Cymbeline and the Sermons *Against Strife and Contention* and *Against Swearing and Perjury*: an Intertextual Reading

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The ornate and emblematic nature of *Cymbeline* has, quite naturally, inspired a critical emphasis on its richly imaginative qualities. The play's intensely optimistic conclusion, coming as it does after four acts of dark, potentially tragic disunion, has tempted many to consign it, rather too hastily perhaps, to the realm of fairy tale romance or escapist fantasy. Nevertheless, while the outer shell of *Cymbeline* may seem fanciful and unrealistic, its ethical underpinnings reveal a poet more concerned than ever with the practical, and particularly with the social, application of Christian ideals. This interest in the active role of religion in social and civic life might naturally have drawn Shakespeare to the sermon literature of his time, and more specifically to the state sermons commissioned in the reigns of Edward VI and Elizabeth I (and subsequently maintained as an integral part of Church of England services throughout the Elizabethan and Jacobean eras). No Englishman of the period could have avoided familiarity with the two volumes of Homilies since they were required reading in all English churches during Shakespeare's lifetime and, along with the *Book of Common Prayer*, served as cornerstones of the Elizabethan compromise.[1]

Let it be noted from the start that I am not about to argue here for the direct, unequivocal, textually demonstrable influence of the Homilies on *Cymbeline*. I am claiming, rather, that they serve as invaluable yet under-employed touchstones to period ethical discourse, and that they share significant points of contact with key moral themes of the play.[2] For example, as post-modern readers, we may be historically predisposed to treat the notion of a binding verbal contract rather casually, yet I hope to show just how central vows, oaths, and covenants are to this play (and were to sixteenth- and seventeenth-century consciousness, generally), and how the cavalier or serious approach thereto—the breaching

or honoring of them—serves as a persistent indicator of moral character, which is of course the argument of the homily *Against swearing and perjury.* Likewise, I propose that the play contains an implicit critique of impulsive English machismo: numerous scenes seem calculated to illustrate how easily and often, even in the most routine social circumstances, vainly-proud, honor-obsessed gentlemen (a category that encompasses several of the principal male characters, including the hero) fall victim to a deadly competitiveness, typically resulting in some reckless wager or formal duel. The homily *Against strife and contention* levels just such a complaint against aggressive, unyielding, and/or easily-provoked men—and against the all-too-common practice of dueling and "brawling," so socially disruptive and shameful (from a Christian standpoint). Again, whether Shakespeare had these texts immediately in mind or not, he composed his plays in the moral climate that they at once reflect and significantly helped to create.

An obvious first step in preparing the ground for a true and lasting societal reconciliation is to expose (and root out) as much as possible the weeds of contention, the sources of division, the obstacles to union among men—to school citizens in the discipline of avoiding fruitless and unnecessary strife. That a state of friction and unrest exists in the English court at the start of *Cymbeline* is easily enough gathered from the opening observation of the First Gentleman that "you do not meet a man but frowns." This loquacious informant goes on to tell the tale of an angry king, a discountenanced marriage, an imprisoned princess, and her "poor but worthy . . . husband banished" (1.1.7-8).[3] A more specific account of societal strife, however, is given by the servant, Pisanio, when he enters late in the opening scene to report a skirmish between Cloten (the Queen's foolish son and rejected pursuant of the princess, Imogen) and the aforesaid banished husband (and eventual hero), Posthumus Leonatus:

> *Pisanio.* My lord your son drew on my master.
> *Queen.* Ha!
> No harm, I trust, is done?
> *Pisanio.* There might have been
> But that my master rather played than fought
> And had no help of anger. (1.1.160-63)

In Pisanio's reference to his master's admirable restraint, we see, dimly foreshadowed, both the hero's eventual assertion of his true virtuous nature, and the final heroically-benevolent gesture of Cymbeline himself (pardoning his Roman prisoners-of-war amid

cries for revenge from the Briton people, even voluntarily resuming tributary payment to the conquered enemy!). The possibility of a concordant, cohesive community begins when the chain of vengeance—of stroke and counter-stroke—is interrupted by heroic non-action: if all men give way, peace must reign. Here, also, are anticipated the play's central paradoxes—that true strength derives from an essential humility that would forego vain and superficial displays of personal prowess, that patience and forbearance are at the heart of moral action. But with this brief prefiguring of a Christian solution, we are also given a preview of the problem—man's prideful, irrational, relentlessly contentious spirit—in the elemental figure of Cloten.

And in fact, for all his deceptively comic ranting and posturing, Cloten might be perceived to serve a serious purpose in these opening scenes (i.e., introducing the play's cautionary focus on anti-social contentiousness and irresponsible oath-taking). For the foolish prince distinguishes himself immediately as an irrepressible brawler and swearer—appears very much the physically unruly, verbally reckless, socially disruptive type that, as we shall see, the Homilies firmly and persistently denounce. On the one hand, his vices, as they are so flamboyantly exhibited at the start, seem calculated to affirm by contrast Posthumus's virtues. The enormous gulf between the two characters—in terms of essential nature and sensibility—is deliberately pointed up in the play's opening dialogue. According to the First Gentleman, it is the difference between a "good man" of peerless qualities both inside and out and "a thing/ Too bad for bad report" (1.1.16-17). Posthumus and Cloten are, after all, radically antithetical in fundamental innate demeanor—the one dignified and soberly reflective, fashioned predominantely in the stoic/tragic mode, the other a farcical type—mindlessly impulsive and eternally foolish.

On the other hand, a paradoxical resemblance gradually emerges from out this initial overt and extreme contrast (a fact that makes director Russell Treyz's decision to double the Posthumus/Cloten roles in the Utah Shakespeare Festival's current production all the more intriguing—more than simply a daring test of actor Brian Vaughn's formidable range). Cloten foreshadows in caricature everything that Posthumus is destined to become in the central portion of the play. For it will be specifically a lurking spirit of contention and an all-too-flippant attitude toward oath-taking that will contribute materially to the hero's profound and startlingly abrupt moral fall. Cloten anticipates the subsequent exposure of the hero's darker side, serves as a

prophetic reflection of his lesser self. The later Posthumus who rails against "the woman's part" in Act 2, Scene 4, whom we scarcely recognize as himself, is very much like the disgruntled, raving Cloten of Act 1, Scene 3, and Act 2, Scene 1. The notion that Cloten functions potentially as an alter ego to Posthumus finds dramatic textual and visual support later in what seems the deliberate on-stage conflation of the two, when Imogen mistakes the slain Cloten for a headless Posthumus (Act 4, Scene 2). As Robert Grams Hunter has observed,

> Posthumus is absent from the scene during acts Three and Four, and yet he is in a sense present insofar as during these acts Cloten is providing us with a parody of him. . . . Posthumus . . . adopt[s] the mindless savagery of Cloten, and Cloten, by putting on Posthumus' clothes, underlines the resemblance. I take Cloten's headless body to be a deeply ironic and excessively macabre joke—a deserved mockery of Posthumus. For he, too, has lost his head.[4]

But to return to our focus on the play's exposition, Posthumus's reported forbearance notwithstanding, the first act of *Cymbeline* is dominated by images of interpersonal conflict. We see (in addition to a conniving, hypocritical queen) a virtual parade of aggressive, highly volatile men (the raging king, the fight-prone Cloten, the taunting Iachimo, the surprisingly testy [in person] Posthumus of the wager scene [1.4]), and are thus immediately alerted to the fracturing principle inherent in (contentious) human nature. At the same time, the action of the play leads us almost as directly to a heightened sense of the fragility and vulnerability of intimate human bonds (e.g., in the immediate forced parting of Imogen and Posthumus after their poignant exchange of faith tokens—the ring and the bracelet—and after the latter's pledge to "remain/ The loyal'st husband that did e'er plight troth" [1.2.26-7]). The verbal contract (i.e., the vows and promises by which people bind themselves together) proves a significant point of focus and a crucial testing and/or gauging instrument from the outset.[5] By examining a character's habits and attitudes in relation to the practice of swearing and oath-taking, one can project, fairly accurately, his or her moral progress, state of grace, and societal fitness: the oath itself becomes a kind of benchmark of social and religious competency.

Once again, at the bottom of the scale, we find Cloten, the play's clearest representative of primitive carnal man. The foolish prince is among those who, as the homilist attests, swear "often unadvisedly, for trifles, without necessity, and when they should

not . . . they be not without fault but doe take GODS most holy name in vaine."[6] While contention was the theme of Cloten's first entrance on stage (1.2), he spends a good portion of his second blustery appearance defending his verbal license after losing in a game of bowls:

> Was there ever man had such luck? When I kist the jack upon an upcast, to be hit away! I had a hundred pound on 't. And then a whoreson jackanapes must take me up for swearing; as if I borrowed mine oaths of him and might not spend them at my pleasure. . . . When a gentleman is disposed to swear, it is not for any standers-by to curtail his oaths. (2.1.1-5; 10-11)

Cloten is guilty of the kind of habitual cursing and casual oath-taking that the homilist roundly condemns in part one of the sermon *Against Swearing.* "When men doe sweare of custome," the cleric observes, "in reasoning, buying and selling, or other daily communications (as many be common and great swearers) such kind of swearing is ungodly, unlawfull, and forbidden by the commandement of God."[7] Of course, Iachimo proves an equally shameless and irresponsible swearer, as is evidenced by his persistent use of false oaths to bait and deceive Posthumus in the later wager scenes. More than a common careless oath-taker/-breaker, however, the insidious Italian proves a calculating and malicious perjurer; he seems driven by an anti-social impulse to malign or slander virtue.[8] Cloten's habitually foul mouth simply bespeaks his fundamentally irreverent nature, while his cavalier approach to oath-taking consistently undermines his vain, comic efforts to win the respect and/or love of others as this feeble attempt to woo Imogen demonstrates:

> *Cloten.* . . . I swear I love you.
> *Imogen.* If you but said so, 'twere as deep with me.
> If you swear still, your recompense is still
> That I regard it not. (2.3.90-93)

As in the case of the boy who cried "Wolf!," Cloten's word has lost all credence, his oaths have no meaning: he has utterly compromised his integrity as a social being by virtue of his false and unlicensed tongue. "For trueth it is," writes the homilist, ". . . that no man is lesse trusted, then he that useth much to sweare."[9]

A too casual approach to oath-taking is characteristic of the foolish and morally ignorant. But even a scrupulous man of conscience and honor may be tempted to make a rash oath, as is shown by Posthumus's too-easy succumbing to the mischievous

baitings of Iachimo, his overhasty embroilment in the wager over his wife's virtue. "He that taketh an oath, must doe it with judgement," insists the homilist, "not rashly and unadvisedly, but soberly, considering what an oath is."[10] Posthumus's intent on entering into this unholy "covenant" with Iachimo is superficially for the best. He means simply to assert his faith in Imogen in the spirit of chivalry, Christian commitment, and marital fidelity. Driven by a kind of moral pride, however, he fails to consider the unnecessary discomfort and suffering that the proposed test, or assault, may cause his wife. Moreover, in his passion to vindicate his love (and by extension himself) in the public, competitive male arena of Philario's Roman villa, he either recklessly overestimates (based on his own high standards of honor), or disdains to consider, the trustworthiness of his adversary. In his indignant pursuit of self-justification after the affront of Iachimo's challenge, he blinds himself to man's deceitful capacity, thereby exposing innocence to needless and substantial peril. As a husband who has solemnly sworn to love his wife, "honour her, keep her and guard her," Posthumus is simply in no position to wager over her fidelity. Strictly speaking, he can not accept Iachimo's challenge without rescinding his former marriage vow. The promise of "fidelitie in marriage" is placed high on the sermon *Against Swearing*'s list of "lawfull" oaths. By engaging in the wager, Posthumus is clearly allowing what the homilist terms an "unlawfull" oath to supersede (and thus compromise) his lawful obligations.[11]

True it is that the hero hesitates (as well he might) over the giving up of Imogen's ring as surety. "I will wager against your gold, gold to it. My ring I hold dear as my finger, 'tis part of it" (1.4.123-24), he observes, hoping that Iachimo will not entice him to remove or hazard Imogen's precious gift, which he had formerly vowed would "remain, remain . . . / While sense can keep it on" (1.1.117-18). Posthumus is, at core, a faithful and sensible being; he cannot act imprudently without some rebellion of his better instincts. But the tempter is not content with a wager of gold for gold, and so presses on. "I see you have some religion in you, that you fear" (1.4.127-28), taunts Iachimo. And the fiend has put his finger on the flaw. Posthumus's pride of manhood will not admit fear. It needs only for the devil to "swear" he is in earnest, and the hero replies, "Here's my ring" (1.4.136).

In a broad sense, Posthumus's precipitate answer to Iachimo's dare simply reveals his hubris, identifies him as a figure of naive, impetuous youth, overconfident youth—convinced of its own immortality, believing itself invulnerable to evil. The uninitiated

hero must learn to respect the power of evil in the world, and to acknowledge human frailty—first of all, in himself. He must learn, as the Tudor theologian/homilist, Richard Hooker, remarks, "that we are to stand in fear of nothing more than the extremity of not fearing."[12] But Iachimo's baiting reveals deficiencies of character in Posthumus over and above the general want of prudence or healthy apprehension. The test finds the hero surprisingly unschooled in many of the so-called Christian virtues: patience, forbearance, humility, loyalty, even, dare I suggest it, love.

Generally speaking, in our defense against "malicious tongues," we ought to "arme our selves with patience, meekness, and silence, lest with the multiplying wordes with the enemie, we be made as evil as he."[13] Posthumus's angry, defiant, super-masculine response to Iachimo's challenge proves paradoxically a sign of spiritual weakness as the state homilist observes: "And he that cannot temper nor rule his own anger, is but weak & feeble, and rather more like a woman or a childe, then a strong man. For the true strength and manlinesse is to overcome wrath . . ."[14] At this point we begin to realize that this perfect and "worthy gentleman," as he has been presented to us in the opening scenes, is not quite perfect after all. Evidence of the essential nobility and grand potential of Posthumus's nature is never wholly absent from *Cymbeline*, but like Spenser's Red Cross Knight his initial claims to virtue, moral courage, and spiritual prowess (or more accurately claims made for him) prove premature. He has much to learn—both about the world, and about himself—before he can emerge as a truly effectual force of good.

Posthumus's first stumbling, his careless assenting to Iachimo's proffered covenant (1.4), is but a prelude to a much more serious fall in Act 2, Scene 4. In marked contrast to the caution, distrust, and fear which common discretion should urge upon him at the untimely reappearance of Iachimo, the protagonist greets the unscrupulous Italian with an overconfidence and haughty disdain that are, if anything, more reckless than before. Again the issue of swearing is brought swiftly forward as Iachimo offers to "confirm with oath" his false, slanderous testimony of Imogen's adultery. After describing in detail the features of her bedchamber, he produces the stolen bracelet (Posthumus's former gift to his wife), stating, "She gave it me and said/ She prized it once" (2.4.103-04). The wavering hero's impulsive response is to surrender without contest: "Here, take this too./ [*Gives the ring.*] It is a basilisk unto mine eye" (2.4.106-07). The descent of Posthumus's perceptions from spiritual to carnal—reflected in his repeated references to

the ring (a symbol of Imogen herself) first as "jewel," then as "stone," now as "basilisk"—is complete. We see a decay of moral vision (or revelation of lurking male chauvinism) prompted by his exposure (and gradual surrender) to Iachimo's cynical, aggressively materialist outlook, confirmed by boldfaced perjury.[15] Philario (the objective bystander) counsels "patience" and orders the ring returned, suggesting of the bracelet, "It may be probable she lost it, or/ Who knows if one of her women, being corrupted,/ Hath stol'n it from her?" (2.4.115-17). But it remains for Iachimo to add but one more false oath ("By Jupiter I had it from her arm"), and again Posthumus falls victim to his too credulous trust in the word of man:

> Hark you, he swears; by Jupiter he swears.
> 'Tis true—nay, keep the ring—'tis true. I am sure
> She would not lose it. Her attendants are
> All sworn and honorable. (2.4.122-25)

That Iachimo is a liar (and Imogen's attendants deceived if not corrupted) is abundantly clear to the reader/audience, but the impassioned Posthumus has become a carnal literalist, ready to forget his solemn marriage vow, ready to discard his faith, over the perjured oaths of a stranger. Indeed, Posthumus reveals an obsessive determination to believe the worst of Imogen in a subsequent retort, once again provoked by an Iachimo oath:

> *Iachimo.* I'll be sworn—
> *Posthumus.* No swearing:
> If you will swear you have not done't, you lie,
> And I will kill thee if thou dost deny
> Thou'st made me cuckold. (2.4.143-46)

The episode plays out as a sobering cautionary exemplum of the profoundly de-stabilizing effect of perjury in social terms. The destructive potency of the false oath is felt at the personal level, as here where we see it so efficiently employed to break down the faith and character of a potentially good man; but it is no less devastating in its impact upon the society at large. Indeed, a good portion of the socio-political unrest in Cymbeline's court can be traced, we finally discover, to a crime of perjury. As Belarius recalls the chain of events, "Two villains, whose false oaths prevail'd/ Before my perfect honour, swore to Cymbeline/ I was confederate with the Romans: so/ Follow'd my banishment" (3.3.66-69). And of course this banishment led to the kidnapping of the king's natural sons, to the queen's plot to advance the unworthy Cloten, to a general anxiety over succession.

Notwithstanding the prominence and potency of this anti-perjury theme, it is interesting to note that of the play's two male types of pernicious and obstinate evil, Iachimo, despite the immense, seemingly irreparable harm he causes, is finally pardoned and re-integrated into society, while Cloten is (as if by design) excluded from the new order. The foolish Prince's intent in venturing into the wilds of Wales had been expressly to behead Posthumus and rape Imogen. Thus when Guiderius appears on-stage with Cloten's "clotpoll" in hand, there can be little doubt that poetic justice, at least, has been served. Still, it may require some further explanation to convince the average modern reader/theater-goer that Cloten, say, more than Iachimo, deserves to die.

In the first place, Iachimo may be a subtle and deceitful schemer, a slanderer, and a perjurer, and such men do often prove as ruinous to the state as the most demonstrative malefactors; nevertheless, he repents, and (more particularly) he is capable of repenting. The primary difference between Cloten and Iachimo, from a moral standpoint, is that, while both behave badly, the former, through utter and habitual surrender to the bestial passions, has all but erased the image of God (i.e., reason) in himself; as a result, he can hardly distinguish between virtue and vice, and rushes about in a kind of nether world of subjective appetite. Iachimo, on the other hand, is wholly, even acutely, sensible to the good (recall his first response to Imogen, "She is alone th' Arabian bird" [1.7.17]); he simply willfully denies it.[16] While the Italian's intelligence and studied, malicious intent make him, in many respects, a more potent force of evil than the simple-minded Prince, his potential for good is also proportionately greater. In so far as his reason and conscience remain intact and functional, though shamefully disobeyed, he is simply a change of heart away from becoming a useful, contributing member of the Christian community.

Cloten remains, first to last, a notorious and irrepressible swearer and brawler (not to mention an intended murderer and rapist). Pisanio's final report of him leaves us with a stubbornly unregenerate image:

> Lord Cloten,
> Upon my lady's missing, came to me
> With his sword drawn, foam'd at the mouth, and swore,
> If I discover'd not which way she was gone,
> It was my instant death. . . .
> . . . away he posts
> With unchaste purpose, and with oath to violate
> My lady's honour. . . . (5.5.274-78, 283-85)

There is not room in any reasonable projection of an ideal society for such a careless, unthinking, undisciplined loudmouth; the Elizabethan/Jacobean mind, with its extreme emphasis on social and political order (its dread of rebellion and anarchy), would simply not countenance such an open and obvious threat to societal peace as Cloten represents. As the author of the sermon *Against Strife and Contention* maintains, "[T]hese common brawlers .... bee unworthy to live in a common wealth, the which doe as much as lieth in them, with brawling and scoulding[,] to disturbe the quietnesse and peace of the same."[17]

But to summarize, what then are the implicit morals of this story that seem most in harmony with the sermons *Against Swearing* and *Against Strife*? Treat the oath as a sacred trust: take it seriously. Do not swear habitually or lightly. Honor one's lawful vows; shun the rash or unlawful oath; in particular, scrupulously avoid making new vows or covenants that in any way conflict with (or threaten to compromise) one's previous commitments. Beware the slanderer and/or perjurer. Temper one's masculine pride and steer clear of needless contention in the context of civil society.

Of course, Shakespeare has at strategic moments, in his predictably unpredictable manner, complicated the straightforward message of the Homilies. Despite the play's clear assertion of the citizen/believer's duty to honor lawful oaths, the fact remains that it is only by a willful *failure to honor* certain dubious verbal contracts that tragedy is averted. I am thinking here of vows made against one's will (as when Pisanio agrees to serve Cloten at sword point [3.5.118-23]), or oaths of allegiance made to malicious or unsound authority and/or that go against conscience. The physician, Cornelius, presumably reneges on his tacit sworn duty to serve the Queen when he substitutes a sleeping potion for the poison she requests; and likewise, Pisanio, in order to save Imogen, must break his former oaths of allegiance to his master. Thus he protests to an absent Posthumus:

> That I should murder her,
> Upon the love and truth and vows which I
> Have made to thy command? I her? Her blood?
> If it be so to do good service, never
> Let me be serviceable. (3.2.11-15)

Posthumus later remarks in regard to Pisanio (while regretting Imogen's presumed death by the servant's sword), "Every good servant does not all commands;/ No bond but to do just ones" (5.1.6-7). The Homilies, while they caution against the swearing of "unlawfull oaths," are naturally quite reticent about the breaking

of any oath once it is made. In fact, two overtly political sermons—*An Exhortation to Obedience* and *An Homily Against Disobedience and Wilfull Rebellion*—explicitly advocate adherence to the will and commands of even an unjust or tyrannical king. On this issue, then, Shakespeare—compelled by his evident belief in the inviolability of the individual conscience—diverged notably from the orthodox Church of England view.

Again, generally one should keep one's word and avoid contention, but just as there are extreme circumstances in which a person may actually be required ethically to break an oath, there are times when a man may, and in fact should in good conscience, fight: for instance, in defense of his life (Guiderius's excuse for killing Cloten), or in defense of his country. In the moral economy of *Cymbeline*, private quarreling in the peacetime court seems implicitly censured; war for national autonomy—heartily condoned. The play is replete with Jacobean patriotic sentiment, and Posthumus's super-macho discourse in the field (e.g., with the cowardly lord [5.3]), together with the restless complaints of the princes to take up arms and join the fray (4.4), must be acknowledged as vital and fully-sanctioned expressions of the English martial ethic. In the larger context of universal history, the play pits English valor against Roman: it asserts the British warrior tradition and code of masculine honor as worthy rivals of—and natural successors to—their Roman originals. Posthumus, Belarius, Guiderius, and Arvirigus are all complimentary depictions of the stalwart British soldier.[18]

Still, despite much stoic war imagery and a literally pagan historical context, it is the Christian social ethic that prevails in this play: the Anglo-Roman warrior (albeit he may appear noble and civil from the start) must be gradually fashioned into a true Christian gentleman—precisely tailored for the final idealized epoch of peace and communal accord toward which the entire narrative imperceptibly, yet surely, gravitates. As Robert S. Miola has argued persuasively, Shakespeare, in the experience, actions, and character of his hero Posthumus, challenges the fundamental integrity of many celebrated Roman virtues: he repudiates the Romans' strict indomitable male pride, their preoccupation with public repute and fame, "the vanity of their high seriousness, and the inhumanity of their military values."[19] in favor of English "flexibility and natural instinct"[20] and what he terms the "British capacity for humility and spiritual growth."[21]

Posthumus, of course, recovers from his Cloten-like spell. His better nature ultimately reasserts itself. For sure, he must first

pass through a harrowing dark night of the soul, a veritable holocaust of self-scrutiny. Nevertheless, the protagonist's final act trial proves, not a soul-rending journey into irrevocable despair, but rather a rigorous exercise in humiliation tending to spiritual revitalization. His faith gradually returns to him (a process emblematically sealed and confirmed in his reunion with "Fidele"). He regains his focus on his original marriage vow, albeit, ironically, after the supposed death of his wife. Having no longer the option of living for her, he thus determines, "I'll die/ For thee, O Imogen, even for whom my life/ Is, every breath, a death" (5.1.25-27). Later, he comes to provide a decisive model for the Christian response. He spares Iachimo even on the battlefield (where killing him would have been unquestionably allowed) and later formally forgives his mortal enemy in court—an action that inspires Cymbeline to say, "We'll learn our freeness of a son-in-law:/ Pardon's the word to all" (5.5.422-23). Lest we forget that men are still men, Posthumus exhibits one last flash of temper, striking the disguised Imogen, even amid the reconciliation scene. But the tone for a new era of accord has been set. And we leave the play confident that a more spiritually mature, morally reconstituted Posthumus, reunited with Imogen and once again under her close supervision, can and will contribute to a better (i.e., more faithful, more cohesive, less contentious) society.

Finally, many have found Cymbeline's sudden promise to resume tributary payment to Rome after his defeat of Augustus's army passing strange, if not inexplicable. We simply do not expect to see Christ's injunctions to "love your enemy" and "render good for evil" obeyed by a temporal king—factoring in the ruthlessly competitive realm of state politics. If we recall, however, that the play has shown us a world profoundly fractured by the effects of so much false swearing, so many broken vows, Cymbeline's voluntary renewal of the tributary pledge becomes, perhaps, a more comprehensible and significant symbolic gesture toward socio-political repair.

Notes

1. There were thirty-three Homilies in all. The first volume of twelve (which included *Against Strife* and *Against Swearing*) was published in 1547 under the auspices of the staunchly Protestant Archbishop Cranmer (later executed under Mary Tudor). The authors of the particular sermons were not identified in the original, but Mary Ellen Rickey and Thomas B. Stroup, in their introduction to the facsimile reprint of the 1623 edition (which combined the two "tomes" in one volume under the appropriately generic title, *Certaine Sermons or Homilies appointed to be read in Churches. In the time of the late Queene Elizabeth of famous*

memory [Gainesville, Florida: Scholars' Facsimiles & Reprints, 1968]), identify John Harpesfield, Thomas Becon, Bishop Bonner, and Cranmer himself among the contributors to the "First Book" (1547), and include Bishops Jewell, Grindal, Pilkington, and Parker in a speculative list of "Second Book" (1563) authors. A more recent discussion of authorship (still largely speculative) along with a brief history of the *Homilies* appears in the printed introduction to Ian Lancashire's electronic edition, *The Elizabethan Homilies 1623* (Toronto: Centre for Computing in the Humanities—University of Toronto [Renaissance Electronic Texts 1], 1994), 19-22; see also Philip Hughes, *The Reformation in England*, vol. 2, 5th ed. (New York: MacMillan, 1963), 95—note. For the most thorough recent account of the history, themes, organization, and style of the Homilies, see Ronald B. Bond's introductory chapters in *Certain Sermons and Homilies (1547) and A Homily against Disobedience and Wilful Rebellion (1570): A Critical Edition* (Toronto/Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1987).

2. In *Shakespeare's Religious Backgrounds* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1973), Peter Milward remarks that

> [t]here are indeed few plays which are not governed to some extent by the ideas of one or other Homily. Yet it is only in recent times that the importance of their influence has come to be recognized by some Shakespearean scholars, together with an increasing recognition of his indebtedness to the homiletic tradition of the Middle Ages—which lingers on in these homilies. Even so, their attention has mainly been devoted to the two political Homilies, those 'On Order and Obedience' and 'Against Disobedience and Rebellion', which were mainly insisted on during the Elizabethan Age. But the others, which have largely been neglected, are no less amply stored with Shakespearean themes. (115)

Milward proceeds with a survey of the more civic-minded sermons while remarking briefly on the relevance of each to specific plays. Lancashire likewise prints a list of correspondences between specific homilies and plays, but provides no substantiating commentary (8). Perhaps the only classic works on the subject that warrant mention are A. Hart, *Shakespeare and the Homilies* (1934) and Henry Hitch Adams, *English Domestic or Homiletic Tragedy 1575-1642* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1943). A few published studies considering the influence of the Homilies on Elizabethan/Jacobean drama have appeared since Milward's complaint of their neglect, but several of these have been short notes: e.g., Lawrence Rosinger, "Hamlet and the Homilies," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 26, no. 3 (Summer 1975): 299-301; Andrew Hadfield, "*The Spanish Tragedy* and *The Elizabethan Homilies*," *Notes and Queries* 237 (vol. 39, no. 3; Sept. 1992): 307-308; Donald S. Lawless, "Shakespeare's Indebtedness to 'Homily XVII'," *Shakespeare Newsletter* 20 (1970): 13. For somewhat more substantial commentaries, see T. W. Baldwin, "Three Homilies in *The Comedy of Errors*," in *Essays on Shakespeare and Elizabethan Drama in Honor of Hardin Craig*, ed. by Richard Hosley (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1962), 137-147; Thomas P. Hennings, "The Anglican Doctrine of the Affectionate Marriage in *The Comedy of Errors*," *Modern Language Quarterly* 47 (1986): 91-107; and Ronald B. Bond, "'Dark Deeds Darkly Answered': Thomas Becon's Homily Against Whoredom and Adultery, Its Contexts, and Its Affiliations with Three Shakespearean Plays," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 16, vol. 2 (Summer 1985): 191-205.

3. All play quotations are based on the text of *Cymbeline*, ed. Robert B. Heilman, in *William Shakespeare: the Complete Works* (Baltimore, Maryland: Penguin, 1972).

4. Robert Grams Hunter, *Shakespeare and the Comedy of Forgiveness* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1965), 157-8.

5. For discussions of the oath/contract theme in *Cymbeline* that share occasional points of contact with my own, see Constance Jordan, "Contract and Conscience in *Cymbeline*," *Renaissance Drama* (n.s.) 25 (1994): 33-58; Lila Geller, "*Cymbeline* and the Imagery of Contract Theology," *SEL* 20, no. 2 (1980): 241-55; and Donna B. Hamilton, "*Cymbeline:* The Oath of Allegiance and the English Catholic," in *Shakespeare and the Politics of Protestant England* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1992), 128-62.

6. *Certaine Sermons,* 1:48.

7. *Certaine Sermons,* 1:46.

8. See Robert Y. Turner, "Slander in *Cymbeline* and Other Jacobean Tragicomedies," *English Literary Renaissance* 13, no. 2 (1983): 182-202. Turner identifies malicious "dispraise" (with its potentially disastrous personal consequence to the innocent—e.g., Imogen) as a prime target of the romance's implicit moral commentary.

9. *Certaine Sermons,* 1:48.

10. *Certaine Sermons,* 1:47.

11. Compare Jordan, "Contract and Conscience in *Cymbeline*, 39; also Geller, "*Cymbeline* and the Imagery of Contract Theology," 250.

12. "A Remedy Against Sorrow and Fear: Delivered in a Funeral Sermon," in *The English Sermon*, vol. 1 (Old Wolking, Surrey: Carcanet Press, 1976), 176. The passage from Hooker's sermon that immediately precedes this pronouncement expresses a typical Renaissance belief in the providential role of evil in disciplining the unwatchful soul (based on Job, perhaps, where God allows Satan to afflict his servant, prompting the onlooker/sage Eliphaz to remark, "[H]appy is the man whom God correcteth: therefore despise not the chastening of the Almighty" [5.17—KJV]); it thus suggests a period religious context that may make Iachimo's schemings and the wager theme more comprehensible.

13. *Certaine Sermons,* 1:96.

14. *Certaine Sermons,* 1:93.

15. For additional discussion of Iachimo's corrupting influence on Posthumus's perceptions, see Jordan, "Contract and Conscience in *Cymbeline*," 38-40; and Hunter, *Shakespeare and the Comedy of Forgiveness*, 150-52.

16. *Certaine Sermons*, 1: 21, The homilist's description of "dead fayth" below is possibly relevant to Iachimo's spiritual state through much of the play:

> There is one fayth, which in Scripture is called a dead fayth, which bringeth foorth no good workes, but is idle, barren, and unfruitfull. And this is compared to the fayth of Divels, which beleeve GOD to bee true and just, and tremble for fear, yet they doe nothing well, but all evill.

17. *Certaine Sermons*, 1: 97-98.

18. For further commentary on *Cymbeline*'s masculine ethic drawn from Roman roots, see Jodi Mikalachki, "The Masculine Romance of Roman Britain: *Cymbeline* and Early Modern English Nationalism," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 46, no. 3 (Fall 1995): 301-322; Robert S. Miola, "*Cymbeline:* Shakespeare's Valediction to Rome,"

in *Roman Images: Selected Papers from the English Institute, 1982* (n.s., 8), ed. Annabel Patterson (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984), 55-56; and Coppélia Kahn, "Postscript: *Cymbeline* paying tribute to Rome," in *Roman Shakespeare: Warriors, Wounds, and Women* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 168.

19. Miola, 60-61.
20. Miola, 58.
21. Miola, 56.