him, and disheartens him . . . in conclusion, equivocates him in a sleep, and, giving him the lie, leaves him” (2.3.33-35). Macbeth’s tragedy reveals stratified layers of alternating deceit and loyalty, manipulation and deliberation,

military might and paranoia. As Malcolm storms Dunsinane Castle with his troops, Young Siward, after hearing Macbeth identify himself, retorts, “The devil himself could not pronounce a title / More hateful to mine ear” (5.7.8-9). When Macbeth replies, “No, nor more fearful” (5.7.10), Siward detects Macbeth’s deceit: “Thou liest, abhorred tyrant; with my sword/ I’ll prove the lie thou speak’st” (5.7.11-12). Siward, with his unbridled valor, wanted nothing more than to slay Macbeth. When Macbeth slays him, Macbeth is exultant and relieved, for he thinks his “charmed life” has sidestepped the witches’ ominous not-of-woman-born prophecy.

The Porter’s final words, “giving him the lie,” echo Siward’s last words: “I’ll prove the lie thou speak’st” (5.7.12). The Porter, who comes stumbling about the stage evoking laughter from the audience, has one last message: he’s here to give the audience a universal truth about “the lie” that is embedded in all of humanity. The truth is mortals lie, to what degree they lie is debatable. Since priests are mortals they, too, lie. But their consciences necessitated them to discover other methods of keeping the sanctity of the confession intact, and these methods included silence and even a little sarcasm. Jesuits harbored incriminating facts to avert harm that could have been disastrous for their fellow Catholics, but to execute a priest, and these executions were performed repeatedly, who dared to remain silent was nothing short of heinous. Perhaps Shakespeare included the brief Porter scene to not only “remember the Porter” but to remember Father Garnet and his needless execution. And to remember that religious intolerance throughout the Elizabethan and Jacobean reigns had become entirely too prevalent and damaging.

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