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I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Margaret Wilson Hilliard entitled "To Sacrifice a Child: The Development of a Theme in Medieval and Renaissance Drama." I have examined the final copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in English.

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TO SACRIFICE A CHILD:
THE DEVELOPMENT OF A THEME
IN MEDIEVAL AND RENAISSANCE DRAMA

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To Mike

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ABSTRACT

In his study Shakespeare and the Allegory of Evil, Bernard Spivack demonstrates the organic relationship between the Vice character of medieval drama and the Shakespearean villain; a similar case can be made for the referential if not organic relationship between the English medieval mystery cycle plays of Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac upon a collection of Renaissance dramas in which a parent kills his child or in some literal or figurative way sacrifices his child.

The Abraham and Isaac plays have an obvious, intentional Christian dimension as exempli of faith and obedience. With the Renaissance and the parallel growth of the Protestant spirit came the decline of religious drama as it was known in the medieval era. Among the factors which contributed to this secularization and growing humanism in English society and, consequently, its drama are the "rediscovery" of classical texts and philosophy, the rise of certain Protestant ideas, the changing economic situation due to the decline of feudalism, and the rise of a collection of ideas which made tragedy a possibility on the Renaissance stage.

The secularization of values in the Renaissance can be perceived in the treatments of child sacrifice in Renaissance drama. The story of Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac became, consequently, a theme. Renaissance plays which deal to some extent with a parent's literal or figurative sacrifice of a child are Sackville and Norton's Gorboduc; R. B.'s Apus and Virginia; Thomas Preston's Cambyzes; Marlowe's Tamburlaine, Part II and The Jew of Malta; Shakespeare's Titus Andronicus, The Merchant of Venice, Henry IV, Part I, King Lear, Coriolanus, Cymbeline, and The Winter's Tale; Massinger and Field's The Fatal Dowry; and John Webster's Appius and Virginia. These plays differ from the Genesis story and the medieval plays based on it in that none of the Renaissance parents is responding to God's command. However, the Renaissance dramatists examine the ethics of a parent's killing a child within the context of more secular motivations which range from materialism, pride, anger at the child's disobedience, and obedience to an earthly ruler to the more metaphysical concepts of sacrifice for the sake of patriotism, justice and honor.

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INTRODUCTION

In his landmark study Shakespeare and the Allegory of Evil, Bernard Spivack demonstrates the organic relationship between the Vice character of medieval drama and the Shakespearean villain, specifically Iago. He argues that "the stage shifted, in the space of one generation, from one dramatic method to another," and that the nature and function of the drama changed because the values governing the plays changed (47). He argues that in the early period of the Vice's popularity the prevailing values of the stage were "ascetic and transcendental. Later they became political and social and reflected the ideological conflict of the Reformation. By Shakespeare's time they had become fairly secular, although not without deep religious implications in the immediate background" (47). In both the medieval and the Renaissance traditions the Vice and villain characters contribute emotional intensity (sometimes humor, sometimes terror), but underlying both traditions is the pervasive question of Evil and man's relationship to it on both metaphysical and physical levels.

Spivack's case for the medieval Vice character's development into the more secular Renaissance villain is one that can be made for other characters and situations in medieval drama. Among the most popular and most enduring of the medieval English mystery cycle plays was the play of Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac based on the Genesis 22 episode. Seven versions of this play survive, and one version, the Brome version, is considered one of the finest medieval dramas. The situation of the play--the relationship between parent and child--is timeless; the circumstances and ethics of a parent's killing his child are penetrating concerns with both religious and secular dimensions. My purpose is to employ the medieval mystery plays of Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac as a framework from which to examine a collection of Renaissance plays in which a parent kills his child or in some literal or figurative way sacrifices his child. Just as Bernard Spivack perceives the development of the Renaissance villain from the medieval Vice, so, I believe, one can discern a referential if not organic relationship between the Abraham and Isaac plays and incidents of filicide or figurative child sacrifice in Renaissance drama. The Abraham and Isaac plays have an obvious, intentional Christian

dimension as exempli of faith and proper relationships between parent and child and between God and man. With the Renaissance came an increasing secularization--a growing humanism--which is of course reflected in the ideas addressed by the drama. In short, the secularization of values in the Renaissance can be perceived in the treatments of child sacrifice in Renaissance drama.

I am of course aware that this approach toward understanding the Renaissance plays with which I will deal is neither definitive nor all-encompassing. It is one vantage point--hitherto untried--from which to examine a dramatic theme as it is treated in medieval and Renaissance drama and as it reflects--albeit in a very general way--the cultural context of both ages.

CHAPTER I

THE MEDIEVAL PLAYS

Of all human relationships none is more powerful, more far-reaching in its consequences than the relationship between parent and child. Few situations are as emotionally charged as the killing of a child by a parent. When child murder is ritualized or somehow imbued with necessity and ceremony, it becomes the ethically puzzling notion of child sacrifice. Countless cultures throughout history have espoused child sacrifice for a variety of reasons generally concerned with the appeasement of various gods. In the Judeo-Christian tradition the story of Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac, recounted in Genesis 22, is a provocative mixture of complex notions. In its historical context it served to distinguish the God of Israel from the other deities worshipped in that day. In sparing Isaac's life, God indicated that He--unlike the other gods--did not require ritual child sacrifice. But the Judeo-Christian theological and doctrinal heritage sees in the episode not only that notion but also the exemplary faith and obedience of Abraham which indicates a sacrifice of spirit rather than of flesh, the obedience and self-sacrifice of Isaac, and (in the Christian heritage) the prefiguration of the Crucifixion in the entire episode.

Occupying a mere eighteen verses in Genesis, the story of Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac has through centuries evoked bewilderment and affirmation and encouraged question and intense study both for its significant position in Judaism and Christianity and as a stirring and penetrating example for examining the ethical and religious notions bound up in child sacrifice. From studies of the Akedah (as the episode is known in Jewish tradition), through various treatments by the Apostle Paul and early Christian Fathers such as Irenaeus, Origen, and St. John Chrysostom, to incorporation into the plastic arts of the magnificent medieval cathedrals and establishment in Christian liturgy and sermons, the story of Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac was familiar to laity and clergy alike by the time of the medieval age in Europe. And it is the medieval age which gave Western culture its most poignant treatments of this episode.

In 1311 Pope Urban IV and the Council of Vienne established the Feast and Festival of Corpus Christi, the essential message of which was "Behold and believe!" Corpus Christi Day was the only holy day not devoted to a saint, martyr, or biblical event; it was devoted purely to the church dogma of transubstantiation. The Feast of Corpus Christi and the sermons associated with it focussed on the actuality of the presence of Christ in the Eucharist and the sacrificial interpretation of the Eucharist, and the crucial doctrine behind the Festival was repentance and return to a proper relationship of obedience to God. Consequently, the literature and activity surrounding the Feast emphasized the sacrificial aspect of the Christ Child.

Among the most powerful literature of the Feast was the Corpus Christi Play. When sometime in the fourteenth century the Corpus Christi Play developed into its final form presenting through a collection of small plays the history of the world from the Creation to the Last Judgment, the story of Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac was naturally included in the cycle of plays because of its thematic and episodic importance. The parallels between the sacrifice of Christ on the Cross and Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac linked the Genesis episode to the intention and theme of the Corpus Christi Festival, but the importance and interest of the story go beyond typological concerns. The premise of the story is almost tragic--God calls upon Abraham to sacrifice his own son, thus placing him between the two horrible alternatives of murdering his son and disobeying God. The story is a lesson in obedience, both filial and theological, and an examination of sacrifice and its ethical, religious, and human dimensions.

Since the medieval mystery cycle plays were originally devised to teach and make pertinent certain theological doctrines, it is safe to assume that the medieval understanding of Genesis 22 is reflected in the cycle plays based on that episode. It is necessary, therefore, to examine briefly the theological, liturgical, and homiletic influences on the cycle plays in general. Hardin Craig and other scholars have researched the roots of early English drama and have found them to be in the medieval church.¹ It is virtually beyond doubt that the Church influenced and probably even determined the

¹See Hardin Craig's English Religious Drama of the Middle Ages; Karl Young's The Drama of the Medieval Church; and Joseph Quincy Adams's Chief Pre-Shakespearean Dramas.

organization of the earliest cycles. Church liturgy has traditionally been considered the germ of the cycle plays, but there is perhaps another source of influence which only a few scholars have examined--the popular vernacular sermon. The average medieval Christian probably attended Mass and was exposed to all that the church had to offer in the way of Biblical instruction: the plastic arts, the liturgy, and limited instruction by priests and other clergy of varying education in the theology of the Fathers of the Church (Irenaeus, Origen, Augustine) and varying literacy. Since the great majority of medieval Christians were illiterate, it seems safe to assume that they came into contact with theology indirectly. But the popular vernacular sermon was perhaps another vehicle of religious instruction which had a profound effect on the medieval populace and thus on the cycle plays. In such sermons, which were delivered both by parish priests and by itinerant preachers, the emphasis was not on intellectual theology but on basic Biblical truths in which the populace could find daily solace and direction. And it is indeed probable that some of the liturgy of the church and some theology were contained in these sermons. Thomas J. Heffernan points out, "The catechetical thesis most prevalent in English preaching during this period is twofold: to continue the Church's efforts at reform and to raise the laity's ecclesial literacy and public morality through the aegis of preaching Church dogma" (179). Further, says Mary Desiree Anderson, "listening to sermons was not only a religious exercise but the only form of adult education available to the poorer citizen" (53).

Eleanor Prosser sees the vernacular sermons as having particular implications for the Corpus Christi cycle plays, for "the development of the mysteries closely parallels the campaign of education" for the common clergy of the day (21). Following the IVth Lateran Council (1215) the ecclesiastical hierarchy became increasingly concerned about the illiteracy and poor instruction which characterized the parish priests in the numerous small hamlets throughout England. The church embarked on a program to improve the education and homiletic abilities of these priests. Many collections of sermons and instructions for priests derived from this program, as did some books for private devotion which were issued first in Latin and then in the vernacular. The thrust

of all these materials was to stress "vernacular instruction in that doctrine which led to repentance" (Prosser 21). The doctrine of repentance was one of the most significant in the church, and it was particularly important in the Feast of Corpus Christi which honored the Holy Eucharist, the Real Presence. "The service [of the Eucharist] is a commemoration of the sacrifice offered for man's Redemption. Thus the attendant doctrine emphasized by the medieval Church was preparation for receiving the Sacrament: 'Repent now: partake not of Christ's Body in sin'" (Prosser 22). Sacramental penance, stressed in manuals for vernacular instruction, was significant not only to the church but also to the Corpus Christi cycle plays. One book among the many we might adduce produced during the education campaign and which deals with repentance is John Mirk's Instructions for Parish Priests, written sometime after 1400. In this text, as Prosser remarks,

Mirk instructs his reader that preaching is primarily a call to confession, and exactly one-half of the book is devoted to repentance doctrine. His manual is especially significant for [an examination of the relationship between the mysteries and vernacular preaching] in that it was written for the most ignorant and ill-equipped priests. (26)

Also composed by Mirk for this campaign for priestly education was his Festial, a collection of sermons which, according to Alan J. Fletcher, became "central to preaching in English in the fifteenth century" (514). Since the Corpus Christi cycle is an outgrowth of the Festival of Corpus Christi and its emphasis on repentance, and since the campaign for the education of parish priests which took place about the same time the cycle plays developed also focussed on the doctrine of repentance, a connection can be seen between the cycle plays and the vernacular sermons which derived from the education campaign. As Prosser states,

we may conceive of a typical Corpus Christi cycle as one vast sermon on repentance: a sermon complete with exempla, meditations, and exhortations; a sermon utilizing all the techniques in which the

medieval preacher was trained--from comic castigation of folly to impassioned prophecy of doom. (25)

Further, related to the doctrine of repentance in both the plays and the vernacular sermons is the issue of Christ's Passion. Prosser points out that "the final motivating step that Mirk suggests is an act of faith, faith in the mercy of God through the merit of Christ's Passion" (31). In one Festial sermon Mirk makes this point, highlighting the typology in the Genesis 22 episode:

And alsoo 3e schull leue yn þe yncarnacyon of oure Lord Ihesu Crist þat oure lady conceyuet of þe Holy Gost wythout wem of hyr body, and was borne of hur yn flessch and blode as on of vs, and he was veray God and man þat aftyr was ded on þe crosse, and buryet, and aros from deþe to lyue þe þryd day, and stegh ynto Heuen on þe Holy Þursday, and schall come a3eyne, forto deme þe quycke and þe ded.

This was figurt by Isaake, þat was þe sonne of Abraham, þe wheche Abraham gete by his wyfe Sare þurgh byhest of God when þay wer boþe past age forto gete chyldyr; of þe whech sonne God behet Abraham, þat he schuld haue fruyt as mony as wer sterres of Heuen. Þen when þys chyld was borne, he was called Isaake. But when he was XXV 3ere old, God asayde Abraham yn þys wyse: he bade hym take hys sonne Isaak þat he loued wele, and go to suche an hull þat he wold schew hym, and þer offyr vp hym yn sacryfycce, þat was, sle hym and brenne hym, as þe maner was þat tyme. Þen Abraham, þogh he loued his sonne moche and had behest of God to haue gret vssu by hym, neuerþelese he toke hym anon wythout grucchyng, and 3ede to þat hulle, and made Isaak to ber wod to bren hymself wyth. And when þay come to þe hullys cop, Abraham made an auter of þe brondys, and set hom on fure; and þen toke his sonne Isaake, and wold han slayne hym, and offred hym vp soo to God. Then anon spake an angyl to hym, and

bade hym leue of, and take þe wedyr þat ys byhynde hym, tyed by þe hornys to brerys, 'and offor hyt ynstede of þy sonne'; and so he dyd.

Then by Abraham 3e schull vndyrstonde þe Fadyr of Heuen, and by Isaac his sonne Ihesu Crist. Þe whech he sparyd not for no loue þat he had to hym; but suffered þe Iewes to lay þe wode apon hym, þat was þe crosse apon hys schuldres, and ladden hym to þe mount of Caluary, and þer dydyn hym on þe autre of wode, þat was þe crosse, þat was made of foure treus: cydyr, cypur, olyue, and palme; and þer dyed for all mankynd. Thus may Crist well be called Isaac þat ys to vndyrstond laghtur for mony a soule. He broght out of helle laghyng þat 3ode þedyr, full sor wepyng. Þen as þus was fygur of Crystys passyon longe or he wer borne, ryght so Crist hymselfe þys day yn þe gospell tolde to his dyscypuls how he schuld be scornyd, and betyn wyth scorgys, and don to deth on þe crosse, and ryse þe þyrd day a3eyne to lyue. (77-78)

In the cycle plays, too, Christ's Passion figures prominently not only in the particular play of that subject but in the other plays which contain types of Christ. The play of Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac is such a play. From a typological perspective Abraham represents God in being willing to sacrifice his son, Isaac, who represents Christ.

The religious drama left the church and became more secular at some point during the Middle Ages. Hardin Craig and others who see liturgy as drama's origin attribute the secularization of drama to the increased control of religious plays by the laity. Their theory is that due to physical constraints the church had to give over control of the plays to the laity, particularly the guildsmen, and that the greater contact with the secular environment brought about the secularization of the plays. However, while the plays were becoming more secularized, a parallel development was taking place with the pulpit which perhaps gives a more complete explanation of how the first step toward the secularization of the religious drama was taken--the vernacular preaching moved outside the church and became the popular preaching of the streets and marketplaces. Heffernan points out the

contributions of the mendicants and later of the Franciscans and Dominicans (known for itinerant preaching) to the popularity of vernacular preaching. He notes, "In England, the mendicants were, shortly after their arrival, the most potent force in vernacular preaching. They rode this crest from the late 1220s until the close of the thirteenth century" (184). Though the mendicants' popularity declined, as G. R. Owst notes in his Preaching in Medieval England, the Franciscans and Dominicans became popular vernacular preachers with their varied sermon exempla, the superior education they possessed compared to most of the parish clergy, and their experience of life on broader geographical and social spectra than most of their audience had experienced (81). It was this popular preaching, according to Owst, that encouraged the secularization of religious drama:

In England, indeed, where the golden age of vernacular religious drama coincides, so far as existing records suggest, with the golden age of vernacular preaching, the parallels between them are far too numerous and arresting to be mistaken for mere coincidences. Even when due allowance is made for the fact that both drew inevitably upon a common store of theological doctrine, there remain overwhelming similarities in the actual handling of the matter, the details of certain characters and topics, the very texture and language of . . . composition. (Literature and Pulpit in Medieval England 485-486)

The common points of secularization and the similarities in the content of vernacular plays and sermons are not the only bases for believing a connection to have existed between the two. If scholarship and tradition are correct in identifying Ranulf Higden as the author of the Chester cycle, then the connection appears even stronger. Higden was not only a religious dramatist but also the author of a treatise on preaching and other works on homiletics (Owst, Literature and Pulpit in Medieval England 482). It is certainly possible and at some points even probable that preachers assisted the cycle authors in composition of the plays. The cycles also occasionally contain a homiletic commentator who could easily have been modelled on preachers, the Contemplatio of the Ludus Coventriae and the Chester cycle's Expositor being two examples. The vernacular cycle plays

themselves seem at times to be merely dramatized sermons and as such simply extensions of a homiletic revival which apparently took place in the early medieval age (Owst, Literature and Pulpit in Medieval England 547). While it is nonetheless entirely possible that some vernacular sermons were composed from impressions of the cycle plays, the evidence available to scholars seems to suggest that for the most part the sermons existed before the plays. In any event, the vernacular plays contain striking parallels with sermon material, and both the plays and the sermons seem to have been directed toward a common end.

Mary Desiree Anderson sees yet another related source in the display of medieval religious concepts--the plastic arts. She sees the arts which are associated with the church and which contain and develop church imagery as complementing both medieval sermons and the cycle plays. Anderson believes that English medieval literature and church imagery, imagery developed through both sermons and the plastic arts, "were developed as closely integrated parts of medieval culture . . ." (1). She explains this idea further:

In an age when few of the laity could read, various forms of spoken drama played an important part in their religious instruction As the imagery of the churches was intended to convey precisely the same teaching to the same illiterate public, the development of its iconography . . . naturally followed lines parallel to that of the drama It is obvious that they would not have been allowed to differ very widely in their presentation of religious lessons, since this would have confused those whom it was intended to instruct (2)

V. A. Kolve, in Chaucer and the Imagery of Narrative, examines how iconography probably worked in the minds of medieval Englishmen. He notes the particularly close linking of "the verbal, the visual, and the memorial" in the minds and art of medieval Englishmen (41). He cites the words of Gregory the Great: "'what a book is to those who can read, a picture provides to even the unlearned who look at it carefully, for in it the unlearned see what they should follow, and those who

cannot read books read it. Hence a picture especially serves as a book to the common people.'²

Interpreting explanations of Albertus Magnus on the function of memory, Kolve explains how art, memory, and learning are interrelated:

[T]he visual memory is very strong, and to images can be attached many details otherwise not readily accessible to the verbal memory. The words can be found through them. Perhaps the clearest explanation of the process comes from Albertus Magnus, in considering the objection that since propria (the literal details) represent a thing more accurately than can metaphorica (similitudes, metaphors), why should we not prefer the propria in a memory system? His answer is in three parts: (1) images by their very nature assist the memory; (2) many propria can be remembered through a few images; and (3) images are able to move the soul, a power that makes them more memorable still.

(Chaucer and the Imagery of Narrative 48)

The common end of medieval sermons, church art, and drama, of course, was the religious instruction of the common man. The cycle plays, like the feast which sponsored them, focus on the Eucharist and the Old and New Testament episodes which suggest, model, or reflect upon the presence of the living, redeeming Christ of the Eucharist. The cycle plays were concerned with explaining episodes of the Bible both theologically and dramatically--they aimed at both instruction and entertainment. It is a remarkable accomplishment of the cycles as a whole that neither aim was completely subordinated to the other. Underneath the dramatic touches and tricks of the cycle plays is Christian history; at the same time, the often weighty theological motif of sacrifice never stifles the plays' appeal.

In perhaps no other cycle play are theology and drama balanced so well as in the play of the Sacrifice of Isaac. Theologically, the basis of Genesis 22 is faith and obedience. Abraham and Isaac

²Gregory the Great, Second Letter to Serenus, Bishop of Marseilles, Patrologia Latina 77, col. 1128, as cited by Kolve, Chaucer and the Imagery of Narrative 45.

demonstrate faith and obedience which serve as typological prefigurations of Christ's faith and obedience at the Crucifixion and as a model for the faith and obedience mankind is intended to show God. The theology of faith and obedience was intended to be translated into a lesson for believers. The emphasis in the play is upon the type as vehicle for religious instruction--Isaac, as a type of Christ, serves to tell the laity about Christ. But the point of the story was not merely theological education. The play shows a true concern for the day-to-day lives of the members of its audience. While for the Apostle Paul and the Fathers of the early Church Christ and His death on the cross represented primarily a triumph over sin and death, gradually another perspective evolved in the later middle ages--a devotion to the Passion, or Passion-mysticism, which found a voice in Thomas a Kempis's The Imitation of Christ. Gustaf Aulen explains this view: "The attitude of the Christian is to be meditatio et imitatio; to enter with loving compassion into the unspeakable sufferings of Christ, to follow in His steps, and so be cleansed and united with the eternal Divine Love: per vulnera humanitatis ad intima divinitatis" (97). One result of this perspective, according to Aulen, was that the crucifix became less a symbol of triumph than an empathetic emblem of human suffering (98). Therefore, added to the instructional typology in the play of certain theologies of Christ was the sense of Christ as a human being who experienced and understood human suffering. In this attitude the plays of Isaac's sacrifice have their drama. The Abraham and Isaac plays are dramatizations of the tenderness, pathos, and piety such as are exemplified by Christ and find their secular versions in English domestic life (Bates 171). The plays contain and develop pulpit themes of paternal love and filial obedience, and their dramatic impact on their medieval audience was the sense of a dutiful son accepting his father's word as law and the sense of the tenderness of the parent-child relationship. Such drama enhanced rather than diminished the varied theological implications in the play concerning Christ and God and Christ's redemptive sacrifice for all God's children.

Religion and drama, though in Western tradition apparently closely related with the former probably having given rise to the latter, are potentially and frequently incompatible, or perceived to be so. Some scholars consider the major flaw in the dramatic quality of the cycle plays to be the fact

that the plays came out of a strong religious background and were developed for purely didactic purposes. Prosser explains, "We have prized the religious drama for its secular elements--for its rustic clowns and ranting tyrants. We have treated the mysteries almost entirely as germinal Renaissance drama, as conscious attempts to establish a secular art form" (10). This approach, she contends, is inappropriate to the mystery plays' form and purpose. Hardin Craig, too, asserts the naturalness and appropriateness of the religion in medieval drama: "Its [medieval drama's] life-blood was religion, and its success depended upon its awakening and releasing a pent-up body of religious knowledge and religious feeling" (4).

Religion and religious morality permeated the life of medieval England even though it may be safe to assume that some portion of the population was outside the church. The members of the audience--believers and non-believers alike--saw the Abraham and Isaac plays both as entertainment and as vehicles for conveying religious instruction and moral standards. From attending a performance of a play of Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac a medieval viewer would have learned several things. Perhaps the most obvious didactic function of the plays was to enhance the viewers' understanding of the Crucifixion by showing Abraham as a type of God, Isaac as a type of Christ, and Isaac's sacrifice as a prefigurement of Christ's sacrifice. Among the Abraham and Isaac plays, which have been called "the most typologized of the cycle plays," is one version which contains a character who tells the audience that Isaac is a type of Christ; this explicitly stated typology must have been the intention, to some extent at least, of all the playwrights of the Abraham and Isaac plays. In the medieval age, after all, typology reached an apex, with elements of typological exegesis exhibited in its plastic arts as well as its drama. As Murray Roston points out, the function of typology in the medieval age was to confirm "faith in the validity of the Christian mystery" (76). If the original cycle playwrights were indeed priests or other educated clergy, as they are assumed to have been, we can probably suppose a desire on their parts to use their drama to some degree as a vehicle for the religious instruction of the populace, but such a desire would not preclude a desire on the part of the playwrights, as educated individuals, to construct a well-crafted expression

of doctrine within their drama. The issue is what of the typology within the plays would have been grasped by the medieval population as a whole, given the playwrights' various dramatic as well as religious sensibilities. Further, as the plays came increasingly under the control of the laity, the subsequent productions of the plays would have conveyed only the typological elements a layman could have perceived. In the cycle plays typological points, however well made, were only as effective as their dramatic representation. Meanings easily perceived through a close reading of a play text are at best difficult and at worst impossible to convey to a live audience in an effective and pleasing manner through the opportunities and limitations of the stage. Since in the thirteenth century God began to be represented as an old man with a beard, the typology of Abraham as God could be suggested by a visual similarity. The wood which Isaac carries was portrayed in many medieval pictures as a cross, thus rendering him as a type of Christ.

At this point the question arises as to whether the plays have a human appeal which includes but goes beyond the human appeal inherent in the religious elements. To say that the Abraham and Isaac episode was included in the cycles solely to give typological unity to the cycles is to doom those plays to dramatic ineffectiveness. Admittedly, in the earliest forms of the Abraham and Isaac play the elements of Christ typology are so strong that there is no human sensitivity shown in or engendered by the play. Such is always the case with the insertion of typological elements into the medieval drama and into the Abraham and Isaac plays in particular. All drama, pathos, and sense of human struggle and conflict are muted or blunted with heavy-handed typology (Williams 185). But if the sole purpose of the plays was typology or theological correctness, then the York version of the play would be considered the best for it reflects the most rigid adherence to typology of all the plays. But the York play is widely regarded as being one of the weakest. If all the medieval dramatists had adhered so rigidly to typological standards exclusively, the plays they produced would not have been human drama (Elliott 41). Some of the dramatists instead chose to follow artistic traditions reflected in the plastic arts of the church by making Isaac a child instead of a man of Jesus's age (as in the York cycle). Those dramatists sacrificed typological rigidity and exclusiveness in favor of human appeal and sensitivity. In this endeavor the dramatists were not necessarily

breaking new ground. Biblical characters and episodes had, by the Middle Ages, undergone imaginative expansion, allowing the medieval playwrights artistic freedom. The basic Biblical narrative allows for a variety of mental images concerning the details of singular persons and events. As Murray Roston points out, "Abraham and Isaac belonged to the brotherhood of saints traditionally haloed on the stained-glass windows. Yet instead of remaining stylized, they became before long among the most human and realistic of the medieval dramatis personae" (27).

The fact that the more dramatically pleasing versions of the play have sacrificed typological exactness in such a way has caused some scholars to claim that the plays are effective on the basis of the degree to which they overcome the "limitations imposed by . . . their subject matter" (Coffman 417). This conclusion, however, does not take into consideration the full nature of the origin of the plays, the true nature of typology, or the full sense of the typology of the episode itself. As John R. Elliott so aptly states, these plays "achieved their dramatic qualities not in spite of their religious content but because of it [M]edieval drama remained at all times a religious drama, and . . . it derived its characteristic dramatic techniques directly from the forms and purposes of Christian worship" (37). V. A. Kolve has emphatically stated that "'[w]hat we find in this drama is not in fact an opposition of interests--the religious and the secular, the devotional and the profane--but rather a single coherent dramatic intent'" (Kolve as cited by Elliott 37). The cycles as a whole were developed for the medieval populace and developed in such a way as both to instruct and entertain that audience. The original intention was undeniably instruction, but the playwrights were evidently wise enough to understand that the plays, to perform that function for a varied audience with any effectiveness for any length of time, had to be different from sermons and liturgy. Therefore the dramatists worked out of interpretations of Biblical events as found in sermons and liturgy to interpretations more appropriate for dramatic renderings of theological points. This is not to say, however, that the playwrights left typology behind on their way to dramatic effectiveness and richness, for the nature of true typology is not in conflict with dramatic perceptions. New Testament typology of Old Testament events does not negate the human and

historical nature of those events. Typology does not supersede the reality of the events it construes. Typology is merely one light in which to view events which have integrity of meaning in and of themselves--it by no means denies integrity of meaning.

The Biblical story of Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac does not exist solely for its typological ramifications; the typology discernable in the story and in the plays based on it merely deepens the impact of the plays on a broader scale. Furthermore, a knowledge and appreciation of the incident of Isaac's sacrifice is essential to meaningful typology. As Elliott says, "The literal sense of the Biblical narrative was an objective historical truth, which yielded its deeper spiritual meanings only when its concrete reality had been perceived and understood" (41-42). Even Hardin Craig, who sees the story's initial inclusion in the cycles to be "formal" or "accidental," admits that the plays of Isaac's sacrifice probably grew in popularity because of the story's "compelling interest" (185). Likewise, V. A. Kolve praises the Biblical incident for "the possibilities it offers for an art at once generous, sophisticated, and humane"--possibilities realized in the cycle plays based on it (The Play Called Corpus Christi 257). Contrary to some scholars' belief that the Abraham and Isaac plays achieve success only inasmuch as they "overcome" their religious background and typological possibilities, if the plays are appealing drama--as indeed they are--they are so because of their particularly medieval and particularly Christian background, methods, and materials. The religious typology, far from dominating or subverting the dramatic possibilities of the plays, actually depends on the dramatic vitality and humanness of the plays' story.

The medieval mind saw no distinction or contradiction between the human condition and the divine purpose. Abraham's primary virtues in the incident are his faith in God and his devotion to God's will, and these virtues made Abraham exemplary. The magnitude of Abraham's faith in the incident cannot be underestimated, for the situation God's command places him in is comparable to the concept of the conditions of tragedy in ancient Greek drama; Abraham is caught between two horrible choices--he must murder his son or defy God. The medieval theologians who interpreted this incident and the medieval playwrights who transferred it to the stage were fully



aware of the human anguish and tension in the scene, but the emphasis of the plays and the theology behind them is not on the tragic possibilities (though pathos is developed in the better versions) but on “reconciliation, reward, and renewal” (Elliott 42). To the medieval audience the Sacrifice of Isaac was a story more joyful than tragic because Christianity views history as a comedy--the redeeming Christ will return in the end to claim the world as His dominion. Elliott gives a clear explanation of this point:

In the Middle Ages the term ‘comedy’ referred primarily to the structure of a narrative or a drama: Comedy begins in adversity and ends in joy; Tragedy begins in prosperity and ends in misery. By this definition, the form of Christian history, and hence of any drama imitating it, was clearly comic rather than tragic. (38)

The plays of the Sacrifice of Isaac, like all the other cycle plays, are inherently commedia-like in structure, and, because such structure is larger and may contain tragic elements, the medieval playwrights were able to incorporate elements of pathos and tragedy into the ultimately joyous scheme of the sacrifice episode.

The Christian comic structure and the typology inherent in the Biblical episode of the sacrifice of Isaac, together with the liturgical and exegetical uses of that episode during the medieval period, combine to form the vernacular Biblical dramas of the Sacrifice of Isaac. All the versions of this drama display the figural interpretation of Abraham as a type of God offering his son willingly in extreme faith and profound love. Isaac is a type of Christ willingly offering himself and submitting to suffering because of his desire to be faithful and obedient to God. According to Elliott, given the touching and exemplary devotion of both Abraham and Isaac to God, “the reprieve from God, when it comes, is thus a reward for steadfastness, not a fortuitous happy ending” (40-41). Two important points must be noted for an understanding of how and why the dramatic versions of

Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac emerged from their exegetical and liturgical background up to and including the medieval age.

First, the typological tendency of medieval Biblical exegesis meant that the Abraham and Isaac story derived its meaning not only from its intrinsic characteristics but from its context in the rest of human and divine history. The story was not self-contained but looked before and after: its significance came from its fulfillment of previous events and its foreshadowing of later ones. Secondly, through the function of the story in the liturgy its dramatic versions inevitably took on the ritual-comic structure characteristic of the liturgy and Mass, for it was the historical divisions recorded in the Lenten readings that furnished the rationale for the selection of Old Testament episodes in the Corpus Christi Play. (Elliott 44-45)

Many insights into the plays can be gained from examining the place of the Biblical episode in the Church pericope. The Genesis account was read on Quinquagesima Sunday, and Mirk uses it as a basis for his Festial sermon for that date. The themes of spiritual trial and redemption by grace dominate this reading and the parallel New Testament selection, Luke 18: 31-43, which refers to Christ's resurrection and to the salvation of the faithful blind man. The juxtaposition of the Old and New Testament readings suggests a typological exegesis, and it was upon this background that medieval audiences understood the significance of the Biblical episode of the sacrifice of Isaac and thus of the plays that derived from it (Elliott 43).

Since the Mass and the pericope in particular were the sources from which the medieval populace, and, indeed, the cycle playwrights themselves, had their initial contact with the story of Isaac's sacrifice, it seems reasonable to see the dramatic form of the plays as somewhat ritualistic. Elliott divides this dramatic ritual into seven major sections: a Prologue in which Abraham speaks of his life or in which Abraham or God recounts human history in general; the command to Abraham and Abraham's assent; the journey to the sacrifice and the informing of Isaac; the scene

of the sacrifice itself; the staying of the sword; the release of Isaac and the departure; and, finally, an epilogue with some statement by an expositor.³

Most versions of the play begin with some device or situation which connects Abraham with the whole history of man and with God, with either God (Deus) or Abraham recounting events or personages from Adam to Abraham and establishing in the minds of the audience the pre-eminence of God.⁴ By connecting Abraham with the whole of human history and establishing the role of God in Abraham's life, "the life of Abraham is established as a microcosm of the life of mankind" (Elliott 48). In this way the story can function as a basis for the derivation of morals concerning appropriate faith and obedience and proper familial dynamics for all men. Linking the standards of faith and obedience and the concept of typology is the concept of sacrifice.

Of particular note is the Chester version which precedes the main action of Isaac's sacrifice with the offering of Melchisedech (which suggests the Eucharist), the origin of the tithe with Abraham and Lot, and God's commandment to Abraham to be circumcised--all of which bear some suggestive relationship to the idea of sacrifice. The Expositor then enters and points out the typology the audience should perceive in the play: "By Abraham understand I maye/ The Father of heaven in good faye . . ." (ll. 137-138). Following this remark of the Chester expositor is a scene

³Elliott, 45. Elliott says the play can be divided into seven sections, but his statement of them indicates only six. The "sacrifice" section seems implied and has been inserted.

⁴The texts of the seven versions of the play are found in: The Chester Mystery Cycle, eds. R. M. Lumiansky and David Mills, E.E.T.S., S.S. 3, Vol. 1 (London: Oxford U P, 1974) 56-79; The Cornish Ordinalia, trans. Markham Harris (Washington: The Catholic U P, 1969) 35-38; Ludus Coventriae, ed. K. S. Block, E.E.T.S., E.S., 120 (London: Oxford U P, 1922) 43-51; The Towneley Plays, ed. George England and Alfred W. Pollard, E.E.T.S., E.S., 71 (London: Oxford U P, 1897) 40-51; The York Plays, ed. Richard Beadle (London: Edward Arnold, 1982) 91-100; and (Dublin and Brome versions) Non-Cycle Plays and Fragments, ed. Norman Davis, E.E.T.S., E.S., 1 (London: Oxford U P, 1970) 32-42 (Dublin), 42-57 (Brome). All subsequent references to these plays will be to these editions and will be followed in the text by the appropriate line citations.

in which God promises Abraham that he will father a great nation and that one of his seed will be particularly special:

Therefore, Abraham, servante free,
looke that thou bee trewe to mee;
and here a forwarde I make with thee
thy seede to multiplie.
So myche folk forther shalt thou bee,
kinges of this seede men shall see;
and one chylde of greate degree
all mankynd shall forbye.

(ll. 169-176)

The "one Child" is obviously Christ. It is interesting to note that in six of the seven plays of Isaac's sacrifice Isaac is a child, an obvious reference (as in the above) to the Christ Child. To refer to Christ as a child is a clear link to the medieval idea that the body of the Christ Child was broken in Eucharistic ritual.

Though the Chester play is the only one which explicitly states the typological and sacrificial aspects of the episode, it is clear in the other versions that this episode is to be seen as a prefiguration of the Crucifixion. In two versions of the play--the Dublin and Brome versions--some remarks by God connect the typological elements with didactic moralization. In commanding that Abraham sacrifice Isaac, God establishes a parallel with the Crucifixion but also proclaims (in the Brome version):

I schall asay now hys good wyll,
Whether he lovyth better hys chyld or me
All men schall take exampyll hym be
My commawmentys how they schall fulfyll.

(ll. 43-46)

Such moralization is certainly related to the idea of obedience which is part of the concern in both the Biblical story and the plays.

Abraham's response to God's command takes different forms in the various versions, and the nature of each response reflects variously on the didactic aims of the plays. The responses of the different Abrahams vary from unhesitating obedience, demonstrated in the Cornish, Towneley, Chester, and York versions, to anguished obedience, demonstrated in the Ludus Coventriae, Dublin, and Brome versions. In the former four, Abraham submits to the command without trace of emotion, presenting to the medieval audience exempli of faith and obedience. In the latter three, Abraham, though he submits obediently to God's command, nonetheless expresses natural human pain and regret at having to kill his own son. The Brome version most fully develops the pathos of a father dealing with the alternatives of displeasing God or killing his son:

Wollecom to me be my lordys sond,
And hys hest I wyll not wythstond;
3yt Ysaac, my 3owng sonne in lond,
A full dere chyld to me haue byn.

I had lever, yf God had be plesyd
For to a forbore all þe good þat I haue,
Than Ysaac my son schuld a be desessyd,
So God in Heuyn my sowll mot saue!

I lovyd neuer thyng soo mych in erde,
And now I mvst the chyld goo kyll.

(ll. 68-77)

The Brome Abraham's vexation and vacillation are clear. He would gladly give up all else instead of Isaac. Further, Abraham's vexation goes beyond his love for Isaac. Abraham's conscience pricks him against murder, and he recognizes that he is caught in the tragic dilemma of committing

murder or displeasing God. Only the Brome Abraham shows such a clear perception of his dilemma: "A! Lord God, my conseons ys stronly steryd,/ And 3yt my dere Lord, I am sore aferd/
To groche ony thyng a3ens 3owre wyll" (ll. 78-80). The Brome Abraham seems more human than the Abrahams presented in the other versions for he seems more human in his devotion to God and less a paragon of faith. His devotion to God is a reasoned devotion out of human feelings; he grapples with his human paternal desires and fears and summons the strength to obey God:

I love my chyld as my lyffe,
But 3yt I love my God myche more,
For thow my hart woold make ony stryffe,
3yt wyll I not spare for chyld nor wyffe,
But don after my Lordys lore.

Thow I love my sonne neuer so wyll,
3yt smyth of hys hed sone I schall.
A! Fader of Heuyn, to the I knell,
An hard deth my son schall fell
For to honore the, Lord, wythall.

(ll. 81-90)

The Brome Abraham, by being less godlike and more like a human father, undercuts to some extent the typological ramifications of the episode, but he probably constituted to the medieval layman a more appealing and more approachable model of faith and obedience. In defense of the remorse and regret shown by Abraham in several versions Elliott says,

For the medieval Abraham it is not a matter of absolute choice between two incompatible alternatives, but only a matter of establishing priority between them. He is called upon, not to show that he despises the world and loves only God, but simply to show that he loves God more than the world or its dearest object. (49)

Further, he defends the possibility of Abraham as both obedient and human: "As a human being Abraham is not expected to overcome his emotional reluctance to carry out the Command. But neither is the nature of the Command presented as one that makes obedience incompatible with humanity" (49). Realizing that as a human being he owes a debt to God, Abraham can be both obedient and sorrowful--the Command may be seen as springing from Abraham's humanity as much as denying Abraham's humanity.

It is interesting to note certain of the versions which make two secondary points about obedience on physical and spiritual levels. Two versions--Towneley and York--include servants who dutifully obey Abraham in all his instructions. It is likely that the playwrights intended these servants to exemplify not only the larger themes of obedience and humility but also the proper master-servant relationship. The Dublin version includes yet another character--Sarah--who serves to heighten the tension and pathos of the situation and to render Abraham's submission to God's command even more painful on a human level. The Dublin Abraham is forced to confront the effect his obedience to God will have on his wife, Isaac's mother. Surely this tension was not lost on the medieval audience for this version.

One pivotal point which affects the potential tension and pathos of the scene and which must be addressed is the question of Isaac's age, for a child Isaac and an adult Isaac have different ramifications on the issues of obedience and typology. In all but one of the seven extant versions Isaac is portrayed as a child. Only in the York version is Isaac an adult--the typologically appropriate age of thirty or slightly older, a detail A. W. Pollard calls an "unhappy freak" (185). The Genesis account is ambiguous on this point--the only indication of Isaac's age is that he is big enough to carry the fire wood.

While an adult Isaac furthers typological concepts, on the issue of obedience he might raise in a medieval audience questions about an adult's obedience to his parents as opposed to an adult's obedience to God. For example, does the adult Isaac submit in fact to God or to Abraham? The older Isaac of the York version prays that God give him the strength "To wirke þi wille allweyes!" (l. 184). This obedience to God is joined with obedience to parents in the play's

assumption that God's will is Abraham's will and that Isaac would never have to choose between them. When the York Isaac learns that God has commanded that he be sacrificed, his obedient response is an exemplary but credible adult reaction. Isaac encourages his father to sacrifice him gladly, but he acknowledges both his human frailties and his bodily strength, which is greater than his father's, and asks his father to bind him to the altar so his human resistance will not spoil the sacrifice. Isaac's exemplary courage and obedience move Abraham but do not sway him from God's command and do, in fact, mitigate the pathos. Both Abraham and Isaac fulfill typological functions, but the submissive humanity of their response to God's command make them examples to the medieval audience of an attainable obedience.

Certainly, too, a child Isaac would function as an example of filial submission to parental authority. When the Dublin Abraham commands Isaac to go with him to "lerne how God shuld plesid be" (l. 101), Isaac responds like the innocent lamb being led to slaughter:

So shal I, fadir, and euer haue do,
As ye haue taught me and my moder also.
Loke, when euer þat ye wol go,
I shal not be behynde.

(ll. 104-107)

Clearly Isaac's age and disposition to God's command have considerable impact on the dramatic and theological qualities of the plays and consequently on the ideas conveyed to the medieval audience. The variation in Isaac's age raises some significant issues. The fact that Isaac in all but York is most frequently portrayed as a child is especially significant given the fact that most medieval commentators place Isaac's age at the time of the sacrifice between twenty-five and thirty (Sinanoglou 502). Leah Sinanoglou (Marcus) points to a possible explanation for this discrepancy by citing the purpose of the Corpus Christi festival and linking the play of Abraham and Isaac to other crucial plays. The play of the Massacre of the Holy Innocents and the play of the Purification of Jesus both contain elements of human sacrifice or martyrdom. The Massacre of the Holy Innocents recounts the deaths of baby boys at Herod's command. The Purification presents

the baby Jesus being placed on an altar. When Isaac, portrayed as a child, is placed on the altar, the symbolic connection between the plays is enhanced. In portraying the victims of these three cycle plays as children, the symbolic emphasis of the plays shifts "from history to liturgy--from the sacrifice of Christ on Calvary to His re-sacrifice in the Mass" (Sinanoglou 502). Since the Corpus Christi holiday was intended to deepen the belief in the presence of Christ in the Eucharist, the fact that Isaac was portrayed as a child in the cycle plays of the sacrifice seems to be a dramatic device not only to enhance the pathos of the scene but also to connect the scene, by means of the suggestion of the sacrificed Christ Child, to Eucharistic motif of the holiday which the plays celebrated. A child Isaac--a helpless, innocent victim--undoubtedly heightens the tension surrounding God's command to sacrifice and has various ramifications for the medieval conception of filial obedience. Given the typological and dramatic criteria plus the fact that the Genesis account of the sacrifice scene consists of a simple narrative which reveals nothing about the feelings or words of either Abraham or Isaac, the cycle playwrights faced quite a challenge in constructing the sacrifice scene to be both instructive and meaningful typologically and theologically and dramatically satisfying and believable.

The Towneley version presents Isaac as a completely unwilling child victim and Abraham as a regretful sacrificant. These characteristics are realistic and believable, and Abraham and Isaac appear to be thoroughly human. The drama of the scene is enhanced by the pathos of required infanticide, but the typology in the scene is weakened by Isaac's unwillingness to submit himself in a spirit of self-giving as Christ did at the Crucifixion. These circumstances make the drama interesting but compromise any instruction in obedience.

The Cornish and Ludus Coventriae versions also present Isaac as a child, but these Isaacs, unlike the Towneley Isaac, submit to the sacrifice without hesitation. The result is that these plays (like the York play) demonstrate a dual sacrifice--Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac and Isaac's self-sacrifice. Self-sacrifice seems unrealistic for a child, however, and the result is that these versions are effective typologically but are less effective as realistic models of filial obedience. In both

versions Abraham is resolved to obey God's command but, as the following lines from the Ludus Coventriae version suggest, admits his pain in carrying out the sacrifice and the unnaturalness of the act:

The wyll of god must nedys be done
to werke his wyll I seyde nevyr nay
but ȝit þe ffadyr to sle þe sone
my hert doth clynge and cleue as clay.

(ll. 161-164)

Such Abrahams affirm both the necessary obedience to God and the reality and validity of human emotions.

The Dublin, Chester, and Brome versions strike an even better balance between obedience to God and realistic human emotions and in so doing probably constituted interesting and meaningful lessons in obedience for the medieval audience. In these versions the child Isaacs submit to sacrifice but only after pleading for a different fate. Isaac's attempts to avoid death before he submits seem very human, and his pleas to escape his fate are poignant. His behavior also may be actually most appropriate typologically when one considers that Christ, praying in Gethsemane, begs God to "let this cup pass." The Dublin Isaac asks,

Alas, gentyl fader, why put ye me in þis fere?
Haue I displesid you any thing?
ȝif I haue trespass, I cry you mercy;
And, gentil fader, lat me not dye!
Alas, is þer none oþer beste but I
þat may plese þat hy King?

(ll. 170-175)

The Chester Isaac (like the Brome Isaac) suggests that if he is to be punished he should be beaten but not killed:

Alas, father, ys that your wyll,
your owne chylde for to spyll,
upon thys hilles bryncke?

If I have trespassed in any degree,
with a yarde you may beate mee;
Put up your sworde yf your wyll bee,
for I am but a chylde.

(ll. 286-292)

In another poignant touch he asks that his clothes be removed so that they will not get bloody, vaguely suggestive of the removal and division of Christ's garments.

Abraham in these versions, as in the other versions, is grieved but obedient in the face of his almost tragic circumstances. The Brome Abraham, for example wrestles with his love for his son and his duty to God:

A! Lord, my hart reysyth therageyn,
I may not fyndygth in my harte to smygth;
My hart wyll not now thertoo,
3yt fayn I woold warke my Lordys wyll;
But thys 3owng innosent lygth so styll,
I may not fyndygth in my hart hym to kyll.
O, Fader of Heuyn! what schall I doo?

(ll. 299-305)

Strengthened by Isaac's obedience, the Brome Abraham (like the Dublin and Chester Abrahams) summons the courage to let his head overrule his heart:

Now, hart, wy wolddyst not thow breke on
thre?

3yt schall pou not make me to my God onmyld.

I wyll no lenger let for the,

For that my God agrevyd wold be.

Now hoold the stroke, my own dere chyld.

(ll. 311-315)

Just as Abraham is about to strike the fatal blow, an angel appears to stay his hand and proclaim God's satisfaction with how Abraham handled the test. One question debated through the centuries is whether Isaac was in fact sacrificed. One argument is that since Isaac was not killed, he therefore was not in fact sacrificed. Conversely, another viewpoint holds that since Abraham in his heart consented to kill Isaac and actually set about to do the deed, Isaac was sacrificed. In other words, Abraham's faithful obedience was expressed in an appropriate work. From indications in the texts of the plays, the medieval audience was intended to consider that Abraham did indeed sacrifice Isaac. In the Brome version the angel tells Abraham, "Owre Lord thanke the an hundyrd sythe/ For the keypyng of hys commawment" (ll. 318-319). In the Dublin version God makes great promises to Abraham because of the sacrifice:

Habraham, loke vp and herkyn to me.

Sipe pou woldest haue done þat I charged þe,

And sparedist not to sle Isaac, þi son so fre,

The chef tresoure that thow haste,

Be myn owne self I swere certeyn,

þi goode wille I shal quyte ayeyn:

þat shal be worship vnto you tweyn

While þe world shal last.

For þou sparedist not þi son for me.
Go and novmbre þe gravel in þe see,
Oþer motes in þe sunne, and it wol be
By any estimacion;
And as þik as gravel in þe see doþe ly,
As þil þy sede shal multiply,
And oon shal be borne of þi progeny
þat to all shal cause saluacion.

(ll. 286-301)

In the Chester version God proclaims,

Abraham, by my selfe I sweare:
for thou hast bine obedient ayere,
and spared not thy sonne to teare
to fulfill my bydding,
thou shall bee blessed that pleased mee.
Thy seede shall I soe multiplye
as starres and sande, soe many highe I
of thy bodye comminge.

(ll. 444-451)

Similar expressions are found in the Ludus Coventriae and York versions.

The closing lines of several versions reflect obvious didactic intentions toward the medieval audience. The Ludus Coventriae version stresses appropriate filial attitudes and behavior. When Abraham calls Isaac to start the journey homeward, Isaac responds:

Ffader as 3e wyll so xal it be
I am redy with 3ow to gon
I xal 3ow folwe with hert full fre
all þat 3e bydde me sone xal be don.

(ll. 253-256)

In the York drama the Angel, after giving Abraham God's promise, makes a promise to the audience: "If 3e will in hym trowe or triste,/ He will be wit 3ou euere and aye" (ll. 349-350). Abraham reinforces the moral: "Full wele wer vs and we it wiste,/ Howe we shulde wirke his will alwaye" (ll. 351-352). The Dublin Abraham presents a similar moral to the audience:

Now ye þat haue sene þis aray,
I warne you all, boþe nyȝt and day,
What God comaundeþ say not nay,
For ye shal not lese þerby.

(ll. 366-369)

Two versions, the Chester and Brome versions, conclude with a moral by an expositor or "doctor." The differences between the two versions illustrate the creative tension between drama and religion which lies at the heart of the plays themselves. In the Chester version, after God gives his blessing to Abraham, an Expositor enters to explain the significance of the play to the audience. His explanation is typological:

Lordinges, this significatyon
of this deede of devotyon--
and yee will, yee wytt mon--
may torne you to myche good.
This deede yee seene done here in this place,

in example of Jesus done yt was,
that for to wyne mankinde grace
was sacrificyd on the roode.

(ll. 460-467)

The typology of the episode is pointed out, but the idea that understanding "this deed of devotion" so it "may turne you to much good" implies that also within the play lies a moral lesson. The Chester Expositor goes on to explain the typology more fully:

By Abraham I may understand
the Father of heaven that cann fonde
with his Sonnes blood to breake that bonde
that the dyvell had brought us to.
By Isaack understande I maye
Jesus that was obedyent aye,
his Fathers will to worke alwaye
and death for to confounde.

(ll. 468-475)

The end of the Brome version, which consists of a speech by a "Doctor," focusses on the virtues of obedience and faithfulness to God:

Lo! sovereyns and sorys, now haue we schewyd,
Thys solom story to gret and smale;
It ys good lernyng to lernd and lewyd,
And þe wysest of vs all,
Wythowtyn ony berryng.
For thys story schoyt 3owe her
How we schuld kepe to owr powere
Goddys commawmentys wythowt grochyng.

Trowe 3e, sorys, and God sent an angell
And commawndyd 3ow 3owre chyld to slayn,
Be 3owre trowthe ys ther ony of 3ow
That eyther wold groche or stryve therageyn?

How thyngke 3e now, sorys, therby?
I trow ther be thre ore a fowr or moo
(ll. 435-448)

The Doctor's query is a moving one, intended to point out to the audience the pain endured by both Abraham and God in relinquishing their sons and Abraham's virtue in doing God's will regardless of cost. But the Doctor's speech takes an interesting and striking turn when he applies the lesson to a real problem faced by medieval English society--child mortality:

And thys women that wepe so sorowfully
Whan that hyr chyldryn dey them froo,
As nater woll and kynd;
Yt ys but folly, I may wyll awooe,
To groche a3ens God or to greve 3ow,
For 3e schall neuer se hym myschevyd, wyll I know,
Be lond nor watyr, haue thys in mind.
(ll. 449-455)

The Doctor then concludes his speech and the play by reiterating the value and necessity of obedience and faithfulness to God:

And groche not a3ens owre Lord God,
In welthe or woo, wether that he 3ow send,
Thow 3e be neuer so hard bestad,
For whan he wyll, he may yt amend.

Hys comawmentys trevly yf 3e kepe wyth good hart,
As thys story hath now schovyde 3ow beforne,
And feytheffully serve hyn qwyll 3e be qvart,
That 3e may plece God bothe euyn and morne.

(ll. 456-463)

In viewing the mystery cycle plays of Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac, then, the medieval audience would have derived notions of typology and instruction on faith and obedience. Both typology and obedience in faith intersect in the concept of sacrifice. Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac parallels the sacrifice of Christ on the cross. Isaac's obedience to Abraham and to God's command demonstrates proper faith and devotion put into action. Additionally, the episode constitutes the paradigm of parent-child relations in the context of ultimate obedience to God. For a clearer picture of the medieval view of a parent's sacrifice of a child reflected in the dramas based on Genesis 22, it is necessary to examine summarily the issues of typology and obedience as presented in the plays collectively.

The theme of obedience runs through the story of Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac both in the Genesis account and in the seven mystery plays, and it seems reasonable to assume that the plays both taught and mirrored the roles of faith and spiritual and temporal obedience in medieval English society.

The primary dramatic appeal of the plays lies in the human emotions and human interaction between Abraham and Isaac as Abraham wrestles both with God's command and the threat of death. In several plays Abraham consents to God's command but struggles with mixed human emotions as he prepares to carry out the sacrifice. Abraham's internal conflicts, as they are revealed in the dramas, intensify the pathos and dramatic tension of the plays but are considered by some critics as inappropriate theologically. In the Genesis account Abraham shows no such hesitation or human emotions of pain and regret. However, despite his human nature, and, indeed, perhaps because of it, Abraham is prepared to make the required sacrifice of his son. In both Jewish theology and Patristic theology, Isaac is considered to have been actually sacrificed. As Rabbi Hertz

explains in the Haftorah, "it was the spiritual surrender alone that God required The purpose of the command was to apply a supreme test to Abraham's faith, thus strengthening his faith by the heroic exercise of it" (201). John Elliott gives the medieval view of the nature of this test: "God's will is rational, but men may be unable to perceive its rationality. This faith and the ability to act upon it without question are what chiefly distinguish the medieval characterizations of Abraham from those of the Renaissance . . ." (42). In none of the versions does Abraham question God's command--the Dublin Abraham calls the test unnecessary but only after he is released from the sacrifice. In certain versions he grapples with human paternal feelings, but, as Elliott points out, "[t]here is nothing evil in Abraham's emotional reluctance, because it forms no real obstacle to a resolved will" (50). Kolve agrees that both Abraham and Isaac "recognize the unkindness of God's command as well as the necessity of obeying it. In their goodness they retain their dignity as natural men" (The Play Called Corpus Christi 261).

Though Abraham is certainly a crucial figure in this conflict between parental love and obedience to God, the focal point of the drama, and perhaps of the theology as well, is "Isaac, whose obedience to death at his father's hands is made yet more dramatically important than Abraham's submission to God's will" (Woolf, The English Mystery Plays 148). The Chester version, at least according to Murray Roston, takes its impetus from a fear of death. Isaac's fear of death, coupled with Abraham's fatherly pain and regret, account for the pathos of the drama. Indeed, the Dublin and Brome versions in particular, says Roston, "derive their moving realism primarily from . . . qualities of human fallibility and terror of death Death becomes something fearful, the cancellation of God's decree bringing relief not only to Isaac but to the audience too . . ." (40). The dramatic effectiveness of Isaac's fear derives from its general applicability to humanity. Fear of death such as is manifested by Isaac in five of the seven dramas is a natural fear. Elliott makes a distinction between what he calls natural fear and sinful fear: "Natural fear is that which all men should expect to feel, and which even Christ felt in his humanity. Sinful fear, on the other hand, is a fear which is allowed to overwhelm the reason and to induce contempt for God" (51). The Ludus

Coventriae version is weakened by an Isaac who shows no natural fear, thus making him less than human. The Towneley version is weakened by an Isaac who is an unwilling victim and who never consents, thereby bordering on sinful fear. The other five versions are strong on the point of Isaac's fear of death--though with varying degrees of dramatic effectiveness--because Isaac's fear of death is a natural fear, making him theatrically credible as a human being and typologically appropriate since Christ, too, had fears of death. In fact, Elliott sees Isaac's fear of death as actually heightening the typology and not merely the drama: "Isaac's fear, far from undermining the play's moral lesson, is fully consonant with his typological role, for it is the same fear that Christ is to experience on the Cross, in spite of His voluntary acceptance of his sacrifice" (52). Isaac's eventual submission to death--and therefore to God's command--is exemplary obedient behavior which is also typologically appropriate.

The issue of obedience, both on the part of Abraham and on the part of Isaac, comprises a crucial focus of the drama of the plays. Woolf, in fact, says that in these plays, particularly through Isaac, "obedience becomes for the first time dramatically interesting" (The English Mystery Plays 145). But the theme of obedience is not limited to dramatic effect; it is by no means devoid of theological or typological ramifications. The theological core of the Genesis 22 account is faith and obedience, and similar faith and obedience are displayed by Christ at the Crucifixion. But the theme of obedience is often seen by critics as playing another role in the dramas--a didactic role on a human and relational level. G. R. Owst sees the plays as dramatizations of some medieval sermon themes dealing with parent-child relations: "Isaac is the ideal medieval son alike in his willing obedience, in his filial respect, and in his readiness to receive punishment for any wrongdoing" (Literature and Pulpit in Medieval England 493). There is even a reference to Isaac in a medieval guide to behavior, Caxton's The Book of Good Maners. Isaac's obedience to Abraham has value not only as an example of appropriate behavior for children but also as an example of how Christ behaved and how men should behave. Just as medieval children had a duty to obey their parents, mankind is bound to obey God, and Christ illustrates both situations. A. M. Kinghorn explains this

multiple impact of the plays on the medieval audience: "[I]n medieval times a father's word was law and a child had to obey. This was the main dramatic impact on the contemporary audience. In addition, there is Man's theological duty to obey God, somewhat more abstract but equally immediate" (84).

The parallel obediences of Isaac and Christ would have been perceived by the audience, and both would have been taken as examples of appropriate behavior. Obviously, then, even through the moral of obedience the Christ typology of Isaac and the God typology of Abraham would have been perceived by the medieval audience. The typological ramifications of the plays are, if not also intentional, at the very least inescapable. The story of Genesis 22 was familiar to any medieval Englishman who had ever attended a Mass or visited a cathedral or heard vernacular sermons. Woolf explains the pervasiveness of the story:

In the Middle Ages it would have been . . . [very] difficult for the story of Abraham's sacrifice to escape the eyes and ears of anybody, however uninterested he might be in it. The comments of the Fathers were quoted in every kind of religious work from the Biblical commentaries to manuals of popular instruction and devotion, whilst the tradition of visual representation also continued and multiplied itself in stained glass, carving, wall painting, manuscript illumination, and in the great compendiums of typology, such as the Biblia Pauperum ("The Effect of Typology on the English Medieval Plays of Abraham and Isaac" 806-807)

Indeed, the typology in the story of Abraham's sacrifice would have been so familiar to a medieval Englishman that it would have been inseparable from the story itself. The east window of the Corona of Canterbury Cathedral displays the Sacrifice of Isaac as an antetype of the Crucifixion. In some wallpaintings in Worcester Cathedral Isaac is depicted as carrying the wood like a cross, and the scene is displayed as an antetype to the journey to Calvary. In addition to the suggestions of typology in Abraham's sacrifice found in the plastic arts, certain devotional books also reveal the

typology in the story. The Northern Passion, the Cursor Mundi, and the Biblia Pauperum develop and display the typology in Abraham's sacrifice. An even more pointed illustration of the fact that the typology in the Abraham and Isaac plays is inescapable is found in one of the plays--the Chester version which concludes with an actual statement of the typology in the play.

While the Corpus Christi cycle plays of Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac are interesting and moving drama and display conscious artistry at various levels of skill, they are no less expositions of some of the most important and influential religious ideas of the day. While each of the seven versions of the drama has its own particular strengths and weaknesses both dramatically and theologically, as a whole they represent a remarkable blend of truly human, truly moving drama and spiritual instruction. John Elliott sees the plays as on the whole striking an acceptable balance: "Realistic characterization is delicately balanced with typological significance. Moral conflict is fully developed but never into tragic tension. This was so, however, only as long as dramatists retained medieval habits of mind" (53). Elliott's last phrase here is crucial. The plays spring from a specific tradition and a particular scheme of thought. The Abraham and Isaac plays are parts of larger cycles of plays which were concerned with "relating and explaining [Biblical] episodes theologically as well as dramatically" (Longworth 27). Like the Feast of Corpus Christi itself, the message of the Corpus Christi plays is "Behold and believe!" As Katharine Lee Bates notes, the cycle plays had for their "fundamental material the Christian faith, crudely comprehended, given with startling realism [,] personal embodiment [,] and physical environment, sprinkled over with legend and anachronistic touches of rural English life, yet still in essential features the Christian history" (175). Given the special artistry, the sense of historical theology, and the sense of the unity of life, faith, and art displayed in the plays of Abraham and Isaac, we can agree with Elliott's praise of the special art of which they are a part as "a dramatic form which, while it flourished, gave vital and lasting artistic expression to the deepest beliefs of its society" (59).

CHAPTER II

THE RENAISSANCE, THE GROWTH OF THE PROTESTANT SPIRIT, AND THE DECLINE OF RELIGIOUS DRAMA

The sixteenth century in England saw the decline of the medieval age and the emergence of new intellectual, cultural, and social ideas and activities which have been collectively termed the Renaissance. Various notions abound concerning possible turning points which mark the demise of one era and the rise of another. Some scholars claim the end of the Wars of the Roses and the establishment of Tudor monarchy to be the beginning of England's political Renaissance. Others give great importance to the Reformation which began on the continent in 1517 and soon took on a unique incarnation in England. Clearly a change of era is a result of a variety of factors over some span of time and ultimately affects, subtly or dramatically, every part of life.

What has come to be known as the Renaissance in England is a collection of intellectual and social changes involving, generally speaking, a new perspective on the physical world and all that temporal existence has to offer. While the medieval perspective has been generally characterized as spiritual, heavenly, and eternity-oriented, the Renaissance perspective has been generally characterized as humanist, worldly, and temporal, extolling the virtues and possibilities of man. Murray Roston argues,

For all the swirling currents and undercurrents within the period which we term the Renaissance, with its conflict between the humanist idealization of Reason and the Counter-Renaissance insistence upon Faith, the old definition still holds true: that essentially it marked a new awareness of the challenges and potential splendour of the physical world. Man was no longer a dim figure reduced to shadowy insignificance before the flames of Hell. He had become instead a

being noble in reason, infinite in faculties; and where the medieval mind, focussed on the world to come, had accepted man's return to dust as the natural order of creation, the Elizabethan was for ever amazed that worms would one day feast upon his flesh. His body, symbolic of the temporal world, had assumed a new dignity. (49)

The effects of the Renaissance extended to every sphere of life--religion, politics, society, economics, law, and education. Indeed, the term "Renaissance" has come to indicate the momentous and far-reaching changes which occurred during the sixteenth century in England. Of the term Norman Sanders states:

Like most useful words, this has come to mean many different things. At its simplest level it describes one intellectual activity that Englishmen were involved in at this period: namely the recovery of Greek and the refining of medieval Latin in the light of the classical usage of that language. But it is also used in a more rag-bag fashion to embrace the restoration of learning after a dark night of ignorance, the dawn of a new civilization, the rediscovery of the physical world, the beginning of the physical sciences, the breaking with the primitive past, the growth of sophisticated art, the establishment of a humanistic world to replace a rigidly theocentric existence. Use of the term in this way tends to oversimplify what was a very complex business. (4)

The sixteenth century in England saw the reigns of all five Tudor monarchs, but, as Norman Sanders notes, their reigns "were characterized not by any continuity of policy but rather by each monarch's attempts to handle pressing problems of government caused by shifts in religious belief and the pressures of intellectual change" (3).

The Protestant Reformation was the major factor in the religious sphere and a major component in the dynamic intellectual changes of the sixteenth century. The Reformation assumed a different incarnation in England from its incarnation on the Continent largely because of England's

political climate. Henry VIII, the first monarch to be called the Head of the Church of England, was actually opposed to many theological points of Lutheranism. While still a Catholic he was proclaimed Defender of the Faith by the Pope for his insistence on the seven sacraments of the Roman church rather than Luther's recognition of only three. When the Pope refused to annul his first marriage so he could remarry and produce a male heir, however, Henry found himself at odds with the Church's government and political power. The Church of England therefore had its origin more in political than in religious differences.

During the Tudor monarchy, then, England's religious climate was in a continuous state of flux. Henry VIII was a Catholic who came to espouse some Protestant ideas and then, toward the end of his life, moved back toward Catholicism again. Edward VI and his advisors advanced the cause of Protestantism considerably. As Protestantism gained more and more of a foothold, Catholicism held on in various quarters and even enjoyed a period of supremacy in the reign of Mary Tudor. During her reign, a number of prominent protestants took refuge in Calvin's Geneva, so that when the protestant Elizabeth assumed the throne, they returned from Geneva bringing with them Calvinist ideas. As a result, Calvinism exercised a widespread influence on late sixteenth-century English Protestantism.

A fundamental difference between Roman Catholicism (prior to the Counter-Reformation) and Protestantism in general lay in the place of authority recognized by each church. The medieval Church saw all religious authority as residing in the church institution headed by the pope. Protestantism, however, recognized no single human authority but placed reliance on the Bible--sola scriptura. As Roland H. Bainton states, "The reformers dethroned the pope and enthroned the Bible" (1). Norman Sykes cites the famous remark of William Chillingworth: "'THE BIBLE, I say, the BIBLE only, is the religion of Protestants.'"¹ This view differed from the Roman Catholic view of the importance of faith in the institutions and traditions of the Church. The implications of this difference of perspective were far-reaching. Medieval men and women were taught to look to

¹William Chillingworth, The Religion of Protestants: A Safe Way to Salvation (Oxford, 1638), as cited by Sykes 175.

their immortal souls and seek forgiveness for their sins to ensure their ultimate salvation. The Protestant view, while also Theist, looked to temporal existence with more favor and with a considerable sense of responsibility for bringing about the Kingdom of God on earth. This perspective gave more responsibility to the individual believer and had considerable social and economic repercussions. Salvation was seen as a gracious gift from God which could be neither earned nor deserved and which could not be granted by the church institution. The Protestant belief in "the priesthood of all believers" led to an amazing number of vernacular translations of the Bible and to an increased desire for education at all levels of society with the Bible being one of the major sources of reading material. Under the inspiration of Luther's 1522 translation of the New Testament into German, in England alone eight complete translations and a number of sectional versions were produced between 1535 and 1611.² The church was viewed by the reformers, particularly the Calvinists, as the signpost to direct the community of faith, not (as in the medieval Roman Catholic view) the depository of all faith and salvation.

It is important to note the nature and extent of the influence in England of the Calvinist brand of reform. The influence of Calvin on English thought is generally judged to be minor prior to 1553, but it was far from nonexistent. During Henry VIII's reign what Protestant influence there was was Lutheran. During Edward VI's reign, however, Protestantism was in favor and benefitted from an influx of Continental Protestants who took refuge in England. It is known that Calvin corresponded frequently with Archbishop Cranmer, the Duke of Somerset (the Protestant Protector of young King Edward), King Edward VI himself, and Sir John Cheke (Edward's tutor). During the Marian exile of English Protestants to Geneva and other Continental Protestant strongholds, Calvin's influence expanded. Calvin rapidly became the leading authority on Reformed Church principles. It is especially significant that most of the eight hundred or so exiled English Protestants settled in

²The eight complete English versions are: Coverdale's Bible (1535); Matthew's Bible (1537), by Thomas Matthew, a friend of William Tyndale, who produced the first English New Testament in 1526; Taverner's Bible (1539); The Great Bible (1539); Bishop Beke's Bible (1551); the Geneva Bible (1560); the Bishops' Bible (1568); and the Authorized Version of 1611. For a detailed discussion of these versions, see F. F. Bruce, History of the Bible in English and S. L. Greenslade (ed.), The Cambridge History of the Bible, Vol. 3.

Geneva; they generally did not settle in Lutheran areas because, as Charles D. Cremeans notes, the Lutherans considered them Sacramentaries and, as such, lost to Lutheranism (35-36). English Protestantism was strengthened by this period of Protestant exile in Geneva for, as Cremeans states, "after the accession of Elizabeth, Calvin's influence on England made itself felt through the activities of former members of the Geneva congregation and through his writings" (41). Calvinism never had Elizabeth's espousal as it had had Edward VI's because some books (one by the Scotsman John Knox) produced in Geneva spoke against the rule of women. Nonetheless, Calvinism--though an Anglicized brand altered somewhat from the Genevan form and influenced by the Scottish brand--continued to permeate English life in the sixteenth century. Cremeans goes so far as to claim that "Calvinism became the dominant system of religious thought in Elizabethan England" (60). There were many Calvinists in high offices in the Church of England. Further, as Paul R. Sellin argues,

With the Lambeth Articles (1595), designed to make Anglican endorsement of Augustinian doctrines of free will, election, and perseverance of the saints as explicit as possible for those who thought the Elizabethan creed too weak, the Calvinist temper of the Church of England at the end of the sixteenth century is unmistakably clear. (173)

Calvinism spread in England through English merchants who had contacts with the Netherlands and France and through English students who attended the university in Heidelberg, which had become a new Geneva. Perhaps the most dramatic evidence for the influence of Calvinism in England is found in the number of works by Calvin and Beza which were published in England during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Cremeans, citing Pollard and Redgrave's Short-Title Catalogue, notes that ninety-six editions of Calvin's writings and fifty editions of Theodore Beza's were published in England prior to 1640. Cremeans states:

No other foreign divines have as many, Luther and Bullinger being nearest with thirty-eight each. Archbishop Parker had more books published than any other official of the Anglican Church, and he had

only ten to his credit. One or more of Calvin's works were published almost every year between 1548 and 1634. Between 1578 and 1581, six to eight were published every year. Between 1548 and 1600 no other writer had nearly so many publications in English as John Calvin had. Only in the early seventeenth century was his record surpassed, and then it was by William Perkins and Henry Smith, both Calvinists. (65)

One important aspect of Calvinism was that it presumed to address some vital secular problems and in so doing thrust itself into the secular arena of English society, culture, and art. These secular issues are, in Cremean's words,

the reconciliation of the old with the new conception of the law, the question of the form and nature of the state, the problem of the relation of church and state, the rights and duties of secular rulers or magistrates, the question of obedience to tyrannical and ungodly rulers and the amount of resistance to them that is permissible, and the extent of the liberty and responsibility of the populace. (11)

On the conception of law in particular Calvinism (and Protestantism in general) encouraged a break from medieval society:

One of the greatest problems of Calvin's age was that of the clash between the new conception of the use of laws for the benefit of society and the still powerful medieval conception of an immutable body of law which was to be obeyed, but never changed. It was no easy matter to break away from the legal concepts of the preceding age, and particularly because the ideas of the Middle Ages were dominated by the conception of the rule of law.

Calvin, along with other reformers, participated in the development of a new concept of law, because the accomplishment of their ends required a reorganization of ideas on the source of authority. Their

acceptance of the Scriptures as the source of all wisdom and their belief in the right of the individual to interpret the Scriptures opened the door for new ideas on the interpretation of natural law. . . . Calvin left it pretty much up to the individual to make his decision on the authority of the Scriptures. Of course, he expected only one answer from the godly, but he has shifted the responsibility from the shoulders of the church to the shoulders of individuals. . . . Melancthon, Zwingli, Knox, Buchanan, and others besides Calvin were among those to adopt the new concept of natural law. (Cremeans 11-13)

Another related point on which Calvinism exercised influence on secular aspects of sixteenth-century English society was that of the doctrine of election. As Martha Tuck Rozett explains,

The doctrines of election and justification by faith provided the Elizabethans with a particularly apt framework for articulating the tensions of a highly mobile and rapidly changing society. Although Calvinism emphasized man's innate depravity, its corresponding emphasis on God's omnipotence led circuitously . . . to an intensified conviction of human regeneracy. The result was a new dignity afforded to man as a consequence of the exaltation of God's power to grant faith. The implications of Calvinism were as much social and political as they were theological. . . . (11)

The new authority given to the individual conscience in effect set up a new basis of hierarchy--the hierarchy of spiritual grace--next to the preexisting hierarchy of temporal power (Stone 743-744). As Rozett further states, "Because the only true sign of election was inner assurance, Calvinism inadvertently both demanded and encouraged a general self-confidence in people who had until then been told to believe that God rewards humility, subservience and resignation" (11).

The greater responsibility given to the individual in the Protestant movement found a parallel in Renaissance humanism. As Roston explains,

Although Calvinism somewhat paradoxically laid new emphasis on predestination and the doctrine of unearnable Grace, the Reformation paralleled the Renaissance in its yearning for spiritual emancipation and personal dignity. The Lutheran demand for a Bible translated into the vernacular (as well as Luther's own provision of such a version) was aimed primarily at circumventing the Catholic church's monopoly of Scriptural interpretation. (50)

The more widespread influence of classical texts encouraged a more favorable view of man's potential than had generally been espoused in the medieval era. The two perspectives, though different in origin, were similar in ultimate effects. Both contributed to a sense of the worthiness of man and the possibilities and even responsibilities for development of individual creative capacities. The ramifications of this notion were considerable and widespread, and, naturally, one area affected was the drama. The medieval cycle plays were products of a communal culture and communal effort. As Rosemary Woolf explains, "The form of the mystery play, which required a willing submissiveness to a communal tradition, would . . . have made it unsuitable for a poet of large talent, but it offered excellent opportunities for invention to a writer who could find his best effects by working within the secure confines of a shared literary genre" (The English Mystery Plays 312). Hardin Craig takes a similar view:

As for Corpus Christi plays . . . , they are not the result of the inspiration of an individual author who sat down and wrote a Corpus Christi play as the spirit moved him They were communal in the sense that they were instituted, performed, and managed by communities, and they grew by a sort of incremental amplification by anonymous writers from time to time. (10)

With the increasing emphasis on the individual which derived from Renaissance humanism coupled with the Reformation, however, drama (as did all the arts) became one vehicle by which an individual of talent could make a name and a fortune for himself. Hence the rise in the sixteenth century of numerous well known and well paid dramatists, Marlowe, Shakespeare, and Jonson being perhaps the most notable among them. Even if fame was all the compensation a Renaissance playwright received for his talent and his efforts (and some playwrights like Thomas Dekker lived from pound to pound), that was more reward than most medieval writers ever received and perhaps even ever sought.

The Renaissance and the Reformation in England were not two distinct parallel movements but in fact were intertwined forces which altered the old medieval way of life into a new and different England in the sixteenth century. As Glynne Wickham states,

It is a mistake . . . to think of the Reformation as simply a rather distinct event in ecclesiastical history; for immediately [when] the sovereign takes into his own hands authority for the interpretation of religious doctrine on his subjects' behalf, doctrine and politics become inextricably mixed. Similarly, it is a mistake to equate the Renaissance with academic reaction towards classical learning and artistic precept. A reaction in this direction undoubtedly occurred, but being Italian-inspired it could not escape association in England with Rome, the Papacy and Catholicism. (Early English Stages II, 53)

The emergence of the Renaissance and the arrival of the Reformation in England were major factors in the decline of the mystery cycles. Indeed, as Norman Sanders points out,

With radical changes in the nation's spiritual and intellectual life and their effects in the social and political spheres, it was inevitable that so public an art form as the drama should have been affected

The movement of England during the sixteenth century from participation as a segment of Catholic Europe to religious and political

independence in a continent of critically balanced antagonisms was paralleled by a change in the nation's dramatic life from a vital, largely amateur activity which threaded every level of society to a mainly metropolitan professional business favoured by the court, patronized by the nobility, and arousing anger and disapproval in a powerful segment of the middle classes. (5-6)

Various scholars have espoused different theories about exactly why the mystery cycles declined. Harold C. Gardiner, S. J., has made probably the strongest case for seeing in the Reformation the main impetus toward the decline of the cycles. In the first place, the reformers generally disapproved of the presentation on stage of sacred events and personages. Gardiner cites by way of example an Act of the General Assembly of the Kirk of Scotland in 1575 recorded in Calderwood's The True History of the Church of Scotland:

'Forasmuche as it is considered that the playing of clerk-plays, comedies or tragedies upon the canonicall parts of the Scriptures, induceth & bringeth with it a contempt and profanation of the same, it is thought meete and concluded, that no clerk-plays, comedies or tragedies, be made upon canonicall Scriptures, other New or Old, in time coming, other upon the Lord's Day or upon a worke day: that the contraveeners, if they be ministers, be secluded from their functions, and that others be corrected by the discipline of the kirk.'³

It is interesting to note that the Privy Council of Scotland had a hand in that Act. The mystery cycles, like the other forms of medieval drama, had their ultimate origin in the only church known by medieval man--the Roman Church. With the Reformation came an increasing distaste for and suspicion of all things Catholic. Since in England the Reformation had serious political as well as religious ramifications, anything remotely connected to Roman Catholicism was, to the political and

³D. Calderwood, A History of the Church of Scotland (Edinburgh, 1678) 345, as cited by Gardiner 89.

religious authorities at least, suspect. Even though by the time of the Reformation the mystery cycles had long been out of the direct control of Roman Catholic ecclesiastical authority and had considerable popularity and stature as communal religious events, they were still connected in the minds of some authorities with the Church and thus with Rome. The mystery cycles, at least those in England, apparently fell victim to the religious and political struggles connected with the Reformation. Hardin Craig explains:

The records of the suppression of the medieval religious plays indicate that people in many English provincial cities were much attached to them and gave them up with reluctance, indeed were persistent in their efforts to keep them alive. Ordinary people were of course not sufficiently learned to be aware of doctrinal issues. The mystery plays were not theological or propagandistic; they were religious. They sought from the beginning to tell the truth as they believed it to be and to give instruction in the means of salvation. . . . The plays were in their essence simple stories of patriarchs, prophets, the family and friends of Jesus, His ministry, His disciples, and His sacrifice. They probably had little sectarian effect in their teaching. Their offence was that they formed a rallying-point for those who not only preferred the old customs but the church that had fostered them. (363)

Clearly there were traces of the "Renaissance" throughout the Middle Ages, but during the sixteenth century in England the forces of classical revival and religious reform gathered momentum with one of the results being the conscientious suppression of the medieval religious drama as a matter of government policy. As Norman Sanders notes,

The reign of Henry VIII witnessed the first steps taken by government to control religious drama. The immediate reasons for them were political and doctrinal; but in practice they were only another move in a long history of official attempts to regulate all popular activities. . . .

[T]he demise of the mystery plays is the record of a vital social and religious dramatic activity succumbing to variously exercised central authority (7; 12)

"Chester lost its right to perform its Cycle with impunity in 1574, York in 1575, Wakefield in 1576, and Coventry as late as 1581" (Wickham, Shakespeare's Dramatic Heritage 5).

The religious and political forces which ultimately brought about the decline of the mystery cycles must not be considered to be wholly against biblical drama or drama in general, however. As Murray Roston points out, "The Protestants, despite their distrust of an art 'tainted' by Catholic usage, vacillated between a reluctant toleration of biblical drama and positive encouragement, especially when it served as an effective propaganda weapon" (52). As Hardin Craig remarks, "There is no evidence that the Protestants at first, or as Protestants, objected to drama. To be frank about the matter, they objected to Catholicism, and, so far as biblical drama is concerned, it was not dependent for its future on the medieval mystery plays" (363). Roston further points out that biblical drama was even produced in Geneva: "Thus, whatever the theoretical stand of the Calvinists, in practice they tolerated the drama even in Geneva itself, and there can be no doubt that it was often regarded with favour by Protestants elsewhere" (53). Therefore, Protestant opposition to the stage was, in the sixteenth century at least, not total, and opposition to the mystery cycles reflected more doctrinal and socio-political distrust and not so much a rejection of the whole notion of biblical drama.

During their period of decline the mystery cycles underwent some changes which indicated the pressures of a changing society and changing tastes. Rosemary Woolf points out a change in diction which indicates not only an increasing consciousness of artistry and stylistic concerns but also reflects the Protestant distrust of the stage:

The adoption of aureate diction for the speeches of the deity was ominous in its implications, for it showed a loss of confidence in the assumptions about style upon which the success of the mystery plays

rested. These assumptions went back to the specifically Christian adaptation of classical theories about stylistic decorum, which allowed that the sublime matter of the Redemption might fittingly be treated in lowly style. It was thus possible for God to speak in a plain but dignified style, and, with an interesting twist, elaborate, high-sounding diction was reserved for the evil characters, Herod or Pilate. Furthermore the late and deliberate preference for ornate language in the dialogues of heaven suggests literary self-consciousness in a disturbing way. The argument for the suitability of representing God upon the stage by analogy with His representation in art presupposed an unquestioning literary innocence. It may be conjectured that once poets reflected about propriety of style, the way had been opened to the conclusion that there was no style appropriate and indeed the excision of the divine role was one of the most marked signs of the break-up of the medieval tradition

In the Chester compromise of signifying the divine presence by unseen voice and aureate diction it can be seen that hesitations about the divine role were rooted not only in matters of stylistic decorum but also in the more general Protestant distrust of the stage (The English Mystery Plays 313-314)

Even though the cycles declined and eventually ceased to exist, there is clear evidence that many Renaissance dramatists were acquainted with medieval drama and even incorporated some elements of that drama into their work. Indeed, as Willard Farnham points out, "The English stage under Elizabeth was notable among the national stages of Europe in its time by being the particular, and on the whole unapologetic, heir of the medieval stage" (xi). Bernard Spivack has admirably traced the development of the medieval Vice character into the Renaissance villain, most notably

into Falstaff and Iago. Glynne Wickham points out that the medieval drama had too much to offer both thematically and dramatically to be lost forever:

[O]fficials of both Church and State . . . brought first censorship and then suppression down upon the whole religious stage. Nevertheless, . . . the structural patterns, philosophical and artistic, evolved in the religious theatre of the Middle Ages did not die with the suppression of the texts but survived the Reformation to provide Shakespeare and his contemporaries with models for their own play-making. The grand cosmic pattern of Fall, Redemption and Judgment provided by the Cycles, the equally impressive ethical debate between Vice and Virtue for the souls of men and of nations provided by the Moralities and the groundswell of a ritualistic pattern within which both were framed give the structural strength and forcefulness of expression to the Chronicles, comedies and tragedies of the Elizabethan and Jacobean theatre (Shakespeare's Dramatic Heritage 22-23)

The medieval dramas to which Renaissance drama is most indebted are the moralities, and there has been considerable critical attention paid to the extent of that indebtedness. William Farnham, David Bevington, and others have examined the extensive contributions of the moralities to later drama--contributions which range from various schemes of dramatic unity to bases of character and character interrelationships to various approaches to psychomachia which were easily secularized to suit the changing tastes of the sixteenth century. In addition to the numerous contributions made by the moralities to later drama, perhaps another reason the moralities have excited more critical examination than the mysteries, particularly as influence on Renaissance drama is concerned, is that the moralities survived longer than did the mysteries. As Fr. Harold Gardiner explains, "That the moral plays as a whole were not so swept away arose from the fact that these plays had not generally remained religious and hence were no hindrance to the government policy . . . " (xiii).

Though the moralities are the medieval drama most frequently studied for connections with Renaissance drama, there is nonetheless reasonable evidence to suggest that Renaissance dramatists were familiar with and influenced by the medieval mystery cycle plays as well. Though the moralizing and didacticism of the mysteries declined in favor, the religious message did not entirely disappear. As Murray Roston points out,

The classical revival of the sixteenth century . . . encouraged within the religious sphere the rise of the so-called Christian Terence and Christian Seneca movements, which aimed at sugaring the didactic pill with the livelier fashions of the Renaissance stage.

Nevertheless, the pill was not forgotten, and the biblical drama of the Renaissance preserved beneath its classical exterior that concern with a religious message which had animated the medieval mysteries. (54)

Further, from a somewhat different angle, the classic dictum that tragedy must deal with a great man who moves from prosperity to adversity could be seen to apply to numerous Biblical heroes such as Adam, Abraham, David, and even Christ as they were portrayed in the Cycles. Even though the world of the Renaissance was generally more outward-looking and more worldly than the medieval world, the one great source of inspiration for the authors of the cycles continued to inspire the playwrights (and, indeed, all great artists) of the Renaissance. As Wickham asserts,

The book of Genesis . . . provided the authors of the . . . Cycles with a discussion of personal and national disaster beginning with an individual and reaching outwards, like the ripples from a stone thrown into a pond, to embrace society at large. . . .

In Elizabethan and Jacobean England, despite the growing interest in Graeco-Roman tragedy and the increasing thoroughness with which the Revels Office suppressed overtly religious subject-matter from reaching the stage after 1589, Genesis continued to provide dramatists, actors and audiences with as potent a moral basis for the allegorical

discussion of their own society in theatrical terms of reference as it had ever done. Indeed, as the image of the acted Cycles faded from view, the growing emphasis placed by Protestant preachers on personal reading and interpretation of the Old Testament in English translation served to renew it. (Shakespeare's Dramatic Heritage 62-63)

Further, Wickham argues, Genesis was

a far more potent influence upon plot and character than either Horace's Ars Poetica or the plays of Seneca: for where knowledge of Aristotelian precept in matters of dramatic theory was reserved to the learned few, the stories of a tragic fall from divine grace recounted in Genesis were familiar to all from constant repetition in Church and from repeated theatrical representations of them within the Miracle Cycles. (Shakespeare's Dramatic Heritage 43)

There is considerable evidence that the Bible, and Genesis in particular, continued to provide stimulating and relevant material for the dramatic imaginations of the Renaissance. For example, Marlowe's Doctor Faustus echoes the story of the Fall and the theme of disobedience. Webster's The White Devil portrays a society such as that before the Flood. The society of Shakespeare's The Tempest has hope of atoning for its past sins by exercising charity, reflecting a concept found in both Testaments. Murray Roston sees the explanation for this interest in Old Testament themes as lying both in the Renaissance and in the Reformation. Given the renewed appreciation for the beauties and challenges of the temporal world, "[t]here is little wonder that the interests of the sixteenth-century dramatist when he turned to biblical themes now became more obviously diverted from the saintly other-worldliness of the New Testament to the martial vigour of the Old with which he discovered a new kinship" (Roston 49). But the Reformation, too, had a hand in attracting dramatists to the Old Testament. Roston remarks:

Although Calvinism somewhat paradoxically laid new emphasis on predestination and the doctrine of unearnable Grace, the Reformation

paralleled the Renaissance in its yearning for spiritual emancipation and personal dignity. . . .

The Protestant's kinship with the Old Testament was deepened by his concern with the Covenant. The individualism [of the Protestant] . . . needed firm theological anchoring within the Christian tradition. Triumphantly he pointed out that the covenant inherited by the Christian was initially a personal covenant established between God and Abraham and of only secondary communal significance. The doctrine of Protestant election itself grew out of the renewal of that covenant with Isaac but not Ishmael, with Jacob but not Esau The Old Testament patriarchs and their progeny thus became not only a theological sanction for the Protestant's rebellion and for his determination to dispense with the services of a priest as an intermediary between himself and God; they were also his own spiritual forebears. (50-51)

Roston further argues,

The [new] religious message [in the drama of the age of Renaissance and Reformation] was, however, a very different one: it was a new insistence upon divine justice visible in the pattern of human affairs. In the Middle Ages, the injustice of this world had been accepted as axiomatic. The Day of Judgement became the focus of medieval thought as the only explanation for the victory of the ungodly and the suffering of the righteous in this false world of mortality; and the meek of this earth were comforted with the thought that they were destined to inherit the world to come. As the Renaissance shifted its gaze from eternity to temporality, so the Protestant and, to a markedly lesser extent, the Catholic, began to search for evidence of divine participation

in human affairs, for some pattern which should support their view of a theodicy. It was a search for evidence which formed part of that embryonic empiricism soon to dominate the age. Moreover, this shift in focus was paralleled in the new economic patterns. The medieval monk had rejected worldly wealth as a deception and had preached with bitter iteration against 'usury' and the amassing of property beyond what was necessary for basic subsistence. . . . [T]he Reformers' return to Old Testament sources and their concern with the temporal world led them, like the Hebrew patriarchs of old, to regard the amassing of flocks and herds as a mark of divine blessing, provided, of course, that no extortion or dishonesty was involved in their acquisition. (54-55)

At this point it is profitable to examine the influence of the Bible and the mystery cycle plays in general on the work of the foremost dramatist of the period. By examining Shakespeare's indebtedness to older drama and his use of biblical materials we can extrapolate the importance of religious subject matter and ideas in the generally secular drama of the Renaissance. Peter Milward notes that of all Shakespeare's sources "the most fundamental and universal is . . . the English Bible . . ." (vii). The nature and extent of Shakespeare's indebtedness to the Bible has been the subject of numerous critical studies ranging from Shakespeare's linguistic use of the Bible to echoes of scripture in his plays to examinations of which version he employed (Richmond Noble's conclusion on this last point is that Shakespeare used the Bishops' Bible in his early plays and the Geneva Bible in the later ones).⁴ Critics such as John Vyvyan, Paul Siegel, Irving Ribner and Roy Battenhouse have interpreted Shakespearean tragedies in light of Biblical influence. Other critics,

⁴See Christopher Wordsworth's Shakespeare's Knowledge and Use of the Bible, Thomas Carter's Shakespeare and Holy Scripture, and Richmond Noble's Shakespeare's Biblical Knowledge.

notably Roland Frye, argue that Shakespeare used the Bible and other religious sources for a secular, dramatic purpose. On this point Milward argues,

Everyone admits the secular purpose of the dramatist: to present a moving story in dramatic form for the entertainment of his audience. Also, as a Renaissance dramatist, [Shakespeare] may well have had some instruction at the back of his mind in addition to the entertainment. And when the element of instruction comes in, the boundary is blurred between what is merely secular and what is religious, especially when the dramatist freely draws on Biblical sources not just for incidental echoes but for the main themes of his plays, such as those of mercy and justice. (xi-xii)

Further, Milward notes, the Bible

is by no means entirely devoted to God or the things of God. One may even say it is no less preoccupied with man and the things of men, if in the light of divine faith. For this very reason, Judaism and, even more, Christianity have been regarded--not without some justification--as secular, even materialistic, religions Everywhere in the Bible there appears a deeply human, and dramatic, interest

To reject or to disregard all this as outside the secular scope of Renaissance drama shows a lamentable misunderstanding of both the Bible and of Renaissance drama. Writing as he did in the declining years of the Renaissance and the aftermath of the English Reformation, Shakespeare may have felt obliged by the circumstances of the Elizabethan stage to avoid Biblical or other religious subjects for his plays. Yet this did not prevent him from making full use of the Bible in dramatizing his secular sources and thus infusing into them a Biblical meaning. The Puritans with their Bibliolatry may have sought to

remove the Bible from all contact with the secular stage; but in his plays, and particularly in his 'great tragedies', Shakespeare shows the universal relevance of the Bible both to the reality of human life 'in this harsh world' and to its ideal in the heart of God. (207)

Furthermore, the Corpus Christi plays were still enjoying considerable vigor and popularity during Shakespeare's youth, with famous cycles performed still at Coventry, Chester, and York. Given the proximity of Coventry to Stratford, it is likely that the young Shakespeare witnessed the cycle of plays there. Scholars have pointed out in Shakespeare's plays a collection of references to mystery cycle plays (for example, Macbeth's Porter as an allusion to the Harrowing of Hell plays and Hamlet's reference to the ranting Herod of the cycles), but few have looked beyond these superficialities for a more profound examination of Shakespeare's indebtedness to the mysteries. Emrys Jones, in The Origins of Shakespeare, examines the indebtedness of Shakespeare's tragedies to the Passion sequence of the mystery cycles. Clearly, given the importance of the Old Testament in Protestant thought, it is likely that Old Testament themes and situations displayed in the mystery cycles could also have influenced Shakespeare's work. As Martin Stevens notes, the Renaissance playwrights inherited "a stage that accommodated all the varieties of medieval drama, and they lived in a world that was influenced by a uniform salvation history, based on the Bible and its multiple interpreters and reflected in the liturgy, the art, and the social context of the late Middle Ages" (ix).

Part of Shakespeare's genius lay in his ability to integrate the older drama with new creative forces. As Robert Weimann states,

For Shakespeare, the art and experience of playing handed down via the popular stage was part of a meaningful cultural past in the process of its present reawakening, assimilation and change. For him the popular tradition was an ever changing phenomenon in which the imprint of the past and the impact of his present constantly interacted. Shakespeare excelled as a dramatist precisely because of his ability to relate the

dramatic vitality of a still living past to the drama of contemporary life.

(xvii)

One of the most remarkable aspects of Renaissance drama in general is in fact the way in which the native elements of the medieval religious drama combined with classical techniques and sensibilities rediscovered in the Renaissance to produce tragedy. As Albert Camus states, "Tragedy is born in the west each time that the pendulum of civilisation is halfway between a sacred society and a society built around man" (199). When tragedy evolves, he argues, is when man "frees himself from an older form of civilisation and finds that he has broken away from it without having found a new form which satisfies him" (194). As Glynne Wickham argues, "classical tragic theory was inherited as a literary tradition, transformed by Christian theology and pressed by Elizabethans into the service of the native drama" (Shakespeare's Dramatic Heritage 96). While the term "Christian tragedy" may be oxymoronic since Christianity views the world as ultimately a commedia, the Renaissance saw the production of plays which developed further than the cycle plays could the tragic qualities of certain Biblical episodes. In his study The Medieval Heritage of Elizabethan Tragedy, Willard Farnham examines medieval sources of tragic material and the increasing tendency with the decline of the medieval era to shape religious material into tragic perspectives. Farnham remarks that

the early Christian temper which later metamorphosed itself into a tragic temper was quite largely a heritage from Greece through Rome, but . . . the heritage was in many ways an unpromising gift from a classic world devitalized Before Christian Europe could produce Shakespeare it needed to evolve slowly its own Gothic sense of tragic form and content. Before it could discover during the Renaissance that the classic culture had an inspiring tragic art which it might study with profit, it needed to experience something of the same vision out of which the earlier classic world had produced tragedy. (3)

Gothic tragedy, Farnham argues, "had its origin in a clash of otherworldliness and worldliness that came with the Renaissance" (30). The Bible clearly contained material "highly capable of tragic structure and highly capable of bearing choral comment upon the meaning of mundane suffering [but] the tragic spirit must be said to have remained rudimentary among the writers of mysteries" (Farnham 173-174).

Among the Biblical episodes most readily adaptable to tragedy was the Genesis 22 episode, and the medieval plays on that subject, as has been noted in the previous chapter, reveal some tragic leanings. That the play of Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac was among the more popular of the mystery cycles is indicated by the fact that two versions exist which apparently have no connection with any surviving cycles. The Dublin and Brome versions, in Roston's assessment, "derive their moving realism primarily from . . . Old Testament qualities of human fallibility and terror of death" (40). Their independent preservation suggests that audiences found them quite appealing. Given such popularity, and given the penetrating and timeless issue of child sacrifice with which the play deals, it is reasonable to expect that Renaissance dramatists would have drawn on those medieval plays in some fashion in creating their own works which involved or contained a parent's literal or figurative sacrifice of a child.

It is also reasonable to expect that, just as the medieval plays grew out of and expressed the beliefs of their time, the Renaissance plays reflect (as they also may have helped create) the tenor of their era. Such is the circularity of influence and the effect of cumulative social, religious, and creative forces. The formation of English tragedy is perhaps one way that drama reflected what was happening on the social, religious, and cultural frontiers of the Renaissance. Robert G. Hunter takes the provocative stance that "a necessary (though far from sufficient) cause for the ability of the Elizabethans to write great tragedy was the impact on their minds of some of the more striking

ideas of the Protestant Reformation" (1). He contends that the Protestant beliefs concerning free will and predestination lead to Christian tragedy:

Luther and Calvin believe that our wills are not free. They also believe that the majority of us will spend our eternities in hell. This combination of beliefs leads to a concept of the human condition and the divine nature that, to say the least, takes some thinking about, and such thinking by both playwright and audience helped . . . to make tragedy a possible form in Shakespeare's time. The divine justice which punishes a man who has no freedom of choice must be called mysterious if it is not to be called monstrous (1)

Contending that tragedy in a Christian era results from "the imaginative contemplation . . . of the mystery of God's judgments," Hunter asserts:

The medieval dramatist disregarded that mystery and presented his audience with a world in which man is free to determine his own eternal fate. . . . But the Reformation was founded intellectually on a revival of the Augustinian tradition--a revival that went beyond the doctrines of its originator to an insistence that man's will is not free and could not be free given the absolute nature of predestination. This "solution" of the mystery of God's judgments was, of course, a restatement and deepening of it. Luther and Calvin presented their contemporaries with a tragic image of the human condition and that image had its effect on dramatic art. (193)

While the plays of Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac ultimately went the way of all the medieval dramas in the Renaissance, the basic dilemma which they posed--the disturbing notion of the murder of a child by a parent--continued to capture the imaginations of sixteenth-century Englishmen. Continued interest in this topic is probably due to several factors. First, the rise of Protestantism did not mean a decline in appreciation of the Bible but probably actually the opposite. Scripture was

the final authority for the Protestant believers, so the Bible continued to be a source of creative inspiration. The Genesis 22 episode therefore continued to be read and studied as part of the holy writ, and it is safe to assume that the drama of Abraham's dilemma lost none of its power to move. It is significant to note that Calvin in his Institutes of the Christian Religion remarks, "What more frightful thing can the human mind imagine than for a father to become the executioner of his own son? . . . [F]or a son to be slaughtered by his own father's hand surpasses every sort of calamity" (Book II, Chapter X, section 11).

Indeed, the numerous glosses which the Geneva Bible contains on this passage attest to the story's enduring interest. The Geneva Bible was one of the most popular versions of the period and one of the most influential. It was produced in Geneva during that city's ascendancy; as the facsimile of the 1560 edition notes, it was

the product of the best Protestant scholarship of its time. It was translated "for the space of two years and more, day and night" by William Whittingham, Anthony Gilbey, and others whom the accession of Mary Tudor had forced into exile in Geneva, then at the height of its ascendancy over the Protestant world. John Knox was there preaching to the English congregation, Calvin was there writing commentaries, and Theodore Beza, one of the most prominent Biblical scholars of the day, was there studying the Greek text. (flyleaf)

Further, the facsimile notes, the copious annotations and commentaries the Geneva Bible contained made it extremely popular:

During the reign of Queen Elizabeth, who thought much preaching unnecessary, at least half of the pulpits in London were empty and the people had to interpret the Bible for themselves. They turned to the Geneva Bible to help them over the hard places; indeed, it has been said that the Geneva Bible taught the people of England and Scotland much of their Biblical exegesis for half a century. (flyleaf)

It is a reasonable assessment that the Geneva Bible “shaped the theology, the literary expression, the very consciousness of the Elizabethan world” (facsimile flyleaf). It is likely, therefore, that the prominence of the Geneva Bible kept alive favorite stories which had been and would continue to be stimulating material for drama.

Interestingly, religious drama found support in the Renaissance from what may seem to be an unlikely quarter--humanism. The early English humanists were proponents of religious plays not particularly for religious education (as was the traditional purpose of such drama), but because, as Woolf points out, religious drama

was of ancient Christian-Latin origin and excellently fitted to the plays of which the humanists approved, namely those designed upon classical models. The aim of the Christian-Latin poets was to provide poetry of edifying subject-matter for men whose literary taste had been formed by reading Virgil. They justified their procedure by claiming the superiority of their subject-matter in terms of truth and dignity to that of the pagan poets. (The English Mystery Plays 314-315)

Among the Renaissance Latin dramatists' favorite Old Testament subjects were Joseph (twelve plays were written on his story before 1650), Adam and Eve, Abraham and Isaac, David, Esther and Susanna (each dramatized about six times). (The English Mystery Plays 319-320)

In addition to the popularity of biblical stories and the support of the humanists for biblical subjects, another reason for the continuation of the interest in the topic of child sacrifice was that with the renewed awareness of classical drama came an acquaintance with the stories of Iphigenia and of Apius and Virginia which, since they treat the sacrifice of children, parallel the story of Isaac. Renaissance Englishmen thus had both classic and Christian stories of child sacrifice. Noting the striking similarities between the Biblical stories of Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac and Jephtha's sacrifice of his daughter and the classic story of Agamemnon's sacrifice of Iphigenia in Aeschalus's play Agamemnon, Woolf points out that “[e]ven when it offered plots less strikingly similar, the Old Testament was manifestly a storehouse of the kind of story that classical theorists approved, namely

those which have the power to move even when related in brief summary, and which had themes fitting to the Senecan drama of passion and violence: rape, incest, murder, fratricide, madness, betrayal" (The English Mystery Plays 319). Hardin Craig, too, notes the adaptation of the religious subjects of the mystery cycles to classical tastes and esthetics:

[I]t is significant that the neo-Latin plays of the Renaissance were scholastic and not popular in their origin and patronage and are therefore widely different from the medieval religious drama. And yet there is a close community of subjects between the sixteenth-century Latin drama and the mystery plays. But it is obvious that in them we have to do with the Renaissance and not with the Middle Ages Satire and controversy enter freely, and, although subjects were drawn from medieval plays, the Latin drama itself differs from them in form, spirit, and appeal. There is nevertheless a continuation of the mystery plays that is worth tracing. (366-367)

Significantly, one of the most popular neo-Latin dramas in the sixteenth century was a retelling of the Genesis 22 episode. In 1550 Theodore Beza, a French theologian and friend of Calvin, wrote Abraham sacrificant, a work based closely on the medieval plays but which incorporates elements of classical dramatic art. The composition of a play on this subject by the Protestant leader in Geneva after Calvin indicates that the story of Abraham's sacrifice appealed to Protestants as it had to medieval Catholics. Beza's play, though not an English work, was translated into English by Arthur Golding in 1575 and proved quite popular in England. Also familiar and popular in Renaissance England was the Scottish dramatist, George Buchanan, whose major work was on Jephtha's sacrifice of his daughter. Beza and Buchanan, like most sixteenth-century dramatists, did not care for the typological interpretations of these Biblical episodes that the mystery plays conveyed. In their works they did stress, however, the obedience and courage in those episodes. Because of the necessity of typological appropriateness, the medieval plays are not able to deal with the concept

of free will. The Renaissance plays on Genesis 22 and the similar story of Jephtha are not so limited. As Woolf explains,

Buchanan's Jephthes . . . suggested the propriety of an Isaac obedient and unafraid while at the same time encouraging a heroic enhancement of this response. The Isaac of medieval drama is touching and brave in a tiny, childish way, and appropriately so since the intention is to reflect a divine pattern of obedience which has nothing to do with the primacy of human will. Beza's Isaac arouses admiration for the human capacity to rise above all base emotions and has the dramatic solidity necessary where there is no typological foundation. . . . [T]he application of classical methods to some Old Testament subjects was not restricted to such external matters, but encouraged a genuine imaginative illumination of the subject. (The English Mystery Plays 321-322)

The application of imagination to Biblical stories, however, enhanced the dramatic effectiveness at the expense of the religious meaning and clear moral stance found in the medieval treatments of those stories. For example, Woolf notes that in Buchanan's Jephthes "the dramatic impact is the stronger because the moral question of whether Jephtha should have carried out his vow [to kill his daughter], though debated at length, is left unresolved" (The English Mystery Plays 322). In short, the story of Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac, like other Biblical episodes, became subject in the Renaissance to examination from a more earthly and less didactic perspective that was unknown in the more religious world of the medieval age. Applying elements of classical style to religious subject matter enhanced the dramatic appeal of that material, but the assumption of humanistic perspective clouded the didacticism and clear moral stance conveyed in the more religious medieval treatments of Biblical subjects.

The result of these various factors is that in the Renaissance the story of Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac, while it was itself dramatized several times, became a theme. Numerous Renaissance plays deal to some extent with a parent's literal or figurative sacrifice of a child and provide occasion for

the examination of the human motivations and the ethics surrounding child murder: Sackville and Norton's Gorboduc; R. B.'s Apus and Virginia; Thomas Preston's Cambyzes; Marlowe's Tamburlaine, Part II and The Jew of Malta; Shakespeare's Titus Andronicus, The Merchant of Venice, Henry IV, Part I, King Lear, Coriolanus, Cymbeline, and The Winter's Tale; Massinger and Field's The Fatal Dowry; and John Webster's Appius and Virginia. While each of these plays reveals various kinds of indebtedness to varying extents to the medieval plays of Abraham and Isaac (points which will be examined in subsequent chapters), it is clear that on at least one major dramaturgical point the Renaissance treatments differ from the medieval treatments. The Renaissance plays which deal with a parent's killing of a child are not ritualistic like their medieval ancestors. The Renaissance plays are structured either along classical lines or rather loosely, not ritualistically or liturgically as John Elliott perceives the medieval plays to be.

The decline of the ritualistic structure in the Renaissance is to a considerable extent due to the shift from Roman Catholicism to Protestantism. Under the domination of the Roman Catholic Church, medieval man held to a belief that by enacting his faith through enough good works and perseverance in the paths of righteousness he could to some extent effect his salvation. The New Testament Epistle of James, which declares that "faith without works is dead," was declared "an epistle of straw" by Martin Luther. With the rise of Protestantism came a belief that salvation could not be earned or even ever deserved but could only be received as a gracious gift of God. As a result, those who followed the Protestant teachings gradually dispensed with many of the Catholic habits and rituals believing that, since those things could and would not effect salvation as they were established to do, they were no longer necessary. Consequently, the increasingly Protestant world of sixteenth-century England was an increasingly less ritualistic world. The effects of this circumstance in the drama were subtle but nonetheless evident. Playwrights who wished to produce "legitimate" drama were not bound by the Christocentric standards informing the mystery cycles or the specific religious framework of the moralities. They were free to adopt classical standards from the newly "rediscovered" texts of Greek and Roman playwrights such as Seneca, Plautus, and Terence. Along with the freedom from the ritualistic structure requisite in the mystery cycles came

a freedom from the necessarily religious subject matter which dominated medieval drama. Renaissance playwrights were free to treat subjects which were not inherently religious, and they were free to adapt the basic circumstances of Biblical stories to secular treatment.

One way in which certain Biblical stories, and the Genesis 22 story in particular, were secularized during the Renaissance deals with the changing notion of religious sacrifice. Protestantism took a somewhat different view of sacrifice from the Catholic notion. The Catholic concept of penance was bound up in a notion of sacrifice which some Protestants believed too closely tied to the Old Testament perspective. Of the Jewish view of sacrifice Calvin wrote in his Institutes,

Sacrifice made them aware of their unrighteousness and, at the same time, taught them that some satisfaction must be paid to God's justice. They also taught that there should be some high priest, a mediator between God and men, to make satisfaction to God by the shedding of blood and by the offering of a sacrifice that would suffice for the forgiveness of sins. (Vol. XXI, Book IV, Chapter XIV, section 21)

While the medieval Roman Catholic view held that Christ was indeed that mediator between God and man, the concept of personal sacrifice as a necessary part of the enactment of faith was also part of medieval Christianity. Hence the Genesis 22 episode and the mystery plays based on it were seen to demonstrate, among other things, the necessity for Abraham to make a difficult sacrifice in order to show the substance of his faith. Protestantism's diminution of the role of works in salvation may in large measure account for the decline of the notion of sacrifice as exemplified by Abraham in the medieval plays. The Protestant concept of faith as the only necessary prerequisite for salvation and, indeed, the corollary belief that the possibility of faith was itself a gracious gift of God diminished the role of tangible sacrifice as an integral part of salvation.

The effect on Renaissance drama is that numerous plays deal with a parent's killing of a child, but in none of these plays is the killing a ritualized religious sacrifice demanded by God as proof of individual faith. The examination of human emotions and motivations exhibited in the best

of the medieval versions of Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac is taken a step further in Renaissance drama with the examination of child murder outside of a specifically religious context. In none of the Renaissance plays is a child sacrificed to God or to any other deity. In most of the plays the parent's killing of a child is not itself the central focus of the drama but simply one means by which the parent's values or society's values are held up for examination. To varying extents the Renaissance plays call forth an awareness of the Genesis 22 episode and the various medieval dramatic treatments of that episode as ground for evaluating child sacrifice in the increasingly Protestant and increasingly secular world of sixteenth-century England. From plays like Cambyse, which contains lines taken almost verbatim from a medieval Abraham and Isaac play, to plays like King Lear, which examines misdirected pride, the Renaissance plays which address child sacrifice hark back to the Jewish paradigm of that subject--Genesis 22--with an awareness of the earlier dramas which so eloquently express the medieval understanding of that paradigm. Their infusion of contemporary beliefs and values, however, resulted in different treatments of the issue and reflect the uncertainty and diversity of the Renaissance world.

CHAPTER III

OBEDIENCE: CHANGING VALUES

For the medieval audience one of the major lessons of the mystery plays based on Genesis 22 was obedience--filial obedience and man's obedience to God. Isaac was a paradigm of filial duty, and Abraham was a paradigm of proper submissiveness to the will of God. In six of the seven medieval plays the focus is on Abraham, with only secondary emphasis placed on the obedience of Isaac to Abraham since Isaac in these versions is portrayed as a young child. In the York version, the only version in which Isaac is an adult, the obedience of both Abraham and Isaac carry comparable weight in the drama. Clearly for the York Isaac obedience to God and obedience to Abraham are the same--to obey Abraham is to obey God, and vice versa. The primary Jewish and Christian understanding of the Biblical episode is as an exemplum of proper faith that leads to unfaltering obedience to God and confident self-denial. Shalom Spiegel writes of the episode, "Abraham served his Creator out of love, with his whole heart, not with part of it And because he gave everything to his God in obedience to His sacred word, the Lord returned that gift to him and reckoned it to his merit" (12). Even into the Reformation Age Christian thinking focussed on the obedience exemplified in the episode. Austin Dobbins and Roy Battenhouse cite the Lutheran Wolfgang Musculus who commented, "'[T]o do that which the Lord commaundeth, is the praise of true obedience.'" ¹ Even actions normally considered crimes--such as murder--became holy when commanded by God. As William Tyndale wrote at the conclusion of Genesis in his translation (1530),

Jacob robbed Laban his uncle: Moses robbed the Egyptians: And
Abraham is about to slay and burn his own son: All are holy works
because they are wrought in faith at God's commandment. To steal, rob

¹Common Places of Christian Religion, trans. John Man (London, 1578) 219, as cited by Dobbins and Battenhouse 109.

and murder are no holy works before worldly people: but unto them
that have their trust in God: they are holy when God commandeth
them.²

Further, one gloss in the Geneva Bible interprets God's message to Abraham after the sacrifice to be "by thy true obedience thou hast declared thy . . . faith" (Genesis 22: 12). It is interesting to note, however, that in certain of the medieval plays Abraham does express some reluctance to kill Isaac and agonizes over the pain he must bring his child. Clearly, then, even in this story, paradigmatic of obedience, the medieval audience perceived the dilemmas inherent in obedience and observed the questioning of authority, even the absolute authority of God.

The Renaissance in England is connected with the rise of tragedy in English drama, and certainly the awareness of Abraham's painful dilemma is part of the increasing sensitivity to the tragic possibilities inherent in the human condition. In his study The Origins of English Tragedy, J. M. R. Margeson examines medieval and early Tudor drama for "hints and signs of tragic characters, suggestions of tragic emotion, embryonic patterns of tragic action" (vii). He cites numerous "early examples of the shaping of material in a tragic direction" (vii). While the Genesis story of Abraham's sacrifice is not tragedy per se since the ending is happy, clearly the story contains tragic possibilities, and the medieval playwrights (particularly those of the Dublin and Brome versions) developed and exploited those possibilities to varying extents. While God's command is not the result of any rebellion on Abraham's part, Abraham is clearly placed between the tragic options of murder and disobedience to God. The most appealing of the medieval plays display the human anguish of Abraham and Isaac, rendering them genuinely human in the face of their dilemma. As Margeson points out, "It is clear that we shall not be moved by a tragic crisis or confrontation unless the figures caught up in it are characters with whom we can feel some sympathy, not only as persons like ourselves, but also as characters capable of representing humanity in a wider sense and capable of triumph or suffering" (x). As Margeson notes, the mystery cycle

²Cited by Dobbins and Battenhouse 109.

plays have frequently been dismissed as sources of tragic material because of the fact that "every incident with possible tragic connotations is eventually subordinated to the total scheme of redemption and triumph . . ." (1). Nevertheless, he argues, the cycle plays should be considered in the development of tragedy because

[n]ot only do they portray a universe where suffering and evil exist as facts of experience, but they portray them intensely and without consolation, at least in the dramatic moment of the individual play. . . .

[There is a] recurring conflict in tragedy between human will and a superior law which is either antagonistic to human will or remote and difficult to comprehend. The mystery plays are full of such conflict, though it must be admitted at once that the superior law is equated with the will of God, and that this will is assumed to be just in absolute terms. (Margeson 1-2)

The medieval plays of Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac, Margeson points out, contain in miniature the divine comedy of the whole cycle, in which the tragic moment is swallowed up in a final triumph. Yet the suffering of Abraham and Isaac is undoubtedly real during the time of their doubt and fear. . . . The pathos of innocent suffering in Abraham and Isaac is one of the most intense emotional moments in the cycles (14)

It is reasonable, therefore, to examine the mystery cycle plays for characters and situations which contain some element of tragic possibility. The popularity of the cycles lingered through much of the sixteenth century. Hardin Craig points out that the Chester cycle was performed at least thirteen times between 1546 and 1575 and that at least five manuscripts of the Chester cycle were made between 1591 and 1607 (356). Such popularity suggests that many noted Renaissance dramatists were well aware of the content of the plays and might be inclined to incorporate elements

of the plays--sometimes reshaped, reworked or reexamined--into their own works. As Margeson's study reveals,

What is clear from a close study of the mystery cycles is that the medieval dramatists had learned to do certain things most effectively. They were not attempting to write tragedy, but in the process of representing scenes of suffering and despair, always within the total religious structure, they gave to the dramatic tradition scenes which could be imitated and developed in a tragic direction by later secular dramatists. What was once learned well by the medieval stage did not have to be learned again, and this dictum applies not only to the conventions of acting and staging which have been widely discussed in recent years but also to dramatic situation and characterization. (17)

Given the changes which sixteenth-century England experienced due to the rise of Renaissance humanism and the Reformation, it is to be expected that Renaissance drama would demonstrate an approach to the treatment of Biblical material that differed from that of the medieval playwrights. A variety of factors social, economic, and religious went into the new approach.

First, as drama grew away from the church in the Renaissance, some of the medieval habits of mind ceased to apply. As Hardin Craig explains,

The dominance of the [medieval] church had brought about an established order of uniformity that went so far indeed as to bring about a situation that has been puzzling to modern critics, namely, a state and practice of anonymity. There is nothing more unintelligible to the modernistic thinker than is anonymity, and anonymity was one of the first medieval practices discarded by the Renaissance. . . . [Anonymity]

may in part have arisen because medieval artists sometimes preferred having their names written in the book of life to the enjoyment of personal renown. (15)

In the Renaissance, by contrast, came a new awareness and elevation of the individual and his talents. As Craig points out,

The medieval mind seems to have been . . . maintained by faith and ceremony. To enlighten it, it had the . . . Bible, the New Testament, and their accretions and commentaries, and the story presented . . . not only carried conviction but presented a form and order of man's life on earth greater in themselves than any others ever achieved. (15)

While the Bible continued to be important in the Renaissance (particularly so since it was the first book printed and the only book widely available to the increasingly literate populace), Renaissance man by and large had a broad view of his possibilities and an increasing respect for his individual talents. With the decline of the pervasiveness of otherworldliness came an increasing desire for personal renown. The result for drama was that playwrights increasingly employed more secular material and handled religious material in a different way--with more attention paid to displaying their skill in characterization and plot development. In tandem with this development was the "rediscovery" of classical texts of Greece and Rome which were admired for their humanism, their exciting content, and their artistic skill. Unlike medieval dramatists, who took their inspiration largely from the Bible and related material of moral and religious nature, Renaissance dramatists had not only those types of materials but also the works of such ancients as Plautus, Terence, and Seneca. Drama in the Renaissance became more secular as it became a commercial endeavor and because the social and intellectual climate allowed and even encouraged the use of secular subject matter and classical models and inspiration. Due to the decline in the all-pervasive power of one Church, Renaissance Englishmen found themselves free to pursue new avenues of religious and even atheistic notions. As Craig states, "The medieval religious drama existed primarily to give religious instruction, establish faith, and encourage piety. It did not exist as a free artistic enterprise as did

the Elizabethan drama . . .” (15). Biblical and moral material certainly did not disappear completely from the stage, however. As Margeson states,

the religious drama itself became secularized, at least those parts of it which were taken over by the professional troupes of actors and played up and down the country for their value as entertainment. This is not to say that moral themes were unpopular either in the household of a lord or on the village green: suitably mixed with pleasant mirth, they remained a staple element in the dramatic fare offered by the travelling actors, but secular elements, in the form of comic action, individual personality, and narrative suspense began increasingly to disguise the moral themes of the original, purely didactic, drama. (61)

Due to the emergence of a market economy in the Renaissance, the socio-economic structure of the Middle Ages declined. Renaissance Englishmen found themselves in need of a means of earning a living and free to pursue new avenues of opportunity. With the feudal system in decay and the dissolution of the monasteries and other changes which came with the Reformation, some of the old medieval options were no longer viable. The Court continued to patronize the stage, and public theater became increasingly popular, providing a variety of possible new employments--hence the increase in the number of theaters and professional troupes. With the changing social situation, however, came the New Monarchy and the concern for firm, consolidated political and social power. The Tudors (particularly Elizabeth) established one of the strongest monarchies in history, and part of her power was the successful control of the people to rein in the various dissident factions. The rapid religious changes England experienced during the reigns of Henry VIII, Edward VI, Mary, and Elizabeth made religion a dangerous subject for dramatists. Religious material did not completely disappear from the stage, however. It was frequently subsumed to more secular concerns or altered

in various ways to fit, however awkwardly, with secular or classic materials and techniques. As Marion Lomax aptly explains,

After 1559 it was wiser for playwrights to eliminate religious issues or allusions from their works, but as many later plays show, such things were not entirely abandoned. As is sometimes the case where censorship or suppression exists, mutations occur and elements of the forbidden or the suppressed emerge in a new often oblique form [T]his sublimation of meaning can make the works seem additionally complicated to outsiders We may find it difficult to grasp the simultaneous connections between Diana, Venus, Elizabeth I, and the Virgin Mary--but to Elizabethans, they were part of a popular cult. This does not suggest that every Elizabethan or Jacobean play is a distortion of suppressed religious drama--only that this element is sometimes present amongst a large variety of other shared traditions and myths which these magpie dramatists exploited time and time again (53-54)

The overlay of religious and secular elements had some interesting ramifications for Renaissance drama. One area affected was the use of symbolism. For example, Margeson cites Pericles, in which "the classical myth of Pandora has been allied and adapted to merge with Christian tradition so that lurking behind the symbolism of the whole play is the most potent image of all--that of Christ rising from the confines of the Holy Sepulchre. The effect is cumulative and multi-layered" (52). Perhaps even more significant was the effect on characterization. As Margeson points out,

Classical tragedy, medieval narrative tragedy, and much Elizabethan tragedy resemble one another in their concentration upon large central characters who are representative because they are leaders or rulers and

can thus take others' burdens upon themselves. They also possess largeness of soul as a corollary of their very greatness and nobility. (x)

The plays of the mystery cycles focussed on Biblical characters, their actions, and their experiences as they were part of God's redemptive plan set forth in the Bible. It was therefore a logical step from the study of Biblical characters to the examination of secular heroes from a moral perspective and to the examination on secular moral grounds of characters who found themselves in situations which paralleled those of Biblical characters. As Margeson states,

Biblical plays and political allegories in the 1530's reflected the twin influences of Christian humanism and the Reformation. . . . The biographical treatment of great figures from the Bible led naturally . . . to a similar treatment of legendary characters from history, with a moral theme as a carry-over to justify the use of such material. (62-63)

The mingling of religious and secular brought about by the Renaissance and the changes in approach to religion brought about by the Reformation encouraged dramatists to explore the moral dimensions of secular subjects and to examine Biblical characters and religious subjects--albeit in secular guise--in a human dimension. Again, Margeson's assessment here is apt:

In terms of form, medieval drama supplied a legacy of archetypal characters of general significance--the kings of the world acting as enemies of God, the sinners who deserted God and suffered remorse and punishment, and the innocent victims of the world's evil. Attached to these representative figures were situations, Biblical or legendary, also of doctrinal significance, but capable of generating strong emotions polarized in the directions of pathos and horror. Popular drama had been through these experiences during the fifteenth century, and had discovered means of exploiting them within the strict limits of the religious cycles. In the sixteenth century it was ready to accept wider ranges of experience and new forms of expression. (28)

The characters and situation of Genesis 22 were, as we have seen, subject to imaginative elaboration beyond the brief Biblical narrative even by the mystery cycle playwrights. The Dublin and Brome versions in particular highlight the pathos and tragic possibilities inherent in Abraham's painful dilemma of killing his innocent child or disobeying God. On the question of obedience--religious and filial--the Abraham and Isaac plays became a paradigm for several Renaissance plays which address primarily or secondarily the issue of filial obedience specifically or man's obedience to a higher authority in general. However, the Renaissance plays which present a parent threatening to kill or killing his child or in some way bringing about the death of his child deal more with the human, earthly motivations of the parents and the human costs of child sacrifice than did the more religiously motivated medieval plays. Abraham from the Judeo-Christian perspective is fundamentally unlike all other parents who kill or threaten to kill their children because he was under divine command. Nonetheless, an imaginative rendering of the human circumstances surrounding child sacrifice involved for Renaissance dramatists some consideration of Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac, particularly as it came to them in the mystery plays so popular with their parents and grandparents. While the medieval and Renaissance playwrights found the story compelling from religious and human perspectives, the Renaissance playwrights were freer and more inclined to probe deeply into the questions of obedience, relationships, motivations, and morality raised in the story--and to do so from perspectives not exclusively religious and intentions not exclusively didactic. As Lomax states, Renaissance dramatists on the whole "seem less concerned with the clear portrayal of fixed meaning than with the more exciting challenges of ambiguity and contradictions" (3). The core of the Genesis 22 story and the medieval plays based on it is obedience--both filial obedience and man's obedience to God. In the church-dominated, rigidly structured medieval society, the standards and motivations for obedience--at least as reflected in the drama--were clear. In the drama of the Renaissance, however, one finds reflected a changing society

and more secular, less uniform perspectives on the motivations and ramifications of obedience and disobedience. It is necessary to examine briefly some of the forces which brought about change during the Renaissance.

The decline of the Roman Catholic Church and the rise of diverse religious viewpoints have already been discussed. Among the many ramifications of religious plurality was a changing perspective on the religious and social lives of individuals. As the English social historian G. M. Trevelyan points out, "The tendency of Protestant doctrine was to exalt the married state, and to dedicate the business life, in reaction against the medieval doctrine that the truly religious life was celibacy and monastic separation from the world. The permission to marry, conceded to the clergy under Edward VI and Elizabeth, was one symptom of this change of thought" (127). The family became in a sense the primary religious unit. Trevelyan states,

The religious home was the Protestant ideal, with family prayer and private Bible reading in addition to the services and sacraments of the Church. These ideas were by no means confined to the dissident Puritans: in late Tudor and in Stuart times they were the practice of Anglican families who loved and fought for the Prayer Book. The religion of the home and of the Bible became a social custom common to all English Protestants. (127)

Renaissance drama, generally speaking, tacitly acknowledges the family-oriented society as a touchstone. As Sarup Singh points out, "Any discussion of family relationships in Shakespeare [and, indeed, in the works of any other dramatist of the time] . . . must take into account the generally accepted view that family and religion were the two governing principles of the inner life of most people in England at that time" (1). The Elizabethan world view was largely one of Order, with everyone and everything having its own appropriate place in the Great Chain of Being. The fundamental principle of this Order was a God-ordained pattern of subordination. All human relationships were seen as hierarchical, and the hierarchy within the family was considered a microcosm of the hierarchy of society, which was in turn a mirror of the proper subjection of men

to God. The father was the unquestioned head of the family, and all his children owed him respect and obedience. A reflection of this view may be seen in Shakespeare's A Midsummer Night's Dream in which the Duke says to Hermia,

To you your father should be as a god:
One that compos'd your beauties, yea, and one
To whom you are but as a form in wax
By him imprinted, and within his power
To leave the figure, or disfigure it.

(I.i.47-51)

Lu Emily Pearson cites Becon's admonishment in The booke of Matrimony (1564): "'Next to God do children owe their parents their education and bringing up, their trade or living, their wisdom, learning, science, riches, honors, and such like benefits,' for which they must return to these parents 'high honor and humble obedience.'"³ Edmund Morgan cites the work of Thomas Cobbett which, though composed in 1656, reflects the attitudes of Elizabethan preachers toward parental authority and filial duty. In his A Fruitfull and Usefull Discourse touching the Honour due from Children to Parents and the Duty of Parents towards their Children, Cobbett reflects the views of many Elizabethan preachers that parents were not strict enough to be good Christian parents and charges that "'Parents in regard to their children, doe beare a singular image of God, as he is the Creatour, Sustainer, and Governour.'" He goes on to admonish children: "'Present your Parents so to your minds as bearing the Image of Gods Father-hood, and that also will help you on your filiall awe and Reverence to them.'"⁴ To the Elizabethan world, as Pearson points out, "a child's first duty was loving obedience, not mere compliance or passive duteousness" (224).

³Becon, The booke of Matrimony (1564), as cited by Pearson 245.

⁴Thomas Cobbett, A Fruitfull and Usefull Discourse touching the Honour due from Children to Parents and the Duty of Parents towards their Children (London: 1656) 94, as cited by Edmund S. Morgan 78.

Two early Renaissance plays, Apus and Virginia, by R. B. (1567), and Cambyses, by Thomas Preston (1569?), demonstrate filial obedience and reverence comparable to Isaac's in several of the medieval plays. Indeed, though the stories upon which these plays are based are classical in origin, they parallel not only the Genesis 22 story in some significant ways but they also echo the medieval mystery plays on that subject. Such a connection between the mystery plays and early Tudor dramas is not far-fetched. As Rosemary Woolf asserts,

A detection of echoes of the mystery plays in the works of mid-sixteenth-century dramatists is not in itself startling. Though it is not possible to show a historical connection between the authors of the popular tragedies and the cycles (uncertain identification of the three writers and the loss of important texts makes such external evidence irrecoverable), the general probability that they would have seen a cycle of plays is high: for the great northern cycles and the famous (though now almost entirely lost) cycles of London and Coventry had either been acted regularly up to 1570 or had been revived during the reign of Mary (1553-1558). Furthermore, the influence of the mystery plays on the Biblical drama of the sixteenth century (both English and Latin) is well established, and allusions to the cycles in the works of secular dramatists, writing before and after the 1560's, are well known: there is, for instance, a reference to the lost Coventry Harrowing of Hell in The Four PP of John Heywood, while two stock themes of the Massacre of the Innocents are referred to by Shakespeare--the ranting style of Herod in Hamlet and the screaming of the mothers in Henry V. ("The Influence of the Mystery Plays" 103)

The story of Apus and Virginia was clearly a popular classical revival, and it is in essence a classical Latin treatment of the same theme as that found in Genesis 22--a father kills his child for

some high purpose. Indeed, Rosemary Woolf calls it "a striking parallel to the Sacrifice of Isaac" ("The Influence of the Mystery Plays" 90). Though the religious dimension is missing in the story of Virginia's sacrifice, the relationship displayed between Virginia and her father, Virginius, is comparable to that suggested in Genesis 22 and portrayed in several mystery plays of Isaac's sacrifice. The Renaissance play about Virginia was written by the unknown R. B. probably in 1569 and was published in 1575. It is a strong testament to the popularity not only of this story, which is in essence a pagan version of Genesis 22, but also of the theme it presents that one of the greatest Jacobean playwrights, John Webster, composed his own play, Appius and Virginia, approximately fifty years after R. B.'s.

Appius and Virginia by R. B. begins with testimony and example of Virginia's devotion, obedience, and chastity which call forth high praise from her father: "A Gods why doo ye not compel eche Dame the like to shoue?/ And euey Impe of her againe, her duty thus to know" ⁵ Virginius goes to proclaim,

By the Gods wise I ioy me that haue such a treasure,
Such Gemme and such Juell, surmounting all measure:
Such a happy spouse, such a fortunate dame,
That no blot or staine, can impayre her fame,
Against such an Impe, and graffe of my tree,
As cleare both surmount all others that bee.

(ll. 120-125)

So much does Virginius love his wife and daughter that he exclaims to his wife, "And rather I with my selfe to be slaine,/ Then thou or thy daughter ought wo should sustaine" (ll. 137-138).

⁵R. B., Appius and Virginia, 1575. Rpt. Malone Society Reprints (U.K.: Charles Whittingham and Co. at the Chiswick Press, 1911) ll. 105-106. Subsequent references to this play are to this edition and will be followed in the text by the appropriate line citations.

Virginius's devotion and high praise of his daughter has a parallel in Abraham's professions of praise and love for Isaac in several of the mystery cycle plays. The Towneley Abraham says to his son,

Now, who would not be glad that had
A child so lufand as thou art?
Thi luffly chere makis my hert glad,
Any many a tyme so has it gart.

(ll. 101-104)

The Brome Abraham proclaims, "I love no thyng so myche, iwysse,/ Excepe þin owyn selffe, der Fader of blysse,/ As Ysaac her, my owyn swete son" (ll. 13-15). He further says,

Ysaac, my 3owng sonne in lond,
A full dere chyld to me haue byn.

I had lever, yf God had be plesyd
For to a forbore all þe good þat I haue,
Than Ysaac my son schuld a be desessyd,
So God in Heuyn my sowll mot saue!

(ll. 70-75)

Virginius recognizes a need for moderation in love and faults both inadequate and excessive parental love. He sings:

When nature nursed first of all, yong Alexander learned,
Of who the Poets mention make, in iudgement so deserned,
Oh what did want that loue procured his vital end well neare,
This is the hope to where parents loue, their children do not feare

When time King Nisus would not let, his daughter to be taught,
Of any one correcting hand to nurtue to be brought:

She void of duty cut his lockes, and golden tresses cleare,
Whereby his realme was ouerrun, and she was payd her hier

When Dedalus from Creete did flie,
With Icarus his ioy:
He naught regarding fathers words,
Did seeke his owne anoy:
He mounted up into the skies,
Whereat the Gods did frowne,
And Phoebus sore his winges did frie,
And hedlonge fling him downe. . . .

Then sith that persualitie, doth partly discorde moue,
And hatred often times doth creepe where ouermuch wee loue:
And if we loue no whit at all, the faming trump will sound,
Come wife, come spouse, come daughter deare, let measure beare the ground.

(ll. 166-197)

Abraham, as the cycle plays indicate, acknowledges a similar notion of proper balance in love. The Brome Abraham, for example, states, "I love my chyld as my lyffe,/ But 3yt I love my God myche more . . . " (ll. 81-82).

With such an attitude toward parental love, Virginius is susceptible to Virginia's suggestion that her father kill her rather than subject her to abuse and shame at the hands of the wicked, lecherous judge Apius:

Oh father, oh friendship, oh fatherly fauour,
Whole dulset words, so sweetly do sauour,
On knees I beseeche thee to graunt my request,
In all things according, as lyketh thee best:

Thou knowest, O my father, if I be once spotted,
 My name and my kindred, then forth wilbe blotted:
 And if thou my father, should die for my cause,
 The world would accompt me as guilty in cause:
 Then rather deare father, if it be thy pleasure,
 Graunt me the death, then keepe I my treasure?
 My Lampe, my light, my life undefiled,
 And so may Judge Apius, of flesh be begiled:
 This upon my knees with humble behestes,
 Graunt me O father my instant requeste.

(ll. 922-935)

Virginius regretfully agrees with his daughter's reasoning and tearfully assents to her request.

Virginia, moved by her father's tears, says,

Then tender armes complect the neck, doo dry thy fathers teares,
 You nimble handes for wo whereof, my louing hart it weares:
 Oh father mine, refraine no whit, your sharped knife to take,
 From giltles sheath, my shame to ende, and body dead to make:
 Let not the shameles blouddy iudge, defile my virgins life,
 Doe take my head and send it him, upon your bloody knife:
 Bid him imbrue his bloody handes, in giltles bloud of mee:
 I virgin dye, he leacher liues, he was my ende you see:
 No more delayes, lo kisse me first, then stretch your strongest arme,
 Do ryd my woe, increase my ioy, do ease your childe of harme.

(ll. 950-959)

In her firm resolve to die Virginia here parallels the Isaacs of the Cornish, Ludus Coventriae, and York versions who submit to death without hesitation. In R. B.'s play as in these three cycle plays the self-sacrifice of the child is as much the focus as the sacrifice of the child by the parent. Virginia

is particularly reminiscent of the York Isaac, the only adult Isaac presented in the cycles, in her mature submission to what she perceives to be an appropriate death. She demonstrates a resolve comparable to that the Chester Isaac eventually shows:

Upon the purpose that you have sett you,
forsooth, father, I wyll not lett you;
but evermore to doe your vowe
while that ever yee maye.

(ll. 365-368)

Virginus, like Abraham in the Dublin, Ludus Coventriae, and Brome versions shows human anguish but is ultimately true to what he knows must be done. He laments,

O weary wittes of wo, or wealth, oh feble aged man,
How can thy arme geue such a blow, thy death I wishe thee than:
But sith that shame with endles trompe, wil souldre if case thou ioy,
By meanes of false iudge Apius he, myselfe will thee destroy:
Forgeue me babe this bloody deede, and meekely take thy ende

(ll. 961-965)

Though Abraham's dilemma is essentially different from Virginus's in that Abraham must respond to God's command and not to an evil man's machinations, various cycles record Abraham's mixture of regret and certainty that the deed must be done. The Ludus Coventriae Abraham says,

Now goddys comaundement must nedys be done
All his wyl is wourthy to be wrought
but 3itt þe fadyr to scle þe sone
grette care it causyth in my thought
In byttyr bale now am I brought
my swete childe with knyfe to kylle

but 3it my sorwe awaylith ryght nowth
for nedys I must werke goddys wylle.

(ll. 89-96)

The Dublin Abraham laments, "Alas, goode hert, þat me is wo/ þat euer I shuld þe þus spille!" (ll. 222-223). Virginia, like Isaac in several versions, tries to comfort her father in his agony and poignantly asks that she be blindfolded so as not to witness the stroke:

The Gods forgeue thee father deare, farewell, thy blow do bend:
Yet stay a whyle, o father deare, for fleash to death is fraile,
Let first my wimple bind my eyes, and then thy blow assaile.
Now father worke thy will on me, that life I may inioy.

(ll. 967-970)

One point of interest is the Epilogue, which moralizes about what the audience has seen much as the Expositor or Doctor of certain mystery plays does. Apius and Virginia concludes thus:

As earthly life is graunted non for euermore to raigne,
But denting death wil cause them al to grant this world as vain
Right worshipfull sith sure it is that mortall life must vade
Do practice then to winne his loue that all in all hath made:
And by this Poets faining here example do you take,
Of Virginias life, of chastitie, of duty to thy make.

(ll. 1205-1210)

This appeal, clearly to obedience to the Christian God despite the ancient Roman story and setting, parallels the speech by the "Doctor" which concludes the Brome Abraham and Isaac play. The Doctor, focussing on the virtues of obedience and faithfulness to God, states:

Lo! sovereyns and sorys, now haue we schewyd,
Thys solom story to gret and smale;
It ys good lernyng to lernd and lewyd,
And þe wysest of vs all,

Wythowtyn ony berryng.
 For thys story schoyt 3owe her
 How we schuld kepe to owr powere
 Goddys commawmentys wythowt grochyng.
 (ll. 435-442)

Another early Renaissance play which parallels mystery plays of Abraham's sacrifice is Thomas Preston's Cambyeses. As in Apius and Virginia, the sacrifice of a child is not commanded by God but is brought about by an evil earthly ruler. In R. B.'s play Judge Apius's lecherous plans precipitate Virginia's death. In Preston's play a pompous king rewards good advice with death. When the advisor Praxaspes warns Cambyeses against drunkenness, Cambyeses proposes a test of his sobriety--he vows he can drink wine and still shoot an arrow through the heart of Praxaspes's young son. While Praxaspes is not the actual killer of his child, he is an unwitting agent in bringing about the child's execution. The scene between Cambyeses's declaration and command and the execution of the child bears strong resemblance to cycle plays of Isaac's sacrifice, particularly the Towneley version in which Isaac is a completely unwilling child victim and Abraham is a regretful sacrificant. Both the Towneley version and Cambyeses focus on the pathos of required infanticide. While in the Genesis 22 story God puts Abraham to the test by means of the sacrifice, in Preston's play, ironically, the king commands the sacrifice merely to put himself to a whimsical test. As "God" or "Deus" makes clear in several versions of the play, the sacrifice of Isaac is a test of Abraham's faith and obedience which will be rewarded. As the Dublin God says in conversation with the angelic messenger:

Of al þing erthely, I wot wel, he [Abraham] loueþ him [Isaac] best;
 Now he shuld loue me moste, as reson wold and skylle,
 And so I wot well he doþe, I dyd it neuer mystrest.
 But 3it, for to preue hym, þe truþe wol I fele.
 Myne aungel, go to Abraham þat I loue ri3t wele,
 And say þat i comaunded and charged hym above all þinge,

The furst dede þat he doþe, or mete ouþer mele,
To make sacrificise vnto me of Isaac his son 3ynge

I do not but to assay hym,
And if he do it I wol not dismay hym;
Of his sorow I shal delay hym,
And for on childe encrease hym a pusunde.

(ll. 18-25; 31-34)

The Brome God similarly comments,

I schall asay now hys good wyll,
Whether he lovyth better hys chyld or me
All men schall take exampyll hym be
My commawmentys how they schall fulfill.

(ll. 43-46)

Cambyses, on the other hand, rewards Praxaspes's good will and good advice with a cruel test to prove "Whether that I a sober king, or els a drunkard be."⁶ When Cambyses commands Praxaspes to bring the child to certain death, Praxaspes pleads:

Redoubted Prince, spare my sweet child, he is mine only ioy.
I trust your grace to infants hart, no such thing will imploy.
If that his mother hear of this, she is so nigh her flight:
In clay her corps wil soone be shrinde, to pass from worlds delight.

⁶Thomas Preston, *Cambyses, King of Persia*, *The Tudor Facsimile Texts*, ed. John S. Farmer (New York: AMS Press, Inc., 1970). All subsequent references to this play are to this edition.

These lines echo Abraham's in several versions when he is informed of God's command. The Brome Abraham proclaims, "I lovyd neuer thyng soo mych in erde" (l. 76). Praxaspes's reference to his wife's grief echoes the Dublin Abraham's concern for Sarah:

Home to my wif I most nedis go
For þer is Isaac and I trowe she wol be ful wo,
If she know þe case.
For she haþe hym and no mo,
And if I telle her þat it is so,
Þat God wol haue hem to deþe ido,
She faileþ not of sorowes trase.

(ll. 73-79)

Praxaspes leaves to get the child but expresses his hope that the cruel design will not be carried out: "I will go fetch him to your grace, but so I trust it shall not be." Abraham in the Cornish, Chester, York, Towneley, and Brome versions expresses to Isaac a comparable faith that the sacrifice will not ultimately be carried out. As the Brome Abraham says, "Owre Lord wyll send me onto thys sted/ Summ maner a best for to take,/ Throw his swet sond" (ll. 144-146). When Praxaspes returns with the child he once again appeals to the king with reference to the child's mother: "O mighty king, your grace behest with sorrow I have scand./ And brought my child fro mothers knee, before you to appear/ And she thereof no whit doth know that he in place is heer." Abraham in the Dublin version (in which Sarah appears) makes similar remarks to Isaac that Sarah does not and should not know what is about to happen to Isaac. Praxaspes once again begs that Cambyzes "set this pretence apart," but, knowing such pleading is useless, he takes tearful leave of his child:

Farewel my deer and louing babe, come kisse thy father deer:
A greevous sight to me it is, to see thee slaine euen heere.
Is this the gaine now from the king, for giuing counsell good:

Before my face with such despight to spil my sons hart blood?

O heauy day to me this is, and mother in like case.

The injustice which Praxaspes recognizes in Cambyses's command parallels the Dublin Abraham's mild rebuke of God for what he perceives to be an unnecessary test of his love for God: "Now, Lord, I know wele þou dydest but asay/ What I wold sey þerto, ouþer ye or nay./ Pou knowest myne hert now, and so þou didest afore" (ll. 276-278). The child, seeing Praxaspes's tears, touchingly remarks,

O father, father, wipe your face,

I see the teares run from your eye:

My mother is at home sowing of a band,

Alas, deere father, why do you cry?

Isaac in several versions is concerned about his father's grief, and such concern is particularly poignant in those versions in which Isaac is a young child like Praxaspes's son who does not understand the complexity and pain of his father's situation. For example, in the Ludus Coventriae version Isaac says,

Lat be good fadyr 3our sad wepyng

3our hevy cher agrevyth me sore

tell me fadyr 3our grett mornyng

and I xal seke sum help þer-fore.

(ll. 133-136)

When it is clear that Cambyses is about to shoot him with an arrow the child fearfully exclaims, "Alas, alas, father, wil you me kill?" Even though he recognizes that the king will deal the death blow, he attributes responsibility to his father who is seemingly capable of preventing the tragedy. In the Chester version of Isaac's sacrifice Isaac asks this sad question twice. At one point he says,

Father, I am full sore afraide

to see you beare this drawn sworde.

I hope for all middle-yorde
you will not slaye your childe.

(ll. 265-268)

Later he says, "Alas, father, ys that your wyll,/ your owne chylde here for to spyll,/ upon thys hilles bryncke?" (ll. 286-288). The Brome Isaac poignantly asks, "Tell me, my dere fader, or that 3e ses,/ Bere 3e 3owr sword draw for me?" (ll. 153-154). Praxaspes's child, seeing he is about to die, makes a last touching plea to the king: "Good master king do not shoot at me, my mother loves me best."

The Brome Isaac makes a comparable statement:

A, fader, do now what euer ye lyst,
For of my modre, I wot wel, I shal be myst.
Many a tyme hap she me clipt and kyst,
But farewel nowe, for þat is do.

She was wont to calle me hir tresoure and hir store;
But farewel now, she shal no more.

(ll. 212-217)

So, also, the Chester Isaac:

Would God my mother were here with mee!
Shee would kneele downe upon her knee,
prayeinge you, father, if yt might bee,
for to save my lief.

(ll. 297-300)

Clearly, then, Apius and Virginia and Cambyses both reflect several ideas exhibited in the mystery plays of Isaac's sacrifice. Particular echoes are found in the loving father's reluctance to kill the child, the child's touching obedience to death even though he or she may be fearful, and the use of the Epilogue, like the medieval "Doctor," as a choral figure. Obviously it is tenuous and tedious to try to prove direct descent from medieval plays to these two early Renaissance plays by means of

verbal echoes, but the juxtaposition of parallel scenes does suggest that, as Margeson argues, "playwrights built on what had already been achieved and did not have to learn certain dramatic lessons over again. In addition . . . the serious intensity of such scenes was carried over from the religious to the secular drama" (17). It is particularly notable that the pagan parallel to the Abraham and Isaac story--the story of Apius and Virginia--remained popular for many decades and captured the imagination of one of the greatest Stuart playwrights, John Webster. Webster's version of Appius and Virginia, probably written about 1629, develops to a greater extent than R. B.'s version the nobility of Virginius and the political machinations and duplicity of Apius, who is very much a typical Jacobean dramatic villain.

Early in the play the loving and respectful relationship that exists between Virginius and his daughter is established. Numitorius notes how Virginia "most humbly/ Prostrates her filial Duty" and kneels before her father.⁷ Virginius responds that he is "only rich in her" and gives her to Icilius, the man she loves (I.iv.126). Virginia obediently states, "I am my father's daughter, and by him/ I must be swaid in all things" (I.iv.149-50). Appius's lust for Virginia leads him to vile, intricate plots against both father and daughter, and Virginia, when falsely accused of being a slave, confronts her father with a plea for her death:

O my dear Lord and father, once you gave me
A noble freedom, do not see it lost
Without a forfeit; take the life you gave me
And sacrifice it rather to the gods
Then to a villains Lust. Happy the Wretch
Who born in bondage lives and dies a slave,

⁷John Webster, Appius and Virginia, in The Complete Works of John Webster, III, ed. F. L. Lucas (London: Chatto and Windus, 1927), rpt. New York: Gordian Press, 1966, I.iv.123-4. Subsequent references to this play are to this edition and will be followed in the text by appropriate act, scene, and line citations.

And sees no lustful projects bent upon her,
And neither knowes the life nor death of honor.

(IV.i.31-38)

Appius feigns justice and love for Virginius but facilitates his plot to have Virginia. Virginius speaks a fond farewell to his daughter:

Farewel my sweet Virginia, never, never
Shall I taste fruit of the most blessed hope
I had in thee. Let me forget the thought
Of thy most pretty infancy, when first
Returning from the Wars, I took delight
To rock thee in my Target; when my Girl
Would kiss her father in his burganet
Of glittering steel hung 'bout his armed neck;
And viewing the bright mettall, smile to see
Another fair Virginia smile on thee:
When I first taught thee how to go, to speak:
And when my wounds have smarted, I have sung
With an unskilful, yet a willing voice,
To bring my Girl asleep. O my Virginia,
When we begin to be, begun our woes,
Increasing still, as dying life still growes.

(IV.i.321-36)

He then resigns her by killing her:

Thus I surrender her into the Court
Of all the Gods. And see proud Appius see,
Although not justly, I have made her free.

And if thy Lust with this Act be not fed,
Bury her in thy bowels, now shee's dead.

(IV.i.343-347)

For this deed Virginius is condemned from many quarters, and he, too, agonizes over what he has done, but he is nonetheless convinced that he did right:

Alas, might I have kept her chaste and free,
This life so oft ingag'd for ingrateful Rome
Lay in her bosom. But when I saw her pull'd
By Appius's Lictors to be claim'd a slave,
And drag'd unto a publick Sessions-house,
Divorc'd from her fore-Spousals with Icilius,
A noble youth, and made a bond-woman,
Inforc'd by violence from her fathers armes
To be a Prostitute and Paramour
To the rude twinings of a lecherous Judge;
Then, then, O loving Soldiers, (I'l not deny it)
For 'twas my honor, my paternal pity,
And the sole act, for which I love my life . . .
Then lustful Appius, he that swayes the Land,
Slew poor Virginia by this fathers hand.

(IV.ii.142-156)

Like Abraham, who regretfully but willingly sacrifices Issac to God because he believes it is right to do so, Webster's Virginius, too, makes what he sees to be a difficult but necessary decision and, like Abraham, finds his child obedient and willing as well.

While in the two versions of the Apius and Virginia story and in Cambyzes the fathers find their children to be ultimately obedient, in two other plays, Marlowe's Tamburlaine, Part II (1587), and Shakespeare's Titus Andronicus (1594), sons resist or reject their fathers' commands at their

peril. These plays take the premise of Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac and alter it to concern only filial obedience. When a Renaissance child disobeyed his parents, potentially extreme consequences were seen in both religious and social arenas. Lu Emily Pearson in her study Elizabethans At Home argues that

[i]n theory, at least, most [Elizabethans] believed a disobedient child transgressed against the laws of God more than against parental authority. Like the Greeks, they felt that disobedience struck at the very roots of the family organization and, if not checked by severe punishment, might even endanger the welfare of the very State. Indeed, they regarded with terror the ingratitude of rebellious children, for they saw in their conduct a sin so unnatural as to upset by its treachery the harmony of nature itself. To them disobedience was ingratitude, and ingratitude was moral decay that led to monstrous acts. In all the range of human iniquity there was nothing comparable to it, for it rejected reason by which God had raised man above the beast. (122)

Pearson's point is most eloquently expressed by Ulysses in Shakespeare's Troilus and Cressida when he analyzes the Greeks' lack of success against Troy as being due to a violation of the principles of order and degree:

Troy yet upon his basis had been down
And the great Hector's sword had lack'd a master
But for these instances.
The speciality of rule hath been neglected,
And look how many Grecian tents do stand
Hollow upon this plain, so many hollow factions.
When that the general is not like the hive
To whom the foragers shall all repair,
What honey is expected? Degree being vizarded,

Th' unworhiest shows as fairly in the mask.
The heavens themselves, the planets, and this centre
Observe degree, priority, and place,
Insisture, course, proportion, season, form,
Office, and custom, in all line of order.
And therefore is the glorious planet Sol
In noble eminence enthron'd and spher'd
Amidst the other; whose med'cinable eye
Corrects the influence of evil planets,
And posts like the commandment of a king,
Sans check, to good and bad. But when the planets
In evil mixture to disorder wander,
What plagues and what portents, what mutiny,
What raging of the sea, shaking of earth,
Commotion in the winds, frights, changes, horrors,
Divert the crack, rend and deracinate
The unity and married calm of states
Quite from their fixture! O, when degree is shak'd,
Which is the ladder of all high designs,
The enterprise is sick. How could communities,
Degrees in schools, and brotherhoods in cities,
Peaceful commerce from dividable shores,
The primogenity and due of birth,
Prerogative of age, crowns, sceptres, laurels,
But by degree stand in authentic place?
Take but degree away, untune that string,
And hark what discord follows. Each thing melts

In mere oppugnancy; the bounded waters
Should lift their bosoms higher than the shores,
And make a sop of all this solid globe;
Strength should be lord of imbecility,
And the rude son should strike his father dead;
Force should be right--or rather, right and wrong,
Between whose endless jar justice resides,
Should lose their names, and so should justice too.
Then everything includes itself in power,
Power into will, will into appetite,
And appetite, an universal wolf,
So doubly seconded with will and power,
Must make perforce an universal prey,
And last eat up himself. Great Agamemnon,
This chaos, when degree is suffocate,
Follows the choking;
And this neglection of degree it is
That by a pace goes backward, with a purpose
It hath to climb. The general's disdain'd
By him one step below, he by the next,
The next by him beneath: so every step,
Example'd by the first pace that is sick
Of his superior, grows to an envious fever
Of pale and bloodless emulation.
And 'tis this fever that keeps Troy on foot,

Not her own sinews. To end a tale of length,
Troy in our weakness stands, not in her strength.

(I.iii.75-137)

Tamburlaine's son exhibits a rejection of his father's authority which represents the greatest fear of numerous Renaissance parents. Elizabethan preachers lamented, as Cobbett puts it, that too many children "'carry it proudly, disdainfully and scornfully towards parents.'" ⁸ While Calyphas is not like the lovingly obedient Isaac, neither is Tamburlaine a loving and devoted father. Far from Abraham's praise of Isaac, Tamburlaine scoffs at his sons' delicate appearance. While he calls his sons "more precious in mine eyes,/ Than all the wealthy kingdoms I subdued," he nonetheless says of them:

But yet methinks their looks are amorous,
Not martial as the sons of Tamburlaine:
Water and air, being symbolised in one,
Argue their want of courage and of wit;
Their hair as white as milk and soft as down--
Which should be like the quills of porcupines,
As black as jet and hard as iron or steel--
Bewrays they are too dainty for the wars.
Their fingers made to quaver on a lute,
Their arms to hang about a lady's neck,
Their legs to dance and caper in the air,
Would make me think them bastards, not my sons⁹

⁸Cobbett, as cited by Morgan 78.

⁹Christopher Marlowe, *Tamburlaine the Great, Part II*, ed. J.S. Cunningham, *The Revels Plays* (Manchester: Manchester U P, 1981) I.iii.18-19; 21-32. Subsequent references to this play are to this edition and will be followed in the text by the appropriate act, scene, and line citations.

Tamburlaine further shows his lack of traditional fatherly feeling when he says to his youngest son, "If thou exceed thy elder brothers' worth/ And shine in complete virtue more than they,/ Thou shalt be king before them . . ." (I.iii.50-52). Tamburlaine admonishes his sons to "[b]e all a scourge and terror to the world,/ Or else you are not sons of Tamburlaine" (I.iii.63-64). These words are far from Abraham's professions of love and gratitude for Isaac and his loving remonstrance to Isaac of how God should be loved and served. One son, Calyphas, rejects Tamburlaine's values and teachings. He says,

But while my brothers follow arms, my lord,
Let me accompany my gracious mother:
They are enough to conquer all the world,
And you have won enough for me to keep.
(I.iii.65-68)

His father scornfully replies,

Bastardly boy, sprung from some coward's loins,
And not the issue of great Tamburlaine,
Of all the provinces I have subdued
Thou shalt not have a foot unless thou bear
A mind courageous and invincible . . .
(I.iii.69-73)

When Tamburlaine admonishes Calyphas to take a Turkish crown by beheading its wearer, Calyphas attempts to appease his father: "If any man will hold him, I will strike/ And cleave him to the channel with my sword" (I.iii.102-103). Even this is inadequate to Tamburlaine, who responds with a threat: "Hold him and cleave him too, or I'll cleave thee . . ." (I.iii.104). Tamburlaine proclaims that he will teach his sons all the arts of war and lists in detail all the dangerous tests they will endure. When Calyphas points out that "[w]e may be slain or wounded ere we learn," Tamburlaine's response is fury at his son's cowardice (III.ii.94 and passim). When the time for

battle draws near, Amyras has difficulty rousing Calyphas to the fight. Calyphas, however, is a different man from his father:

I know, sir, what it is to kill a man:--

It works remorse of conscience in me.

I take no pleasure to be murderous,

Nor care for blood when wine will quench my thirst.

(IV.i.27-30)

Tamburlaine, furious at Calyphas's cowardice, drags him out and insults him unmercifully:

Image of sloth and picture of a slave,

The obloquy and scorn of my renown!

How may my heart, thus fired with mine eyes,

Wounded with shame and killed with discontent,

Shroud any thought may hold my striving hands

From martial justice on thy wretched soul?

Here, Jove, receive his fainting soul again;

A form not meet to give that subject essence

Whose matter is the flesh of Tamburlaine

(IV.i.91-96; 111-113)

Proclaiming to his prisoners that he will show them his strength and supremacy, Tamburlaine stabs Calyphas in a display which causes one of his prisoners to remark that the difference between Tamburlaine and other men is "barbarous damned tyranny" (IV.i.139). Tamburlaine then orders that the prisoners bury his "effeminate brat" so that "not a common soldier shall defile/ His manly fingers with so faint a boy" (IV.i.162-164).

Marlowe's treatment of infanticide here exemplifies his originality of mind and illustrates one aspect of Renaissance change. Marlowe's atheism--or whatever form his unorthodox religious beliefs took--reflects an important change in religious values which gradually evolved in the Renaissance. Many Elizabethans considered Tamburlaine blasphemous--his madness causes him, as Robert

Greene wrote, "'to dare God out of heaven.'"¹⁰ In the play, as J. S. Cunningham notes in his Revels edition, "God, who might scourge impiety, is Himself celebrated as an impious rebel. This is a characteristically abrupt change of perspective on divine sanctions for human conduct" (73).

Tamburlaine kills Calyphas because of Calyphas's rejection of Tamburlaine's values and his ensuing disobedience to the will of his father. In Shakespeare's Titus Andronicus a similar situation occurs, though Titus Andronicus seems to be a more sympathetic character than does Tamburlaine. Tamburlaine is driven by overweening pride and martial ambition to kill his disobedient son; Titus Andronicus kills his son in a brief fit of anger when his son fails to comply immediately with a command. When Titus betrothes his daughter Lavinia (already promised to Bassianus) to the Emperor Saturninus, his sons, outraged, help Bassianus escape with Lavinia. As Titus begins his pursuit, his son Mutius bars his way to let the promised lovers escape. Titus, seeing his own son will not let him pass, angrily shouts, "What, villain boy,/ Barr'st me my way in Rome?"¹¹ Angered that his son would stand in the way of his disposing of his daughter in marriage as he chooses, Titus kills Mutius. Another son, Lucius, points out to Titus the injustice of Mutius's death: "My lord, you are unjust, and, more than so,/ In wrongful quarrel you have slain your son" (I.i.292-293). Titus's pride claims the killing was just: "Nor thou, nor he, are any sons of mine;/ My sons would never so dishonour me./ Traitor, restore Lavinia to the Emperor" (I.i.294-296). Lucius again asserts that Titus, not his sons, is wrong: "Dead, if you will; but not to be his wife/ That is another's lawful promis'd love" (I.i.297-298). Once again there is no direct echo of Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac, but one is struck by the difference between Abraham's motivation and Titus's. Far from seeking to obey God, Titus Andronicus seeks to please the emperor and to do so will even violate a legal betrothal. His pride in his ability to dispose of his daughter as he chooses is clouded in his desire to please the

¹⁰Cited by Battenhouse, Marlowe's Tamburlaine 238.

¹¹William Shakespeare, Titus Andronicus, ed. J.C. Maxwell, 3rd ed., The Arden Edition of the Works of William Shakespeare (London: Methuen and Co., 1961) I.i.290-291. Subsequent references to this play are to this edition and will be followed in the text by the appropriate act, scene, and line citations.

emperor, and the result is that he not only loses his daughter but also tragically kills the son who was attempting to thwart the father's misjudgment. In both Calyphas and Mutius we see sons caught in the dilemma of doing right and displeasing their fathers. The issue of filial obedience in the Renaissance was fraught with moral ambiguity.

The issue was further complicated in the Renaissance by economic changes which came to fruition during Elizabeth's reign and which had far-reaching effects on familial relations. These economic changes fit quite neatly with Protestantism's advocacy of a work ethic. As Trevelyan notes, "The new type of English religion idealized work, dedicating business and farming to God It was a good religion for a nation of shopkeepers and farmers" (127). One of the greatest social changes of Elizabethan England was the tremendous expansion of overseas trade, resulting in contact with a variety of cultures, burgeoning economy, increased military prowess and position, and new sources of employment and wealth for Englishmen. With the rise of a mercantile economy under Elizabeth and the parallel emphasis of the Protestant work ethic, money became a main means of disciplining children in the sixteenth century. Singh cites the work of Lawrence Stone who indicates that

'between 1500 and 1660, the current owner [of property or other wealth] was relatively free to dispose of his estates as he wished, which gave him a formidable weapon to help impose his will upon his children.' During this period, 'the threat of partial or even complete disinheritance as a penalty for disobedience was a very real one.'¹²

Lear's disinheritance of Cordelia is a prime example of this point. When Cordelia's profession of love for her father is truer but less extravagant than those of her sisters, Lear warns, "How, how,

¹²Lawrence Stone, The Family, Sex, and Marriage 1500-1800, as cited by Singh 26.

Cordelia! Mend your speech a little,/ Lest you may mar your fortunes.”¹³ The threat is clear.

When Cordelia reiterates her true and just division of love between father and husband, Lear, his pride hurt, lashes out:

[T]hy truth then be thy dower:

For, by the sacred radiance of the sun,
The mysteries of Hecate and the night,
By all the operation of the orbs
From whom we do exist and cease to be,
Here I disclaim all my paternal care,
Propinquity and property of blood,
And as a stranger to my heart and me
Hold thee from this for ever. The barbarous Scythian,
Or he that makes his generation messes
To gorge his appetite, shall to my bosom
Be as well neighbour'd, pity'd, and reliev'd,
As thou my sometime daughter. . . .

Hence, and avoid my sight!

So be my grave my peace, as here I give

Her father's heart from her!

(I.i.108-120; 124-126)

In the image of the Scythian who devours his own young, Lear clearly conveys a deadly message to his daughter, suggesting that her disinheritance is like her death to him.

Daughters were perhaps the greatest victims of the patriarchal family because their only perceived value was in procuring a mate who would improve the social and financial status of a

¹³William Shakespeare, *King Lear*, ed. Kenneth Muir, 8th ed., The Arden Edition of the Works of William Shakespeare (Cambridge: Harvard U P, 1959) I.i.94-95. Subsequent references to this play are to this edition and will be followed in the text by the appropriate act, scene, and line citations.

family. Arranged marriage was a widespread practice in the Renaissance, and Dobbins and Battenhouse note that “[i]t was customary among the Reformers to interpret the marriage contract as a matter restricted by the commandment to honor one’s father and mother” (111). They cite Peter Martyr, for example, who wrote,

Paule saith to the Ephesians; Children obeie your parents in all things.

He excepteth nothing, when he writeth so: but saith, In all things:

Namelie, which they command not against the word of God. And in his first epistle to the Corinthians, the seuenth chapter, is most manifestlie declared, that it belongeth to the parents to giue their daughters in marriage to husbands. . . .

So then it seemeth maruellous, that christians at this daie determine, that marriages are lawfull, without consent of the parents.¹⁴

Trevelyan remarks that “[m]any parents seem to have cared very little who married their children, provided they themselves got the money . . .” (65). Even marriages between very young children were not uncommon. Trevelyan cites one extreme example of a three-year-old boy who was coaxed into saying marriage vows to a five-year-old girl. As he states, “Clearly the love marriage was more frequent by the end of the Tudor period, but child marriages were still all too common . . .” (69). It is apparent, however, that such extreme measures were not widely necessary. As Lewis Einstein argues, “The spirit of Tudor England, in many respects conducive to freedom, and in some even to license, remained in others enough under the influence of a medieval past to accept conventional family relationships based on material advantage regardless of preference or of personal happiness” (245). The nature of “material advantage” was altered somewhat by the burgeoning mercantile economy of the Renaissance, but, as Singh notes, “by and large Elizabethan children obey their parents and are indeed willing to sacrifice their personal urges and aspirations at the altar of

¹⁴Peter Martyr, The Common Places of the Christian Religion, trans. Anthonie Marten (London, 1583) II, 432, as cited by Dobbins and Battenhouse 111-112.

parental obedience. Only rarely do we come across individuals who disobey their parents and act in defiance of accepted norms of conduct" (34). In several plays, however, we do find Renaissance dramatists addressing the issue of children who choose their own desires over the preferences of their parents. Shakespeare's comedies in particular are full of children going their own ways. These children are not like the dutiful Isaac, and it is indicative of a major change of thought and perspective in the Renaissance that frequently the playwrights' sentiments are with the children nonetheless.

In Marlowe's The Jew of Malta (1592), Abigail, the daughter of the Jew Barabas, is a pawn in her father's machinations which usually involve the acquisition of money. Barabas is willing to promise his daughter to two men in hope of aggrandizement and willing to have her feign conversion to have access to his hidden fortune, but when she genuinely converts he brings about her death.

Though Maurice Charney sees a parallel between Barabas and Abraham, whom he calls "the prototype of all 'heavy' Jewish fathers," from the beginning of the play the audience is told that Barabas is a Jewish father quite unlike the Abraham of the cycle plays (37). In the Prologue, Machiavel comments that Barabas is much like himself and that the play intends

But to present the tragedy of a Jew,
Who smiles to see how full his bags are crammed,
Which money was not got without my means.
I crave but this, grace him as he deserves,
And let him not be entertained the worse
Because he favours me.¹⁵

¹⁵Christopher Marlowe, The Jew of Malta, ed. N.W. Bawcutt, *The Revels Plays* (Manchester: Manchester U P, 1978) Prologue ll. 30-35. Subsequent references to this play are to this edition and will be followed in the text by the appropriate act, scene, and line citations.

The action opens with Barabas in his counting house talking about reaping the happiness which, ironically, was promised to Abraham after the sacrifice of Isaac. Barabas says,

Thus trolls our fortune in by land and sea,
And thus are we on every side enriched;
These are the blessings promised to the Jews,
And herein was old Abram's happiness:
What more may heaven do for earthly men
Than thus to pour out plenty in their laps,
Ripping the bowels of the earth for them,
Making the sea their servant, and the winds
To drive their substance with successful blasts?
Who hateth me but for my happiness?
Or who is honoured now but for his wealth?
Rather had I a Jew be hated thus,
Than pitied in a Christian poverty:
For I can see no fruits in all their faith,
But malice, falsehood, and excessive pride,
Which methinks fits not their profession.

(I.i.102-117)

When he realizes Malta faces possible invasion, his only concern is that the enemies "spare me, my daughter, and my wealth" (I.i.152). Ominously, however, he refers to his "one sole daughter, whom I hold as dear/ As Agamemnon did his Iphigen" (I.i.136-137). Invoking the story of Iphigenia, which, like the story of Virginia, is a classical parallel to the story of Isaac's sacrifice, suggests to the audience Abigail's fate. Barabas is the stereotypical theatrical Renaissance Jew, concerned primarily with himself and his wealth, and he is relentlessly persecuted by his society. He is given the choice

of relinquishing half of his estate or becoming a Christian, neither of which is acceptable to him.

When his wealth and home are confiscated, he mourns for his lost gold:

My gold, my gold, and all my wealth is gone!

You partial heavens, have I deserved this plague?

What, will you thus oppose me, luckless stars,

To make me desperate in my poverty? (I.ii.258-261)

In order to retrieve some gold hidden in his house turned nunnery he persuades Abigail to feign conversion and become a nun so that she can have access to the house and to the gold. At this point he sees religion merely as a tool for expediency. As he says, "religion/ Hides many mischiefs from suspicion" (I.ii.281-282). When Abigail shies away from such deceit, Barabas cajoles, "A counterfeit profession is better/ Than unseen hypocrisy" (I.ii.292-293). When the gold is retrieved Barabas exults over his wealth and his daughter equally:

O my girl,

My gold, my fortune, my felicity,

Strength to my soul, death to mine enemy:

Welcome, the first beginner of my bliss!

O Abigail, that I had thee here too,

Then my desires were fully satisfied;

But I will practise thy enlargement thence.

O girl, O gold, O beauty, O my bliss!

(II.i.47-54)

Barabas is not only willing to sacrifice Abigail's honesty to retrieve his wealth, he is also willing to sacrifice her integrity and her true affections for his own evil machinations and in the cause of hatred and revenge. Knowing she loves Don Mathias, he uses her to bait Lodowick. When Lodowick expresses an interest in Abigail, Barabas to himself says, "e'er he shall have her,/ I'll

sacrifice her on a pile of wood" (II.iii.52-53). The reference is clearly to Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac. Nonetheless, Barabas orders Abigail to entice Lodowick:

Entertain Lodowick, the governor's son,
With all the courtesy you can afford,
Provided that you keep your maidenhead.
Use him as if he were a--Philistine:
Dissemble, swear, protest, vow to love him;
He is not of the seed of Abraham. . . .
Abigail, bid him welcome for my sake. . . .
Daughter, a word more; kiss him, speak him fair,
And like a cunning Jew so cast about,
That ye be both made sure ere you come out.

(II.iii.227-232; 234; 236-238)

When Abigail insists on her love for Don Mathias, Barabas insists on her deception nonetheless: "I know it: yet I say make love to him;/ Do, it is requisite it should be so" (II.iii.240-241). Barabas justifies his evil machinations on the grounds that he is duping Christians, not "the seed of Abraham." As he says, "It's no sin to deceive a Christian,/ For they themselves hold it a principle/ Faith is not to be held with heretics" (II.iii.311-313). He thinks nothing of how he is sacrificing Abigail in the process, considering her simply a tool for his disposal. He directs Abigail to promise herself to Lodowick: "This gentle maggot, Lodowick, I mean,/ Must be deluded: let him have thy hand,/ But keep thy heart till Don Mathias comes" (II.iii.307-309). Abigail does as her father bids, but is conscience-stricken: "O wretched Abigail, what hast thou done?" (II.iii.322). When she realizes that her father has set Don Mathias and Lodowick against each other over her, Abigail vows to reconcile the two men. Barabas, incensed, says, "You'll make 'em friends?/ Are there not Jews enow in Malta,/ But thou must dote upon a Christian?" (II.iii.360-362). He then has her taken into the house a virtual prisoner.

When she discovers that Barabas has brought about the deaths of Don Mathias and Lodowick, Abigail can no longer be a submissive daughter. She genuinely converts and becomes a nun, but, despite her father's ill usage, she will do him no harm: "O Barabas,/ Though thou deservest hardly at my hands,/ Yet never shall these lips bewray thy life" (III.iii.76-78). Though Barabas was willing to sacrifice Abigail for his own purposes, he cannot accept her genuine conversion and self-sacrifice. He calls her "[f]alse and unkind" (III.iv.2) and "hateful to my soul and me" (III.iv.36). He kills her with poisoned rice which he has sent to the convent.

When Friar Barnardine is told that Barabas has done something evil, his first guess is, "What, has he crucified a child?" (III.vi.49). Jews were frequently accused of crucifying children, a charge deriving both from Christ's crucifixion and Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac. As Wilbur Sanders notes,

Perhaps the most tenacious of all the anti-semitic libels was that of child-crucifixion [or child murder in some form]. One hundred and fifty cases of this charge are on record, Hugh of Lincoln being the most famous English example. Belief in the medicinal value of blood, particularly young blood, was the source of this strange conviction that Jews were in the habit of stealing Christian children, crucifying them and using the blood in their Passover ritual. [In Jewish theology and worship, moreover, the event of Isaac's sacrifice, known as the Akedah, was connected with the Passover ritual.] Frequently the decoy was the daughter of the Jew, for folk-lore permitted him to have extravagantly beautiful daughters, as long as it was understood that the beauty was the fatal facade for a murderous heart. Abigail plays this role in her father's plots, though she does it unwittingly. (344-345)

Unlike Abraham, who sacrificed a beloved child for nothing less than the will of God, Barabas kills Abigail for refusing to continue as his tool in his evil deeds. Barabas even has no remorse for killing

her. He grieves not for her: "I grieve because she lived so long./ An Hebrew born, and would become a Christian!" (IV.i.18-19).

It must be noted, however, that neither Christians nor Jews constitute admirable figures in this play. Apart from Abigail there is no single virtuous character in the play. The Jews are usurious and vengeful; the Christians are hypocritical, uncharitable, and deceitful. Particularly condemnable is Friar Bernardine who, upon hearing Abigail's dying confession, laments that she died "a virgin, too, that grieves me most" (III.vi.41).

Barabas, as many generations of scholars have noted, has a theatrical descendant in Shylock in Shakespeare's The Merchant of Venice. Shylock is also a Renaissance stereotype of a Jew, concerned more with money and vengeance against Christians than anything else. His daughter Jessica is unhappy in her home, which she freely calls "hell."¹⁶ Though she acknowledges her sin of ingratitude, she wishes to escape her father and marry the Christian Lorenzo:

Alack, what heinous sin is it in me
To be ashamed to be my father's child!
But though I am a daughter to his blood
I am not to his manners: O Lorenzo
If thou keep promise I shall end this strife,
Become a Christian and thy loving wife!

(II.iii.16-21)

The fact that Jessica wishes to marry a Christian and become a Christian excuses, in the eyes of the Renaissance audience, her disobedience to her father. Dobbins and Battenhouse cite Henry Bullinger who wrote, "'Children ought not to obey their parents . . . if they command any thing

¹⁶William Shakespeare, The Merchant of Venice, ed. John Russell Brown, 7th ed., The Arden Edition of the Works of William Shakespeare (Cambridge: Harvard U P, 1959) II.iii.2. Subsequent references to this play are to this edition and will be followed in the text by the appropriate act, scene, and line citations.

contrary to God, or preiudicall to his law.' ”¹⁷ When she does escape with some jewels and money and marries Lorenzo, Salanio describes Shylock’s reactions:

I never heard a passion so confus’d,
So strange, outrageous, and so variable
As the dog Jew did utter in the streets,--
“My daughter! O my ducats! O my daughter!
Fled with a Christian! O my Christian ducats!
Justice, the law, my ducats, and my daughter!
A sealed bag, two sealed bags of ducats,
Of double ducats, stol’n from me by my daughter!
And jewels, two stones, two rich and precious stones,
Stol’n by my daughter! Justice!--find the girl;
She hath the stones upon her, and the ducats!”

(II.viii.12-22)

Shylock seems as distraught over the loss of the money and jewels and over the loss of his daughter. He rages that Jessica “is damn’d for it” (III.i.29), and one wonders if the greater sin to Shylock lies in her escape or in the theft of the money. In his rage he wishes her dead:

[A] diamond gone cost me two thousand ducats in Frankfort,--the curse
never fell upon our nation till now, I never felt it till now,--two
thousand ducats in that, and other precious, precious jewels; I would
my daughter were dead at my foot, and the jewels in her ear: would
she were hears’d at my foot, and the ducats in her coffin. . . .

(III.i.76-82)

¹⁷Henry Bullinger, Godly and learned Sermons, trans. H. I. (London, 1584), I, 146, as cited by Dobbins and Battenhouse 113.

When he hears of Jessica's and Lorenzo's extravagant living he laments, not that his daughter is lost to him, but, "I shall never see my gold again" (III.i.100-101). In the end Shylock's vengeance and hatred bring about his downfall as he is forced to bequeath all his goods to Lorenzo and Jessica. Though Jessica disobeyed her father, clearly the audience's sympathies are intended to be with her and not with her father. As Dobbins and Battenhouse argue,

Shylock has no logic except that of greed since he is, as Lorenzo rightly remarks, a "faithless" Jew. He is no true son of the Jewish worthies he invokes--Jacob, Abraham, and Daniel. On the contrary, when Shylock raises his knife in the courtyard [sic] scene, Shakespeare is emblemizing a parody of Abraham's "sacrifice" (108)

Apparently, in Renaissance estimation, fathers who do not possess Abraham's values and affections are not worthy of devotion comparable to Isaac's.

In this play, as in Marlowe's The Jew of Malta, Jews are not the only group portrayed unpleasantly. Recent criticism of Shakespeare's play points out the implicit criticism in the play of Christians. Calling the play "ironic comedy," Richard A. Levin notes that in the play "the victors forfeit sympathy. Part of the problem is that the winners calculate their success rather than achieve it incidentally as they pursue the true and the beautiful; getting and spending, they lay waste their spiritual powers" (30). The Christians in the play are unmoved by Shylock's suffering and exclusion. Portia reveals unattractive and uncharitable prejudices against her foreign suitors and she particularly notes one's blackness. Bassanio's happiness leaves his friend, Antonio, in distress. Perhaps the most glaring condemnation of Christians in the play comes from Shylock's repeated assertions that he has learned his villainy from Christians. Such criticism of Christians, while not as vivid and glaring as Marlowe's unorthodox religious ideas, nonetheless reflect, as Marlowe's plays do, the changing societal perspectives on religion which came about during the Renaissance.

In addition to the disobedient Jessica in The Merchant of Venice, Shakespeare portrays another daughter disobedient in marriage in Cymbeline. As the play opens, Imogen, who has wed Posthumus Leonatus without her father Cymbeline's consent, has been imprisoned and her husband

banished. When Cymbeline, at his Queen's instigation, encounters Imogen and Posthumus, he scolds his daughter: "O disloyal thing,/ That shouldst repair my youth, thou heap'st/ A year's age on me!"¹⁸ Imogen, more bold than any disobedient child considered to this point, replies,

I beseech you sir,
Harm not yourself with your vexation,
I am senseless of your wrath; a touch more rare
Subdues all pangs, all fears.

(I.ii.64-67)

Cymbeline, shocked, asks, "Past grace? obedience?" (I.ii.67). When he points out his desire for her to marry Cloten, she scorns his choice: "I choose an eagle,/ And did avoid a puttock" (I.ii.70-71). Enraged, Cymbeline wishes her dead for her disobedience: "[L]et her anguish/ A drop of blood a day, and being aged/ Die of this folly" (I.ii.87-89). Cymbeline's arrogance and cruelty are further revealed when he encourages Cloten to woo Imogen despite the fact that she is already married:

The exile of her minion is too new,
She hath not yet forgot him, some more time
Must wear the print of his remembrance on't,
And then she's yours.

(II.iii.42-45)

When Imogen scorns Cloten's attentions, Cloten reminds her that in rejecting him, her father's choice, she sins against her father. He goes on to deny the legitimacy of her marriage to Posthumus and to add another dimension to her disobedience--her duty to the crown which she and her husband will inherit:

You sin against
Obedience, which you owe your father; for

¹⁸William Shakespeare, *Cymbeline*, ed. J. M. Nosworthy, The Arden Edition of the Works of William Shakespeare (Cambridge: Harvard U P, 1955) I.ii.62-64. Subsequent references to this play are to this edition and will be followed in the text by the appropriate act, scene, and line citations.

The contract you pretend with that base wretch,
 One bred of alms and foster'd with cold dishes,
 With scraps o' th' court, it is no contract, none;
 And though it be allowed in meaner parties
 (Yet who than he more mean?) to knit their souls
 (On whom there is no more dependency
 But brats and beggary) in self-figur'd knot,
 Yet you are curb'd from that enlargement, by
 The consequence o' th' crown, and must not foil
 The precious note of it; with a base slave,
 A hilding or a livery, a squire's cloth,
 A pantler; not so eminent.

(II.iii.112-124)

Imogen rejects Cloten's notions and escapes to Milford-Haven. When Cymbeline notes her absence, he cites his daughter's general disobedience and disrespect:

She hath not appear'd
 Before the Roman, nor to us hath tender'd
 The duty of the day. She looks us like
 A thing more made of malice than of duty

(III.v.30-33)

Cloten later reports that Cymbeline raged that Imogen fled, for though Cymbeline wished her dead for marrying Posthumus, he nonetheless apparently expected her eventual obedience to his wish for her to marry Cloten. The relationship between Cymbeline and Imogen parallels that of Abraham and Isaac in the deep, underlying affection they have for each other, but Cymbeline is misguided where Abraham is not, and Imogen is consequently not like the dutiful Isaac.

One interesting and surprising parallel with the Abraham and Isaac story occurs with Posthumus Leonatus. As he sleeps, the spirits of his ancestors parade around him, and Jupiter

descends to reassure the spirits of Posthumus's eventual triumph. Jupiter expresses ideas comparable to God's in the cycle plays of Abraham's sacrifice:

Be not with mortal accidents opprest,
No care of yours it is, you know 'tis ours.
Whom best I love I cross; to make my gift,
The more delay'd, delighted. Be content,
Your low-laid son our godhead will uplift. . . .

(V.iv.99-103)

"Whom best I love I cross" describes God's relationship to Abraham in the episode of Isaac's sacrifice. Isaac was the delayed gift, the "low-laid son" raised up and spared by God from death. Jupiter's words apply directly to Posthumus's situation, but they also indirectly apply to Imogen. Just as all Abraham's hopes for the future rest on Isaac, so all Cymbeline's hopes--and his kingdom--rest on Imogen (until, in the end, his sons are discovered). Wished dead by her father in a rash moment, threatened with death by the Queen's machinations, presumed dead after taking the mysterious potion, and finally struck fiercely by the unsuspecting Posthumus, Imogen "dies" several times and is ultimately restored to her newly wise and contrite father and to her husband.

Though Jessica and Imogen are disobedient daughters who fare well in the end, Beaumelle in Massinger and Field's *The Fatal Dowry* (1619), like Abigail, is not so fortunate. Beaumelle dupes her father and ultimately dies at his command. Early in the play one character, Romont, speaks a curse on the leaders, of whom Rochfort, Beaumelle's father, is one: "May all your wives prove whores, your factors theeves,/ And while you live, your ryotous heires undoe you."¹⁹ The spirit of the curse unfolds in the course of the play as Beaumelle marries the man of her father's choosing but then betrays him with the man she loves.

¹⁹Philip Massinger and Nathan Field, *The Fatal Dowry*, ed. T. A. Dunn (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969) I.ii.156-157. Subsequent references to this play are to this edition and will be followed in the text by the appropriate act, scene, and line citations.

In a conversation with Bellapert, her maid, Beaumelle confronts the notions of loveless marriage and infidelity. The witty Bellapert states that "the onely distinction betwixt a husband and a servant is: the first will lye with you, when hee please; the last shall lye with you when you please" (II.ii.50-52). When Beaumelle proclaims "I would meete love and marriage both at once" (II.ii.55), the realistic Bellapert instructs her:

[Y]ou must do as you may, not as you would: your fathers will is the
Goale you must fly to: if a husband approch you, you would have
further off, is he you love the lesse neere you? A husband in these
dayes is but a cloake to bee oftner layde upon your bed, then in your
bed.

(II.ii.59-64)

Beaumelle indicates to Young Novall her love for him but soon discovers that her father plans to bestow her elsewhere. Rochfort greets his daughter with the news and expresses his faith in her obedience: "I know, thy duty/ Is handmayd to my will, especially/ When it presents nothing but good and fit" (II.ii.171-173). Beaumelle dutifully submits but expresses fear of being caught between love and duty: "Sir, I am yours. Oh if my fears prove true,/ Fate hath wrong'd love, and will destroy me too" (II.ii.174-175).

Beaumelle's fears prove true when she is given to Charalois, but her love for Young Novall remains. When at Bellapert's instigation the lovers confront one another, Beaumelle attempts to explain her obedience to her father's will:

You come to chide me, servant, and bring with you
Sufficient warrant, you will say and truely,
My father found too much obedience in me,
By being won too soone: yet if you please
But to remember, all my hopes and fortunes
Had reverence to his liking: you will grant

That though I did not well towards you, I yet
Did wisely for my selfe.

(III.i.79-86)

When Charalois's friend Romont sees Beaumelle kissing Young Novall and chastises her for it, she scorns him:

You are come to warme meate, and perhaps cleane linnen:
Feed, weare it, and bee thankfull. For me, know,
That though a thousand watches were set on mee,
And you the Master-spy, I yet would use,
The liberty that best likes mee. I will revell,
Feast, kisse, imbreace, perhaps grant larger favours:
Yet such as live upon my meanes, shall know
They must not murmur at it.

(III.i.227-234)

Though it is unpleasant to hear Beaumelle say that those who benefit from her wealth and generosity should not complain about her actions, her attitude is not too far from her father's--he expects compliance from the daughter who benefits from his wealth and care. When Romont confronts Rochfort with Beaumelle's indiscretion, Beaumelle turns the tables on Romont, dupes her father, and causes her father to question Romont's intentions. She dons a veil in a sarcastic attempt to comply with Romont's instruction, but Rochfort removes the veil and asserts:

I have that confidence in your goodnesse, I,
That I will not consent to have you live
Like a Recluse in a cloyster: goe
Call in the gallants, let them make you merry,
Use all fit liberty.

(III.i.346-350)

When Romont confronts Charalois, Charalois's response is much the same as Rochfort's. When Romont admits to seeing nothing more than a kiss between Young Novall and Beaumelle, Charalois laughs and says, "There is no dramme of manhood to suspect,/ On such thin ayrie circumstance as this/ Meere complement and courtship" (III.i.519-521). But Beaumelle is finally caught in adultery and Rochfort stands as judge on his own daughter. He condemns her to death, and, even though Charalois asks for mercy, Rochfort insists that the punishment must be meted out: "[T]o pardon such a sinne,/ Is an offence as great as to commit it" (IV.iv.158-159). In consequence to Rochfort's decree, Charalois then kills Beaumelle on the spot.

Renaissance Englishmen perceived a frightening connection between filial disobedience (which offended the Almighty) and anarchy. Singh notes that "almost all political and religious writers in the period used the father of the patriarchal family for their argument in favour of absolute royal authority" (2). Gordon J. Schochet cites King James who, in his treatise The Trew Law of Free Monarchies (1598), makes a direct comparison between political obligation and filial duty:

. . . if the children may upon any pretext that can be imagined, lawfully rise up against their Father, cut him off, & [*sic*] choose any other whom they please in his roome; and if the body for the weale of it, may for any infirmitie that can be in the head, strike it off, then I cannot deny that the people may rebell, controll, and displace, or cut off their king at their owne pleasure, and upon respects moving them.²⁰

Such a notion sheds an interesting light on Cordelia's just but seemingly cold treatment of her father. As Lu Emily Pearson argues,

In one moment all the ties of family affection were seemingly dissolved, and [Cordelia] had become an enemy that might disrupt not only [Lear's] own kingdom but the well-being of the whole universe. As she

²⁰Cited by Schochet 87.

stood before him, seemingly defying her own father, the king, so she defied her Father in heaven, the King of the whole world, and she was, therefore, a lost soul. It is ironic but fitting to the dramatic action that her seeming ingratitude, which Lear looked upon as treason to the state, should lead ultimately to her death. Heading the French army of invasion for the purpose of restoring her father to the throne, Cordelia in her great effort to prove--too late, alas--her devotion and gratitude to King Lear, actually becomes guilty of treason. (123)

The equation of father and king followed naturally from the notion of the "divine right of kings." To Englishmen of the Renaissance, as Schochet notes, "[A]ll kings ruled as successors to the power God had given Adam at the Creation" and, therefore, "Disobedience to one's ruler was contrary to God's law" (7). As R. H. Tawney notes, "If the church of the Middle Ages was a kind of State, the State of the Tudors had some of the characteristics of a Church . . ." (6). The Renaissance theory of the prince placed the sanction of sovereign power not on divine law but on personal strength and popular approval. The ability to gain and wield power was the political idea of the age. Lewis Einstein states,

The body of doctrine and of ceremony [which] evolved to enhance the glamour of kingship, by attributing to it a divine authority, appears in contradiction with the realism underlying the conception of the royal power. In reality it confirms this idea. The dignity of the crown arose not from its origin but from its exercise. It rested not on an invisible lineage, but on a visible authority. The two views ran parallel courses and no conflict between them could arise. The Tudors, accepting the homage of divine right, trusted only in the reality of their power. (9-10)

Through the confusing events and the wide swings of the religious pendulum in sixteenth-century England, one point becomes clear--in the course of the century, due to both the Renaissance and the Reformation, religion came to be under the governance of the monarch. The success of the

Reformation in England had rested largely on nationalistic sentiments--the Pope came to be seen as an interfering foreigner. Clerical prestige, generally high in the medieval age, declined through the progression of Tudor monarchies but was by no means extinguished. It simply became, like other aspects of religion generally, compartmentalized in what Einstein calls "the new spirit born of the Renaissance which subordinated religion to the state" (206). The most pronounced testimony to this new relationship between religion and state was the creation of the Church of England with the monarch at the head. Trevelyan cites the words of Bishop Jewel, a prominent exponent of the "Elizabethan compromise": "'This is our doctrine, that every soul, of what calling soever he be,--be he monk, be he preacher, be he prophet, be he apostle,--ought to be subject to King and magistrates.'" ²¹ As M. M. Reese points out, "In its need for order the sixteenth century insisted that political obedience was a religious duty The doctrine of degree flourished in Tudor England through the special needs and anxieties of the age" (33; 37). One of the primary ways by which the necessity of obedience and observation of degree were communicated to the populace was through the Homilies of the English Church. As Reese points out, "Homilies, one of the first by-products of the Reformation, were compiled by the government to be read at divine service, in place of sermons, by beneficed clergy whose orthodoxy or learning might be unequal to the rather exacting necessities of their day. In other words, they were a means to uniformity" (37). Some thirty-three Homilies were produced between 1547 and 1569. The Sermon on Obedience, one of twelve Homilies produced in 1547, eloquently relates political and social obedience to God's Divine Plan:

Almighty God hath created and appointed all things, in heaven, earth and waters, in a most excellent and perfect order. In heaven he hath appointed distinct orders and states of archangels and angels. In the earth he hath assigned kings, princes, with other governors under them, all in good and necessary order. The water above is kept and raineth down in due time and season. The sun, moon, stars, rainbow, thunder,

²¹Cited by Trevelyan 174.

lightning, clouds, and all birds of the air, do keep their order. The earth, trees, seeds, plants, herbs, and corn, grass and all manner of beasts keep them in their order. All the parts of the whole year, as winter, summer, months, nights and days, continue in their order. All kinds of fishes in the sea, rivers and waters, with all fountains, springs, yea, the seas themselves keep their comely course and order.

And man himself also hath all his parts, both within and without, as soul, heart, mind, memory, understanding, reason, speech, with all and singular corporal members of his body, in a profitable, necessary and pleasant order. Every degree of people, in their vocation, calling, and office, hath appointed to them their duty and order. Some are in high degree, some in low, some kings and princes, some inferiors and subjects, priests and laymen, masters and servants, fathers and children, husbands and wives, rich and poor, and every one hath need of other, so that in all things is to be lauded and praised the goodly order of God, without the which, no house, no city, no common wealth, can continue and endure. For where there is no right order, there reigneth all abuse, carnal liberty, enormity, sin, and Babylonical confusion. Take away kings, princes, rulers, magistrates, judges, and such states of God's order, no man shall ride or go by the highway unrobbed, no man shall sleep in his own house or bed unkilld, no man shall keep his wife, children, and possessions in quietness, all things shall be common, and there must needs follow all mischief and utter destruction, both of souls, bodies, goods and common wealths.²²

²²Cited by Reese 37-38.

Homily 33, issued in 1571, describes rebellion as the worst of sins and the origin of all other sins:

He that nameth rebellion nameth not a singular or one only sin, as is theft, robbery, murder and such like, but he nameth the whole puddle and sink of all sins against God and man, against his prince, his country, his parents, his children, his kinsfolk, his friends, and against all men universally; all sins, I say, against God and all men heaped together, nameth he that nameth rebellion.²³

The much-valued obedience to the state or ruler was not unproblematic, however, for when the ruler was a tyrant, the very nature of tyranny frequently presented loyal subjects with the dilemma of choosing between conflicting but equally compelling values. For example, in The Fatal Dowry when Charalois kills Beaumelle at Rochfort's decree, Rochfort lashes out at the younger man's lack of mercy:

But I pronounc'd it [Beaumelle's doom]
As a Judge onely, and friend to justice,
And zealous in defence of your wrong'd honour,
Broke all the tyes of nature: and cast off
The love and soft affection of a father.
I in your cause, put on a Scarlet robe
Of red died cruelty, but in returne,
You have advanc'd for me no flag of mercy:
I look'd on you, as a wrong'd husband, but
You clos'd your eyes against me, as a father.
O Beaumelle, my daughter.

(IV.iv.183-193)

²³Cited by Reese 40.

Clearly Rochfort is torn between his role as judge and the affections of a father much as Abraham was torn between duty to God and paternal affection for Isaac. Railing at Charalois for his lack of compassion, Rochfort sounds like a more agitated Abraham complaining to God about the unnecessary test:

[C]ould not one good thought rise up,
To tell you that she was my ages comfort,
Begot by a weake man, and borne a woman,
And could not therefore, but partake of frailty?
Or wherefore did not thankfulness step forth,
To urge my many merits, which I may
Object unto you, since you prove ungratefull,
Flinty-hearted Charaloys?

(IV.iv.195-202)

Rochfort is distraught at having been caught between conflicting duties--his obligation to enforce justice and his paternal duties of protection and affection. In coming down on the side of justice and thereby bringing about his daughter's death, he, as he says, "[b]roke all the tyes of nature . . . " (IV.iv.186). It is significant to note that in none of the medieval plays is Abraham called "unnatural" for consenting to God's command. Only in the Dublin version is there any suggestion that Abraham should not have sacrificed Isaac, and in that version it is Sarah who, with a mother's devotion, asks, "Alas, where was your mynde?" (l. 345). It is significant that in several of the Renaissance plays the parents who kill their children are called "unnatural." In R. B.'s Apus and Virginia Apus calls Virginius, "Oh curst and cruell cankerd churle, oh carll unnaturall" (l. 1048). Tamburlaine's murder of Calyphas evokes from observers shock at what they call "this thy barbarous damned tyranny" (IV.i.139). Indeed, in many of the Renaissance plays the parents' killing of children is attributed to tyranny or tyrannical behavior. The clear implication on both social and political levels is that tyranny leads to unnatural acts. To the medieval mind God, in commanding

Abraham to sacrifice Isaac, would not have been perceived as a tyrant, but the Renaissance perspective may have been closer to that controversial notion. Clearly, though, the issue of greatest concern to the Renaissance mind was the exercise of humanistic principles on social and political levels, and, while the Renaissance in England brought forth powerful and admired leaders, there was nonetheless a great fear of tyrants who might place their subjects in the difficult position of having to choose between obedience to a ruler and performing unjust or unnatural acts.

Of course, when the tyrannical king is also a father, the child who disobeys or displeases him is guilty of a double disobedience. Imogen, Cordelia, and Calyphas put themselves in such jeopardy by following their own hearts or values rather than their fathers'. Beaumelle is in a comparable situation when she willfully breaks a law which brings on Rochfort not only paternal grief but the necessity of upholding the law as his position of judge requires. In these dramatic situations the wayward children (though in several instances the playwrights' sympathies are with them) are like the briefly reluctant Isaacs who risk not only parental but also divine displeasure.

Even more compelling, however, are the Renaissance plays which more closely parallel the cycle plays by focussing on the dilemma of a father who is forced to choose between the duty he owes to a ruler (who in the Renaissance plays is generally a tyrant) and the love and compassion he naturally feels for his child. Rochfort in The Fatal Dowry is a variation on this dilemma as he serves not a human ruler but a compelling abstraction, Justice. Praxaspes in Cambyzes and Virginius in the two versions of Aprius and Virginia are forced to sacrifice their children due to the whims and machinations of clearly evil rulers.

Perhaps the most interesting and detailed examination of a father's feelings and motivations when faced with such a dilemma is found in Webster's Appius and Virginia in which Virginius, after killing Virginia, is faced with considerable condemnation and is afforded several opportunities to explain his actions. He reveals, too, his own inner turmoil which is only slightly abated by his confidence that he was right to do as he did. When he kills Virginia, his action is met with cries of "O horrid act!" (IV.i.348), and Appius's remark, "Madness and rage/ Are still th' Attendants of old doting age" (IV.i.355-56). Much aggrieved by his deed and the circumstances surrounding it,

Virginius tells his soldiers, "I have plaid the Parricide,/ Kill'd mine own child--" (IV.ii.122-23).

When Minutius calls him "[m]ost wretched villain!" (IV.ii.133), he explains the circumstances:

Alas, might I have kept her chaste and free,
This life so oft ingag'd for ingrateful Rome,
Lay in her bosom. But when I saw her pull'd
By Appius's Lictors to be claim'd a slave,
And drag'd unto a publick Sessions-house,
Divorc'd from her fore-Spousals with Icilius,
A noble youth, and made a bond-woman,
Inforc'd by violence from her fathers armes
To be a Prostitute and Paramour
To the rude twinings of a lecherous Judge;
Then, then, O loving Souldiers, (I'l not deny it)
For 'twas mine honor, my paternal pity,
And the sole act, for which I love my life . . .
Then lustful Appius, he that sways the Land,
Slew poor Virginia by this fathers hand.

(IV.ii.142-156)

His explanation is met with cries of "O villain Appius" (IV.ii. 157), "O noble Virginius" (IV.ii.158),
"Appius is the Parricide" (IV.ii 162), and "Virginius guiltless of his daughter's death" (IV.ii.163).

Virginius is proclaimed a general, but this honor does not mitigate his despair:

What's honor unto me, a weak old man,
Weary of life, and covetous of a grave?
I am a dead man now Virginia lives not--
The self same hand that dar'd to save from shame
A child, dares in the father act the same.

(IV.ii.184-188)

He is prevented from killing himself, but his grief is not over. His action is condemned and challenged by the grieving Icilius who in Virginia's death lost a bride. Icilius paints a vividly brutal picture of the unnaturalness of Virginius's actions:

Old man, thou hast shewed thy self a noble Roman,
But an unnatural Father; thou hast turned
My Bridal to a Funeral. What diuel
Did arme thy fury with the Lions paw,
The Dragons taile, with the Bulls double horne,
The Cormorants beak, the Cockatrices eyes,
The Scorpions teeth? and all these by a father
To be imployed upon his innocent child!

(V.i.110-117)

Virginius responds:

Young man, I love thy true description;
I am happy now, that one beside my selfe,
Doth teach me for this act. Yet were I pleased,
I cou'd approve the deed most Just and noble;
And, sure, posterity, which truly renders
To each man his desert, shal praise me for't.

(V.i.118-123)

Icilius asserts that in fact the deed "'twas unnatural and damnable" (V.i.124), but Virginius reiterates the compelling cause of honor:

You are a Roman Knight.
What was your oath when you receiv'd your Knighthood?
A parcel of it is, as I remember,
Rather to die with honour, then to live
In servitude. Had my poor girle been ravish'd,

In her dishonour, and in my sad griefe,
Your love and pity quickly had ta'ne end.

(V.i.126-132)

Webster's play highlights the difficulties a tyrannical ruler can pose to an honorable and dutiful subject. Another Renaissance play, earlier than Webster's, examines the problems an unwise ruler can bring to a kingdom. Sackville and Norton's Gorboduc, or Ferrex and Porrex (1561) also employs the circumstances of a parent's killing of a child to explore how "unnatural" governing practices can lead to horrendous effects.

As the play opens, it is revealed that King Gorboduc, in violation of the principle of primogeniture, has divided his land between his two sons, Ferrex and Porrex. His queen, Videna, condemns the irregularity of his action: "So great a wrong and so unjust despite/ Without all cause against all course of kind!"²⁴ Ferrex does not understand why he has been cut off so, but Videna finds an explanation in her love for her firstborn son:

Therefore the more unkind to thee and me.
For, knowing well, my son, the tender love
That I have ever borne and bear to thee,
He, grieved thereat, is not content alone
To spoil me of thy sight, my chiefest joy,
But thee of thy birthright and heritage,
Causeless, unkindly, and in wrongful wise,
Against all law and right, he will bereave.

(I.i.21-28)

²⁴Thomas Sackville and Thomas Norton, Gorboduc, or Ferrex and Porrex, ed. Irby B. Cauthen, Jr., Regents Drama Series (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1970) I.i.10-11. Subsequent references to this play are to this edition and will be followed in the text by the appropriate act, scene and line citations.

Videna proclaims her love for Ferrex much as the medieval Abrahams proclaim love for the Isaacs, and the complaints she registers against Gorboduc could have been spoken by Abraham about God concerning the promises made about Isaac which God's command to sacrifice Isaac seems to rescind.

The wise Philander, counsel to Gorboduc, points out to the king the folly of dividing the kingdom, and though he speaks in terms of family relations, the implications for the kingdom are clear: "When fathers cease to know that they should rule,/ The children cease to know they should obey" (I.i.207-208). Philander's fears are realized when Porrex murders Ferrex, and Gorboduc responds to the horrible news with a plea to the gods for vengeance: "O heavens, send down the flames of your revenge!/ Destroy, I say, with flash of wreakful fire/ The traitor son and then the wretched sire!" (III.i.165-167).

The fourth act begins with a dumb show during which the Furies are seen driving before them kings and queens who "unnaturally had slain their own children"--Tantalus, Medea, Athamas, Ino, Cambyses, and Althea (V. Prelude). The action opens with Videna lamenting Ferrex's death in terms much like those employed by the medieval Abrahams who lament over the impending death of Isaac: "O my beloved son! O my sweet child!/ My dear Ferrex, my joy, my life's delight!" (IV.i.23-24). In a rage of grief she renounces Porrex as a murderer and vows revenge. Gorboduc, grieved but more rational than Videna, explains to Porrex the dilemma, pointing out how unnatural actions breed more unnatural actions:

As thou hast done by vile and wretched deed
In cruel murder of thy brother's life,
Our present hand could stay no longer time,
But straight should bathe this blade in blood of thee
As just revenge of thy detested crime.
No; we should not offend the law of kind
If now this sword of ours did slay thee here;
For thou hast murdered him, whose heinous death

Even nature's force doth move us to revenge
By blood again; and justice forceth us
To measure, death for death, thy due desert.
Yet since thou art our child, and sith as yet
In this hard case what word thou canst allege
For thy defense by us hath not been heard,
We are content to stay our will for that
Which justice bids us presently to work

(IV.ii.17-32)

After hearing Porrex's defense Gorbodoc decides instead to banish his "Accursed child" (IV.ii.142).

When Marcella enters with the news that Videna has slain Porrex, the queen's lady highlights the unnaturalness of the act:

Oh, where is ruth, or where is pity now?
Whither is gentle heart and mercy fled?
Are they exiled out of our stony breasts,
Never to make return? Is all the world
Drowned in blood and sunk in cruelty?
If not in women mercy may be found,
If not, alas, within the mother's breast
To her own child, to her own flesh and blood,
If ruth be banished thence, if pity there
May have no place, if there no gentle heart
Do live and dwell, where should we seek it then?

(IV.ii.166-176)

Marcella goes on to give tragic details: Porrex cried out to his mother for aid even though his mother struck the death blow. The scene Marcella's words recreate suggest a cruel perversion of

the scene of Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac. She goes on to ask the penetrating question, "Should nature yet consent to slay her son?/ O mother, thou to murder thus thy child!" (IV.ii.244-245).

The fifth act begins with the recounting of the deaths of Gorboduc and Videna at their subjects' hands. Clotyn's relation of the details makes clear the relationship between unwise rule, tyranny, and unnatural acts both within the family and within the state:

Did ever age bring forth such tyrants' hearts?
The brother hath bereft the brother's life;
The mother, she hath dyed her cruel hands
In blood of her own son; and now at last
The people, lo, forgetting truth and love,
Contemning quite both law and loyal heart,
Even they have slain their sovereign lord and queen.

(V.i.1-7)

The play concludes with considerable moralizing by various speakers, summarized by Eubulus in his concluding remarks: "This, this ensues when noble men do fail/ In loyal troth, and subjects will be kings" (V.ii.244-245). In Gorboduc, then, the circumstances of a parent's killing of a child are altered considerably from the popular medieval paradigm of Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac, and those altered circumstances are employed to show not only the necessity of obedience but also the obligation of fathers and kings to rule wisely. Abraham's painful but noble and necessary sacrifice to God who gave him Isaac differs markedly from the murder of a child motivated by the tyrannical or unwise rule of a king who, though he may be considered God-ordained, is nonetheless ungodly or unjust in his rule.

This variety of ideas on obedience--from filial duty to political obligation--can be found reflected in English drama throughout the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. In several plays which deal with filial obedience or man's obedience to a higher power one can perceive changing treatments of the themes of filial and religious obedience. While the Genesis 22 episode was paradigmatic of both themes during the medieval era, as the cycle plays reflect, during the

Renaissance those themes underwent alterations in treatment due to the variety of social, religious, political, and economic forces shaping the age as a whole. Nonetheless, one can perceive that the powerful and poignant story of Abraham and Isaac and the whole notion of child sacrifice it embodies form a subdued but present backdrop for Renaissance examinations of the circumstances of a parent's killing of a child.

CHAPTER IV

SACRIFICE AS SALVATION: CHANGING FOCUS

The broad anthropological view of sacrifice sheds some light on the etiology of sacrifice as a human religious institution. As René Girard remarks in Violence and the Sacred,

In many rituals the sacrificial act assumes two opposing aspects, appearing at times as a sacred obligation to be neglected at great peril, at other times as a sort of criminal activity entailing perils of equal gravity. . . . If sacrifice resembles criminal violence, we may say there is, inversely, hardly any form of violence that cannot be described in terms of sacrifice (1)

He goes on to note the communal or societal function of sacrifice: "[T]here is a common denominator that determines the efficacy of all sacrifices This common denominator is internal violence--all dissensions, rivalries, jealousies, and quarrels within the community that the sacrifices are designed to suppress. The purpose of the sacrifice is to restore harmony to the community, to reinforce the social fabric" (Girard 8). "The sacrificial process," he notes, "prevents the spread of violence by keeping vengeance in check" (18). The way that vengeance is kept in check is by the destruction of a single individual (human or animal) as a scapegoat. Girard states that

any community that has fallen prey to violence or has been stricken by some overwhelming catastrophe hurls itself blindly into the search for a scapegoat. Its members instinctively seek an immediate and violent cure for the onslaught of unbearable violence and strive desperately to convince themselves that all their ills are the fault of a lone individual who can be easily disposed of. (79-80)

The function of religion, from the anthropological perspective, is that "it humanizes violence; it protects man from his own violence by taking it out of his hands, transforming it into a transcendent and ever-present danger to be kept in check by the appropriate rites appropriately observed and by a modest and prudent demeanor" (Girard 134).

Historically, from Jewish and Christian perspectives, sacrifice has been considered a primary vehicle by which personal and corporate salvation are secured from God. The Genesis 22 episode, known as the Akedah in the Jewish tradition, has historically been held in high regard because of its position as one of the earliest and probably the most profound "sacrifice" made to God by man. The episode became linked with the Pasch or Passover in sacrificial soteriology celebrating, among other things, the salvation of the firstborn sons of the Israelites just as Abraham's son had been ultimately spared from death. In Christian tradition, as has already been examined, the episode came to be seen, among other things, as a prefiguration of the Crucifixion in which God, like Abraham, was willing to sacrifice His Son. The medieval English Christian audience valued the Genesis 22 story for both its demonstration of obedience and its significant parallels with the Crucifixion story--the concept of personal sacrifice endured to secure salvation and promise. The typological notions which informed the Christian perspective on Genesis 22 ultimately shaped to a considerable extent the medieval plays on the subject. The Chester Expositor actually states the typological dimension:

This deede yee seene done here in this place,
in example of Jesus done yt was,
that for to wynne mankinde grace
was sacrifcyed one the roode.

By Abraham I may understand
the Father of heaven that cann fonde
with his Sonnes blood to breake that bonde
that the dyvell had brought us to.

By Isaack understande I maye
Jesus that was obedyent aye,
his Fathers will to worke alwaye
his death to confounde.

(ll. 464-475)

With the rise of Protestantism and its greater value placed on faith rather than works, the medieval Catholic practices akin to ritualized sacrifices--penance, for example--declined along with Catholicism in general in countries like England which became strongly Protestant. While in the Catholic tradition Christ was seen as the mediator between God and man, personal sacrifice--both tangible and spiritual--was seen as a necessary part of salvation. Protestantism held a diminished view of personal sacrifice--particularly material sacrifice--as necessary to salvation, seeing the grace of God as demonstrated in the Crucifixion to be the only source of salvation. Eventually these changing religious notions began to be reflected in the Renaissance drama. Numerous plays deal with a parent's killing of a child, but in none of them is the killing a ritualized religious sacrifice to God to effect salvation. In certain plays, however, the death of the child effects some sort of salvation, though that salvation is not religious. Sackville and Norton's Gorboduc, Shakespeare's Henry IV, Part 1, King Lear, Coriolanus, The Winter's Tale, and Cymbeline all present a character who is a scapegoat whose death is in some measure brought about by his or her parent for the purpose of saving, directly or indirectly, the parent's pride, the parent's life, or the society as a whole. Far from the concept of sacrifice as a means of securing from God the salvation of man's immortal soul, "sacrifice" in Renaissance drama reflects more secular notions of the salvation of earthly existence and human institutions.

While secularization of the concept of sacrifice for salvation is due in large measure to the rise of Protestantism, there are two other factors which may be seen as possible contributors to that secularization. First is the rediscovery of classical texts and the renewed appreciation of the humanistic classical values it engendered. From writings of ancient Greece and Rome came stories of patriotic valor and martial successes. In the story of Agamemnon's sacrifice of Iphigenia to the

gods to receive wind to sail to Troy, the Elizabethan audience found a classical exemplum of sacrifice to achieve political goals. Throughout classical texts the Renaissance reader could perceive the high esteem in which the State was held, esteem which called forth amazing deeds of heroism, bravery, and sacrifice.

Another factor which may have contributed to the secularization of sacrifice and salvation--and which probably has no small connection to the revival of classical concepts--is the rise of nationalism England experienced under the Tudors, particularly Elizabeth. While there were clearly some problems and difficulties facing England during and after Elizabeth's reign, it is nonetheless true that in many ways the latter half of the sixteenth century in England, with the fortunate defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588, was generally a prosperous and optimistic time. English power on the seas increased; overseas trade expanded; colonization began. Englishmen had many reasons to be proud of themselves and their country. And their monarch proved herself equal to the many political problems which naturally came to an unmarried woman who held a throne. With such increasing nationalism, however, came a concern for the continuation of strong, legitimate monarchy. The Wars of the Roses were still in memory with the perturbing issues of regicide and legitimate claimancy they involved. The kingship was for many reasons a concern for Englishmen which naturally became reflected in the drama.

In Sackville and Norton's Gorboduc, Porrex, the younger son, kills Ferrex, the older, in a violation not only of the natural law of brotherly love but also in violation of the sanction against killing a king or heir apparent. It is Gorboduc's violation of the law of primogeniture that brings this real threat to his kingdom, for in dividing his realm between his sons rather than giving all to Ferrex Gorboduc opens the way for Porrex's greed and suspicion and, consequently, Porrex's murder of Ferrex. Porrex, then, is established as a threat to the order of the kingdom, so, in a sense, he must be killed to restore the peace and rightness of society. Videna's murder of her son Porrex can thus be seen not only as a mother's revenge but also as a scapegoat offering necessary to preserve the kingdom. But the unnaturalness of Gorboduc's action in dividing his kingdom--action which precipitated the problems--and Videna's unnatural action in killing her own son also must be purged

from the kingdom, so Gorboduc and his queen are themselves made scapegoat offerings to save the kingdom. The deaths of the royal family, and Videna's murder of Porrex in particular, are not sacrifices made to a deity but are in some sense scapegoat offerings made to purge the society of violent, disorderly and unnatural elements.

While Videna kills Porrex for revenge and to rid the kingdom of his disruptive element, Hotspur in Shakespeare's Henry IV, Part 1, is sent out virtually alone by his father Northumberland and his uncle Worcester to lead a hopeless rebellion against the king. Northumberland knowingly sends his son to certain defeat and death, and Hotspur's death is atonement for the rebellion fomented against the order of the realm and the sovereignty of the crown. Hotspur is, in effect, a scapegoat offering made by his father and uncle and "required" by the kingdom to atone for their treasonous disruption of the peace.

The first scene of the play establishes the perfection of Hotspur's manhood, in effect setting him up as the perfect lamb--the best of the flock--to be offered as sacrifice. The king himself is envious

that my Lord Northumberland
Should be the father to so blest a son;
A son who is the theme of honour's tongue,
Amongst a grove the very straightest plant,
Who is sweet Fortune's minion and her pride. . . .¹

The king goes on to remark on the affront given him by Hotspur in returning to the king only one of the prisoners he requested. The Earl of Westmoreland responds that Hotspur's uncle has set the young man against the king:

This is his uncle's teaching, this is Worcester,
Malevolent to you in all aspects,

¹William Shakespeare, The First Part of King Henry IV, ed. A. R. Humphreys, 6th ed., The Arden Edition of the Works of William Shakespeare (London: Methuen, 1961) I.i.78-82. Subsequent references to this play are to this edition and will be followed in the text by the appropriate act, scene, and line citations.

Which makes him prune himself, and bristle up
The crest of youth against your dignity.

(I.i.95-98)

Hotspur, his father Northumberland, and his uncle Worcester plot against the king--what Hotspur calls "a noble plot"--whom they believe is not the rightful possessor of the crown. They plan a convergence with Owen Glendower and Lord Mortimer to overthrow the king. Just as that convergence is scheduled to occur, however, the leading pieces drop out one by one. Northumberland is taken ill and sends a letter to Hotspur which the young man digests thus:

He writes me here that inward sickness,
And that his friends by deputation could not
So soon be drawn, nor did he think it meet
To lay so dangerous and dear a trust
On any soul remov'd but on his own.
Yet doth he give us bold advertisement
That with our small conjunction we should on
To see how fortune is dispos'd to us;
For, as he writes, there is no quailing now,
Because the King is certainly possess'd
Of all our purposes.

(IV.i.31-41)

One wonders at the earl's "inward sickness," his inability and unwillingness to raise friends to help, and yet his encouragement to Hotspur to continue because of the seeming inevitability of the conflict. Then Hotspur receives news that Glendower "cannot draw his power this fourteen days" (IV.i.126). Despite these blows Hotspur tries to keep spirits up with a reminder of how great their honor will be with fewer to share it. As time for the conflict draws on the rebels learn that Mortimer, too, will fail them, leaving their ranks further diminished.

In addition to the almost systematic reduction in the ranks of the rebels, one crucial opportunity to reduce the severity of the conflict arises and, unknown to Hotspur, is unilaterally rejected by his uncle Worcester. Prince Hal offers to fight in single combat with Hotspur, an offer which the King approves and presents to Worcester with a promise of amnesty:

We love our people well, even those we love
That are misled upon your cousin's part,
And will they take the offer of our grace,
Both he, and they, and you, yea, every man
Shall be my friend again and I'll be his.

(V.i.104-108)

Worcester, however, does not inform Hotspur of the king's generous offer. He believes the king will forgive Hotspur's treason because of Hotspur's youth, but he doubts that the king will truly forgive the older men like Northumberland and himself. When Vernon argues that Hotspur should be made aware of the offer, Worcester replies,

Then are we all undone.

It is not possible, it cannot be,
The King should keep his word in loving us;
He will suspect us still, and find a time
To punish this offence in other faults:
Supposition all our lives shall be stuck full of eyes,
For treason is but trusted like the fox,
Who, never so tame, so cherish'd and lock'd up,
Will have a wild trick of his ancestors.
Look how we can, or sad or merrily,
Interpretation will misquote our looks,
And we shall feed like oxen at a stall,
The better cherish'd still the nearer death.

My nephew's trespass may be well forgot,
 It hath the excuse of youth and heat of blood,
 And an adopted name of privilege--
 A hare-brain'd Hotspur, govern'd by a spleen:
 All his offences live upon my head
 And on his father's. We did train him on,
 And, his corruption being ta'en from us,
 We as the spring of all shall pay for all.
 Therefore, good cousin, let not Harry know
 In any case the offer of the King.

(V.ii.3-25)

Worcester does tell Hotspur of Hal's challenge to single combat, but he neglects to tell Hotspur of the king's offer of amnesty for the rest--a serious and duplicitous omission given Hotspur's sentiments: "O, would the quarrel lay upon our heads,/ And that no man might draw short breath today/ But I and Harry Monmouth!" (V.ii.47-49). Clearly, then, Worcester and, in effect, Northumberland send Hotspur out to certain death. He is accompanied by only a fraction of the manpower the rebels had originally intended, and this fact, coupled with his father's absence and his uncle's deception, make Hotspur a scapegoat offering--a substitute for the older men who had actually fomented the rebellion. From a broader perspective Hotspur presents a threat to the society as a whole and must therefore be eliminated to preserve the society. Though incited to rebellion by his father and uncle, he presents, by his honorable reputation and his valor, an all-too-attractive picture of treason. As Donald A. Stauffer points out, "Hotspur represents an idealism centered on manly honor and family loyalty. He is a danger to the state because he cannot think in terms of the state, but merely in the restricted modes, however warm and noble they may be, of personal glory" (94). Since Hotspur presents such a threat to society, his death can be seen as a necessary sacrifice to atone for the threat he poses to the order of the society.

In three other Shakespearean plays the concept of the scapegoat offering, while not a major theme, is nonetheless apparent, and examination of these plays from this perspective sheds some interesting and perhaps useful light on the relationships and circumstances within the plays. In The Winter's Tale, King Lear, and Cymbeline daughters are cast off by kingly fathers--made, in effect, scapegoat offerings for the threat the fathers perceive them to be to their rules and their realms.

In The Winter's Tale Leontes, King of Sicilia, believes his wife, Hermione, has been unfaithful to him with his friend Polixenes, King of Bohemia. When Hermione produces a baby daughter, Perdita, Leontes rejects the child: "This brat is none of mine."² Since Leontes believes Perdita to be a bastard, she is consequently a threat to his throne and his kingdom and must be eradicated. To eliminate "[a] nest of traitors" (II.iii.81) he fears is around him, he orders his wife and child committed to the fire. Paulina points out Leontes's error in believing himself deceived and betrayed:

It is an heretic that makes the fire,
Not she which burns in 't. I'll not call you tyrant;
But this most cruel usage of your queen--
Not able to produce more accusation
Than your own weak-hing'd fancy--something savours
Of tyranny, and will ignoble make you,
Yea, scandalous to the world.

(II.iii.114-120)

Here Paulina functions as an almost choric figure, pointing out to Leontes that he, not his wife or daughter, represents the greatest threat to his authority and to the peace, order and preservation of the realm. She in effect points out that genuine misjudgment and near tyranny are more dangerous

²William Shakespeare, The Winter's Tale, ed. J. H. P. Pafford, 4th ed., The Arden of the Works of William Shakespeare (London: Methuen, 1963) II.iii.92. Subsequent references to this play are to this edition and will be followed in the text by the appropriate act, scene, and line citations.

than assumed bastardy. But Leontes persists in his error, and the infant Perdita is cast off. Leontes confronts Antigonus, his counsellor and Paulina's husband, and charges him to perform the awful deed:

Thou, traitor, hast set on thy wife to this.
My child? away with 't! Even thou, that hast
A heart so tender o'er it, take it hence
And see it instantly consum'd with fire;
Even thou, and none but thou. Take it up straight:
Within this hour bring me word 'tis done,
And by good testimony, or I'll seize thy life,
With what thou else call'st thine. If thou refuse
And wilt encounter with my wrath, say so;
The bastard brains with these my proper hands
Shall I dash out. Go, take it to the fire. . . .

(II.iii.130-140)

Though his other counsellors try to help him see correctly, Leontes persists: "Shall I live on to see this bastard kneel/ And call me father? better burn it now/ Than curse it then" (II.iii.154-156). Antigonus proclaims Perdita's innocence: "I'll pawn the little blood which I have left/ To save the innocent" (II.iii.165-166). Leontes softens and agrees to give the child a chance to live, though he does order her abandoned. He instructs Antigonus:

We enjoin thee,
As thou art liege-man to us, that thou carry
This female bastard hence, and that thou bear it
To some remote and desert place, quite out
Of our dominions; and that there thou leave it,
(Without more mercy) to its own protection
And favour of the climate. As by strange fortune

It came to us, I do in justice charge thee,
On thy soul's peril and thy body's torture,
That thou commend it strangely to some place
Where chance may nurse or end it.

(II.iii.172-182)

Antigonus reluctantly carries out these orders, leaving the innocent baby as a virtual sacrifice, a scapegoat offering, not to the order of society (as Leontes supposes) but to Leontes's own pride and misjudgment.

In King Lear Shakespeare presents another innocent daughter cast off by her father for what he perceives to be her affront to his desire and his authority. Lear charges his daughters to proclaim their love for him so that he can determine "[w]hich of you . . . doth love us most?/ That we our largest bounty may extend/ Where nature doth with merit challenge" (I.i.51-53). Despite her sisters' overblown protestations of affection, Cordelia states an unextravagant but sincere affection:

Good my lord,
You have begot me, bred me, lov'd me: I
Return those duties back as are right fit,
Obey you, love you, and most honour you.
Why have my sisters husbands, if they say
They love you all? Haply, when I shall wed,
That lord whose hand must take my plight shall carry
Half my love with him, half my care and duty:
Sure I shall never marry like my sisters,
To love my father all.

(I.i.95-104)

Instead of seeing the appropriateness and sincerity of her sentiments, Lear, in his blinding pride, sees her as being “untender,” prideful, and even vaguely threatening to his authority and casts her off:

[T]hy truth, then, be thy dower:
For, by the sacred radiance of the sun,
The mysteries of Hecate and the night,
By all the operation of the orbs
From whom we do exist and cease to be,
Here I disclaim all my paternal care,
Propinquity and property of blood,
And as a stranger to my heart and me
Hold thee from this for ever. The barbarous Scythian,
Or he that makes his generation messes
To gorge his appetite, shall to my bosom
Be as well neighbour'd, pitied, and reliev'd,
As thou my sometime daughter.

(I.i.108-120)

This awful image of a parent devouring his offspring suggests that Lear's rejection of Cordelia means her virtual death to him and suggests that he is leaving her to her fate whatever it may be. Ironically, though, it also reflects on the horror of his injustice to her. Kent, a loyal friend, points out Lear's folly:

What would'st thou do, old man?
Think'st thou that duty shall have dread to speak
When power to flattery bows? To plainness honour's bound
When majesty falls to folly. Reserve thy state;
And, in thy best consideration, check
This hideous rashness: answer my life my judgment,

Thy youngest daughter does not love thee least;
Nor are those empty-hearted whose low sounds
Reverb no hollowness.

(I.i.146-154)

But Lear rejects this wisdom and casts Kent off as well. While Cordelia and Kent merely check Lear's pride with their honest love and loyalty, Lear perceives them as threatening his position, power, and authority. Lear in effect sacrifices Cordelia for what he perceives to be her threat to his honor and authority; however, in the end, when she is literally killed in the chaos caused by her sisters she becomes in one sense a scapegoat offering for Lear or a sacrificial victim to the destruction Lear himself brings on his kingdom through his pride and error.

While Perdita and Cordelia are mistakenly perceived by their fathers as being threats to their kingdoms, in yet another of Shakespeare's plays, Cymbeline, a daughter's actual disobedience encourages her father's wrath, but the audience's sympathy is clearly intended to be with the daughter. As the play opens Imogen, who has married "a poor but worthy gentleman" (I.i.7) without the consent of her king and father Cymbeline, is imprisoned and her husband Posthumus under sentence of banishment. Cymbeline, catching Imogen and her husband in a farewell conversation, rebukes her: "O disloyal thing,/ That shouldst repair my youth, thou heap'st/ A year's age on me" (I.ii.62-64). Defiant in her confidence that her duty to her husband takes precedence over her duty to her father, she responds,

I beseech you sir,
Harm not yourself with your vexation,
I am senseless of your wrath; a touch more rare
Subdues all pangs, all fears.

(I.ii.64-67)

Her father can only gasp, "Past grace? obedience?" (I.ii.67). He reminds her that he had planned for her to marry Cloten, the detestable son of Cymbeline's devious and hateful queen. Imogen responds, "I chose an eagle,/ And did avoid a puttock" (I.ii.70-71). Cymbeline disagrees: "Thou

took'st a beggar, wouldst have made my throne/ A seat for baseness" (I.ii.72). In Cymbeline's eyes Imogen is guilty of disobedience to her father and to her king and, as heir, of debasing the throne by marrying a man he considers unsuitable to share the throne. On both counts Imogen is virtually guilty of treason and thereby constitutes a threat to the king and to his realm. Cymbeline condemns her to "languish/ A drop of blood a day, and being aged/ Die of this folly!" (I.ii.87-89). From Cymbeline's perspective Imogen is a threat to his authority and her marriage a threat to the dignity of his throne. He wishes her dead as punishment for her crimes, and yet underlying this situation is the related notion of Imogen as sacrifice necessary for the preservation of proper order and authority.

In Henry IV, Part I Hotspur is sacrificed on one level to save his uncle and father and on another level to preserve the integrity of the state. In The Winter's Tale, King Lear, and Cymbeline, the father kings in effect sacrifice their daughters because they believe their daughters to be threats to their authority and hence to their kingdoms. In each of these plays, however, the theme of a parent's bringing about the death of a child is arguably only a sidelight and not a major issue. In another of Shakespeare's plays, however, this theme plays a more powerful if not central role in the drama. In Coriolanus, Volumnia in effect sacrifices her son Coriolanus by encouraging him to sacrifice himself in order that her beloved Rome can be spared. She moves him to abandon his march on Rome with the Volscians, knowing that such action will bring about his death.

As with several of his plays, Shakespeare found inspiration for Coriolanus from Plutarch, specifically Plutarch's Life of Coriolanus which he knew in Sir Thomas North's translation. In this as well as other classical texts Elizabethan Englishmen found examples of patriotism and love of country which fed their own burgeoning national pride. In Volumnia and Coriolanus English men and women saw the profound sacrifices which the ancients were willing to make for their countries, sacrifices which, in their own tradition, had been made primarily for faith, family, or liege but not especially for the concept of state.

Another of the major focal points of Shakespeare's play is the relationship between mother and son--Volumnia and Coriolanus. As William Allan Neilson and Charles Jarvis Hill point out in

the introduction to their edition of the play, Volumnia "is in a real sense responsible for the destiny of her son. He is bone of her bone and flesh of her flesh; she has directed his spirit and shaped his ideals, and she cherishes him as a projection of herself" (1288). Her pride and love for him are bound up in the honor she has urged him to win, as she reveals to son's wife:

When yet he was but tender-bodied, and the only son of my womb;
when youth with comeliness plucked all gaze his way; when for a day
of kings' entreaties a mother should not sell him an hour from her
beholding; I, considering how honour would become such a
person--that it was no better than picture-like to hang by th' wall, if
renown made it not stir--was pleased to let him seek danger where he
was like to find fame. To a cruel war I sent him, from whence he
returned, his brows bound with oak. I tell thee, daughter, I sprang not
more in joy at first hearing he was a man-child, than now in first seeing
he had proved himself a man.³

This statement reveals her pride in his manly accomplishments as well as her confidence in her ability to shape and direct him. She even says to him, "Thou art my warrior:/ I help to frame thee" (V.iii.62-63). She even has the power to convince him to swallow his pride and ask for the citizens' support in his quest for the consulship. He is initially adamantly against bending his pride to submit to the mob:

I will not do't,
Lest I surcease to honour mine own truth,
And by my body's action teach my mind
A most inherent baseness.

(III.ii.120-123)

³William Shakespeare, *Coriolanus*, ed. Philip Brockbank, The Arden Edition of the Works of William Shakespeare (London: Methuen, 1976) I.iii.5-8. Subsequent references to this play are to this edition and will be followed in the text by the appropriate act, scene, and line citations.

Volumnia responds:

At thy choice then:

To beg of thee it is my more dishonour
Than thou of them. Come all to ruin; let
Thy mother rather feel thy pride than fear
Thy dangerous stoutness, for I mock at death
With as big a heart as thou. Do as thou list.
Thy valiantness was mine, thou suck'st it from me,
But owe thy pride thyself.

(III.ii.123-130)

Her chiding is successful--he is humbled by his mother into flattering the crowd:

Pray be content.

Mother, I am going to the market-place:
Chide me no more. I'll mountebank their loves,
Cog their hearts from them, and come home belov'd
Of all the trades in Rome. Look, I am going.
Commend me to my wife. I'll return consul,
Or never trust to what my tongue can do
I' th' way of flattery further.

(III.ii.130-137)

But Volumnia is wrong when she says she is responsible for her son's valor and not his pride. She is in fact the author of both. She, however, is more pragmatic than he--she finds it acceptable to compromise pride if such action is necessary to attain greater honor. Coriolanus cannot bend his pride, even for the honor of a consulship, when the plebians insult his honor by suggesting that he

seeks "a power tyrannical" and that he is consequently a traitor (III.iii.65). He responds with disdainful fury:

Let them pronounce the steep Tarpeian death,
Vagabond exile, flaying, pent to linger
But with a grain a day, I would not buy
Their mercy at the price of one fair word,
Nor check my courage for what they can give,
To have 't with saying 'Good Morrow'.

(III.iii.88-93)

When he is banished, in his arrogance he "banishes" Rome in a prideful, venomous tirade:

You common cry of curs! whose breath I hate
As reek o' th' rotten fens, whose loves I prize
As the dead carcasses of unburied men
That do corrupt my air: I banish you!
And here remain with your uncertainty!
Let every feeble rumour shake your hearts!
Your enemies, with nodding of their plumes,
Fan you into despair! Have the power still
To banish your defenders, till at length
Your ignorance--which finds not till it feels,
Making not reservation of yourselves,
Still your own foes--deliver you as most
Abated captives to some nation
That won you without blows! Despising,
For you the city, thus I turn my back.
There is a world elsewhere!

(III.iii.120-135)

Coriolanus joins with the Volscians who march on Rome, believing he can deny all bonds with his loved ones and see his home and country overrun with his assistance. In this thinking he differs from Volumnia, whose sense of honor runs in a different direction. As Neilson and Hill point out,

more than family and more than class, she loves her country, and when her son has shamed them all, she can abase her spirit in a last effort to save Rome. In her pleading with her son it is to his honor, not his pity, that she appeals; her personal feelings are consumed in her country's peril. (1288)

Coriolanus, though he has vowed that he will "never/ Be such a gosling to obey instinct, but stand/ As if a man were author of himself/ And knew no other kin" (V.iii.34-37), ultimately relents not for Rome or for honor but because his mother kneels and begs before him. In relenting, however, Coriolanus sees all too clearly that he will forfeit his life. He says to Volumnia,

O mother, mother!

What have you done? Behold, the heavens do ope,
The gods look down, and this unnatural scene
They laugh at. O my mother, mother! O!
You have won a happy victory to Rome;
But for your son, believe it, O, believe it,
Most dangerously you have with him prevail'd,
If not most mortal to him. But let it come.

(V.iii.182-189)

Volumnia's silence shows that she knows all too well what this "unnatural scene" means. She realizes that she has in effect done the most unnatural thing a mother can ever do--she has sacrificed her child. Further, the sacrifice is not a religious one but a secular one. Coriolanus dies not to please or appease any god or secure immortal salvation but to insure the temporal salvation of a human institution--the city of Rome.

When one considers, then, the Renaissance perspective on child sacrifice as reflected in the drama, one perceives ideas at work which differ considerably from the medieval dramatic paradigm of Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac. The salvation effected by the Renaissance sacrifices is not so much individual but corporate, and the god served or appeased is not a traditional religious figure but the "god" of human institutions such as order, the state, society. While the concept of the realm and its stability was important to medieval Englishmen, the awesome authority of the Roman Catholic Church, while frequently intimately connected with the state, nonetheless held ultimate sway over most Englishmen by reminding them of the necessity to look to their immortal souls. Through the age commonly considered the Renaissance the state and the church became merged in a different manner, with the concept of the state ascending to predominance. To serve the state became in some quarters even more important than serving the church; the increasing secularization of society translated into the state's assumption of authority and power such as the church had had in earlier ages, resulting in the state's receiving from men and women certain actions which had previously been delivered only in religious contexts. From the evidence in the drama, Renaissance England, due to the influence of the classical world and the impact of their current social situation, began to see the state and society as appropriate recipients of sacrifice and obeisance which at other times would have been reserved exclusively for a god. The horrible, unnatural act of a parent's killing of a child became acceptable not only at the request of a god but also for the protection and preservation of man-made order and institutions.

CHAPTER V

FROM HUMILITY TO HONOR:

THE SECULARIZATION OF VALUES IN THE RENAISSANCE

In his study Shakespeare and the Renaissance Concept of Honor, Curtis Brown Watson argues that "the Renaissance was a complex age because of a basic duality, a deep-seated ambivalence, in values" and that "Shakespeare was a man of his age and . . . his plays therefore reflect, with an inconsistency which has to be admitted and accepted, both the Christian and the pagan-humanist values of his period" (5-6). It has long been noted that the medieval era was not exclusively Christian, nor the Renaissance exclusively humanist or secular, but that each era established its own unique synthesis of Christian and humanist philosophies and values. The medieval era was the age of both Boethius and the mystics, of both the code of chivalry and the cult of the Virgin. The Renaissance saw increasing interest in classical pagan-humanist philosophy and yet simultaneously the bold new religious movement of Protestantism. However, as Watson argues, "although Renaissance culture represents a profound interpenetration of Christian and classical elements, it is not a genuine fusion or synthesis comparable to the blending of Christian and humanist values in the age of Aquinas and Dante" (3). One of the most provocative and most difficult conflicts which both medieval Christian scholars and Renaissance scholars had to address in attempting to achieve a fusion or synthesis between Christian and classical ethics was the conflict between the Christian insistence on humility and the classical virtue of honor. An examination of the medieval synthesis on this point will help to bring into focus the Renaissance treatment of this dilemma and will highlight some of the differences between those eras.

The medieval Christian perspective held in contempt the notion of human fame or glory, but one of the prevailing concepts in the much-admired classical literature was the concept of honor. Even in classical literature alone the issue is complex because of the two meanings of honor. As Watson explains,

Honor, in one of its meanings, is an exclusively social virtue. Honor, in this sense, may refer to one's reputation in the community, to one's credit as a man of integrity, to the honors or rewards which are bestowed publicly as a testimony to one's virtue, to the glory and fame which one acquires as the result of exceptional or heroic accomplishments, or to the good name which is gained when one consistently behaves in a fashion which wins the respect and esteem of one's fellows. . . .

But honor also refers to one's private and personal judgement of one's own actions, one's inner conviction of innate moral rectitude. Honor, in other words, relates to self-esteem as much as to public approbation. Because this second meaning can be distinct from the first, it is possible that a man may paradoxically risk the loss of "honor" (i.e., may fail to conform to the norms established by a given society which will win him the praise and esteem of his fellows) in order to preserve his "honor" (i.e., avoid becoming dishonored in his own eyes).

This second meaning of honor is the one most often equated with virtue.

(11-12)

Medieval Christian scholars who sought to reconcile their faith with the philosophy of the classical era looked primarily to Plato. In the Phaedrus, among other works, Plato, as Watson remarks, "in his scorn for those who love fame and who fear dishonor, dissociates the love of fame from virtue" (22). Aristotle, however, took a different view of human praise, seeing the pursuit of honor as "second only to the summum bonum--the pursuit of happiness which results from leading

a good and virtuous life" (Watson 24). The Greeks of the Homeric Age, Aristotle, and the Roman philosopher Cicero placed high value on the esteem and approbation of one's comrades. In the late Roman period, however, favorable opinion toward honor and renown diminished with the rise of Stoicism and the increasing popularity of Christianity.

Though the more worldly classical philosophy experienced several periods of renewed popularity throughout the medieval period, "the worldly spirit of Aristotle and Cicero, reflected in [the] fervent espousal of human reputation and glory, does not play a dominant role in any medieval moral philosophy" (Watson, 28). St. Augustine, familiar with the pagan values of Cicero, condemns human praise as inferior to God's estimation of man. In The City of God he points out how the divine city is more glorious than the city of man. Even Boethius's The Consolation of Philosophy ultimately refutes the concept of immortal fame and honor, but at the same time it illustrates a synthesis of classical and Christian. As Watson points out, "The extent to which Neo-Platonism and Neo-Stoicism could merge with Christianity is indicated by the fact that Boethius's book was frequently taken for a work of Christian philosophy" (31). Medieval contemptus mundi espoused by St. Francis and Thomas a Kempis negates the Aristotelian and Ciceronian values of honor and other worldly distinctions. St. Francis writes that when he and his companions

were called of God and elect to bear in their hearts and in their deeds
and preach with their tongues the cross of Christ, they seemed to be and
were in very sooth men crucified. . . . Therefore they desired the more
to suffer shame and contumely for the love of Christ, rather than honor
of the world and reverence and praise of men: in insults they rejoiced
and at honors they grew sad. (The Little Flowers of St. Francis of
Assisi v)

In his work The Imitation of Christ Thomas a Kempis, wanting nothing worldly to detract from love of the Creator, proclaims, "all human glory, all temporal honor, all worldly exaltation, compared to Thy eternal glory, is but vanity and folly" (III, 40).

St. Thomas Aquinas, like Boethius, achieved a synthesis of Christian and classical philosophies, but unlike Boethius he took up Aristotle's cause. His synthesis gives greater emphasis to man's value in general and to man's place in the universe. He gives considerable attention to the ethics of earthly living. Indeed, in The Summa Contra Gentiles he writes:

Consequent to his life as a citizen, there are also certain goods that man needs for his civic actions. Such is a position of honour, through inordinate desire of which, men become proud and ambitious. . . . There is another desirable thing consequent to the civic life, and this is to be well known, through inordinate desire of which men are said to be desirous of vain glory. (III, I, 63)

Looking further into Aquinas's view of honor, however, reveals that he does have many reservations about it, notably its instability in view of Divine standards:

The supreme good must needs be perfect, for it satisfies the appetite. But the knowledge of one's good name, wherein glory consists, is imperfect: for it is beset with much uncertainty and error. Therefore glory of this kind cannot be the supreme good. Furthermore. [sic] Man's supreme good must be supremely stable in human things: for it is natural to desire unfailing endurance in one's goods. Now glory, which consists in fame, is most unstable, since nothing is more changeable than human opinion and praise. (III, I, 29)

In summary, Watson points out,

Honor, for Aristotle, was central to his whole ethics; for Aquinas it plays a relatively minor role. . . . Again and again, Aquinas stresses the precedence of faith over all other virtues. He also insists that the theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity, which define man's

relation to God and which serve as guides to beatific union, are paramount, with Aristotelian virtues acceptable only in a subordinate position. (35-36)

The attitudes toward honor set forth by medieval theologians and philosophers had apparently little impact on the medieval aristocracy, however, the majority of whom were illiterate. The feudal nobility lived largely under the claims of the medieval chivalric code which espoused honor and glory as man's highest aims. The medieval knight was essentially a warrior with martial aspirations and values--honor, fame, prowess, ambition, loyalty, and generosity with the spoils of war. In essence, then, medieval culture as a whole was a blend of Christian and pagan components, a duality. As Watson explains, "man was expected to conform to two contradictory ideals. One was that of Christ and the Virgin Mother; the other was that of the Sword" (39). The two ideals merged tentatively in the Crusades--knights made their way to the Holy Land to rescue it from infidels. In addition to material spoils, questing knights hoped to claim worldly honor and otherworldly credit.

The Crusades not only illustrate the tentative merging of Christian values with the pagan esteem of honor but also exemplify one way in which the medieval church attempted to deal with the pervasive cultural paganism of the medieval era. While the medieval church was too powerful simply to acquiesce to the adoption of the pagan code of honor, it found that it nonetheless was unable to eradicate that code. The Church therefore attempted to assimilate, at least partially, the secular institution of chivalry and insert itself into that pageantry as the giver of sanction to martial endeavors by establishing chivalric orders and vows. In this process, however, the Church had to alter its view of honor. As Watson explains,

The honor with which it [the Church] was concerned was largely synonymous with the feeling of innate moral rectitude, with purity of heart, with "noblesse de coeur." It involved an uncompromising refusal to perform any act which would make one unworthy either in one's own eyes or in the eyes of God. Although in this sense honor was

synonymous with the Christian notion of the sanctity of the private conscience, one cannot completely separate this meaning of the word from the objective, external meaning. (44)

While medieval scholars grappled with pagan values and a few even achieved what can be called a synthesis of Christian and classical philosophy, and while the medieval aristocracy held to classical and Christian as convenient despite the inherent contradictions between the two, the Renaissance also grappled with the conflict between pagan and Christian and came to a different, more uneasy and variable conclusion. As Watson argues,

If the 12th and 13th centuries are to be treated as a genuine renaissance of pagan values, and if St. Thomas Aquinas is to be considered the great philosopher who completely synthesized the Christian and the pagan-humanist ethics, then we must invent a new word for the Renaissance of the 15th and 16th centuries, for its resurrection of pagan values is of a wholly different order. (Watson 36)

While medieval philosophy gave Christian ethics paramount if not exclusive importance over other approaches to philosophical thought, Renaissance thinking was more fragmented, more variable. Heir to the various medieval scholastic works as well as the medieval chivalric code and the variety of classical works, the Renaissance found itself in a philosophical dichotomy. The elements of the Renaissance code were many, touching on virtually every aspect of human life. Honor, in the pagan-humanist tradition, encompasses public esteem, self-esteem, valor, patriotism, honesty, integrity, magnanimity, reputation, chastity (generally for women only), fidelity, respect for elders, respect for one's betters, wisdom, justice, gratitude, and temperance. Clearly many of these facets overlap with Christian virtues and values. The tentative resolution achieved, though it was by no means general or exclusive, was to place the two ethical systems on an equal footing, not prioritized as the medieval scholastic synthesis had been. As Watson notes,

It is impossible to separate completely the Christian and classical heritages of the Renaissance, both of which were largely humanistic, but

Renaissance moral philosophy in large part represents a secular morality based primarily on purely classical sources. . . . The men of the 16th century had available to them two integrated systems of ethics, two separate ideologies, which, as it turned out, were maintained almost on an equal footing. If it was a sacred duty to fulfill one's religious obligations, it was also a sacred duty to fulfill the ethical obligations which stemmed from the code of honor. Honor, indeed, was often considered inseparable from virtue itself. Instead of being the loosely defined secular morality it had been for the medieval aristocracy, it was now a fully conceived, carefully rationalized and articulated, formal philosophical code. (1; 3-4)

In the concept of honor one finds perhaps the best and foremost example of the Renaissance dilemma and uneasy resolution between Christian and pagan, religious and secular. As Watson argues,

In the Renaissance, honor, basically a pagan idea, [became] almost a religion. For example, while continuing to believe in Christian immortality, Shakespeare's contemporaries believed at the same time and just as passionately that "fame, in times to come, may canonize us," (Troilus and Cressida, II.ii.202) and that, in the words of Cassio, to lose one's reputation is to lose "the immortal part" of oneself (Othello, II.iii.263-264). (4)

Further, he notes, there was, to some extent, at least, a resolution or merging of the pagan notion of honor with Christian ethics:

Many of the Renaissance moralists . . . were at least partially aware that they were worshipping at two altars at one and the same time, though few of them would have been willing to admit that, in deifying honor, fame, and glory, they were lesser Christians than the men of the

Middle Ages. Indeed, they made every possible attempt to find a way to reconcile conflicts between the moral dicta of their two major ethical codes (Christianity and pagan humanism), even though they usually held that the medieval scholastic synthesis was unacceptable. Anyone troubling to read the numerous treatises on moral philosophy published in the Renaissance will find that every effort was made to emphasize the large area of agreement between the two codes and that, on many points, the interpenetration of Christian and pagan-humanist values resulted in a successful fusion, a new kind of Christian humanism. (4)

It is important to note, too, that the Renaissance aristocracy became involved in the conflict between ethical structures in a way that their medieval forerunners had not. Certain aspects of the medieval chivalric code carried over into the Renaissance; for example, the medieval tournament or trial by combat easily evolved into the Renaissance gentlemanly duel. "As we move from one age to another, the social institution may alter but the desire to preserve honor and avoid shame, to take justice into one's own hands, and even perhaps to take private revenge, remains in each case a fixed 'ideal' of the military class" (Watson 40). While the typical medieval knight was clearly not a philosopher or scholar, learning became in the Renaissance an important mark of the nobleman. While the medieval aristocracy had apparently little interest in reconciling Christian ethics and the pagan code of honor he lived with and even less interest in developing a full explanation of either, Watson notes that "[i]n the Renaissance, on the other hand, the concept of honor was an integral part of a pagan-humanist ethics which was largely independent of Christian morality and was defined and elaborated with the greatest care" (41).

That Renaissance gentlemen were concerned with explaining and justifying their essentially pagan valuation of honor is evidenced by the plethora of moral philosophical treatises produced on that subject during that time. Watson lists fifty-nine such works; Sears Jayne, in a review of

Watson's work, notes eight others (358). Norman Council notes yet another three (33). The very existence of such treatises indicates a profound change from the medieval era. As Watson notes,

honor at no time in the Middle Ages was considered in any formal ethical system as synonymous with virtue, as it frequently was in the moral philosophies of Greece, Rome, and the Renaissance. Apart from its incorporation into the framework of scholastic philosophy, the elaboration of an Aristotelian or a Ciceronian ethic was unthinkable, since ethics was the handmaiden of theology. . . .

For the Renaissance aristocrat, honor, glory, reputation, and renown were cardinal aspects of a system of pagan-humanist ethics which sprang from an independent study of Aristotle's Nichomachean Ethics and of Cicero's Offices. (47)

One of the best known of the Renaissance treatises is Robert Ashley's Of Honour (written sometime between 1596 and 1603) which, as Virgil Heltzel notes, is "the earliest attempt by an Englishman to deal with the subject comprehensively and systematically in a separate work" (1). Heltzel explains Ashley's premises:

His contemporaries . . . were pretty generally suspicious of the slightest overzealousness in the pursuit of honor, because such a course, many thought, enticed the unwary to the evil of ambition. To Ashley, however, honor was a noble thing; only the abuse of it was evil, representing an extreme of conduct. To counteract this extreme he set about devising a system of principles, the practice of which would enable a man to achieve and maintain moderation in his desire of honor, to the betterment of both himself and his fellow men. . . .

[W]hereas many of the elements of his thought had been widely discussed among the ancients and even more fully developed by modern Continental writers, Ashley is the first writer in England to bring

together the best things that had been said on the subject and to integrate them by the discipline of reason. . . . It acquires additional interest when one realizes that it was composed at a time when William Shakespeare was weaving the same theme, like a golden thread, through his great historical tetralogy (15-17)

It is significant that at the outset Ashley attempts to make a connection between God and honor, thereby giving divine sanction to the largely classical concept:

But from whence this honour came vnto mankinde or from whence this desire thereof which we feele in our mindes ys derived, how canne yt better be knowne or vnderstood then by going to the Godhead yt selfe which ys the wellspringe and fountayne of all honor? Therefore as the Poetes derive their Muse from Iupiter, A love principium Musae, so must I fetch the beginning of Honour from God, since we find no Originall thereof in the earth neither in thinges without soule, neither in brute beastes, nor in men themselves: but in one onely God alone. This appeareth by those divine honors which by a certeyne law of nature and religion we offer vnto God, as sacrifices, praiers, ceremonies, supplications and all excellent, high, and extraordinarie kind of worshipping; which should not be vsed at all yf we did not thincke some good thinge to be in honour worthie to be offered vp vnto god. Hence yt comes to passe that bicause we offer vp honour both vnto God, and vnto those which are most likened vnto god, as a thing most acceptable, yt ys thought to be a most heavenly thing exceeding all Commendacion. And to me yt seemes not only that there ys nothing amongst men more excellent then honour, but also that even god himself cannot geue or bestowe a greater or more excellent guyfte vppon man: For what els doth he aske or demandaund of men? Any rewardes of benefittes or any

such other thing, seeing he himself geueth all these plenteously?

Nothing els but honour, bicause he thinckes yt best beseemeth him

(27-28).

For the Renaissance nobility honor is the measure of man's value and the bastion of virtue. For example, Ashley writes, "For how can vertue stand if you take away honour?" (28). Ashley's remark, as Watson notes, is in direct contrast to Aquinas's: "'he is not truly virtuous, who does virtuous deeds for the sake of human glory'" (Summa Theologica, II, II, 132, as cited by Watson 67). While the formal ethical systems of the medieval period were inherently theological, with the ultimate measures of behavior being divine standards, in the Renaissance, as Watson points out, "[t]he whole code of honor is a manifestation of an ethics which emphasizes the moral importance of social approval in every aspect of man's daily life" (67). As he further notes, "Public esteem was so closely related to self-esteem in the opinion of the Renaissance aristocrats that it was a cardinal moral imperative to maintain honor, reputation, and good opinion" (72). On several points the Renaissance value of honor was in direct contrast to medieval moral philosophy. First, public approval was necessary to confirm the worth of an individual since honor and virtue, to the Renaissance man, were inseparable, honor being virtue's inevitable reward. Medieval philosophers would not have inextricably linked honor and virtue. Second, to the Renaissance mind, the disparagement of others' opinions in favor of one's own convictions of personal righteousness, given the unreliability of individual moral standards, was condemnable, not praiseworthy. Ashley sees the whole framework of society as hinging on public recognition of honor:

Very well sayd Antisthenes in my opinion, being asked what was the destruccion and overthrowe of a common wealthe, that yt was the want of regard to be had of honour and of shame, wisely considering that mens mynds are not easilie of themselves stirred vpp to welldoing except some honorable reward be proposed for good deeds, and some ignominious punishmentes for foule faultes and

offences. . . . To conclude, without honour no one thing can be well administred or worthely effected. Take honour out of vertuous accions you take away all delight of the mind and easines of accion. Magnanimitie will perish, fortitude, moderacion, and decencie will decay, the observaunce of lawes and lawes themselves wilbe neglected, offyces of honour despised, magistrates contemned, discordes arise amongst Citizens, and every one dare to do each foule and wicked deed.

(28-30)

Further, he goes on to define honor as “a certeine testemonie of vertue shining of yt self, geven of some man by the iudgement of good men . . .” (34). As Watson notes, “To disparage the opinion of one’s fellows is considered by the Renaissance moralists an indication of pride, not of humility” (68). Medieval moralists felt just the opposite; they frequently stressed the fickleness of human judgment and would generally have approved of an individual adhering to his own conscience rather than conforming to external standards of society, with the notable exception of the necessity of conforming to the Church’s teachings. Third, Renaissance thinkers gave considerable importance to posthumous reputation which medieval thinkers believed capricious and unenduring (Watson 68-69).

In general, then, the Renaissance believed honor to be both public esteem and self-esteem. Honor was both the reward for virtuous action and the strength and motive for all virtue. In Of Honour Ashley states that his purpose in writing is to “prove against the dull and heavye spirited, and against the abiect and base minded, that a moderate desire of Honor ys not only very conuenient, but also aboue all other good things (vertue only excepted which yt vsually accompanieth) to be preferred” (24). He does, however, stress the importance of moderation, drawing on the Aristotelian golden mean: “Let vs then . . . desire neither more nor lesse honour

then reason alloweth; since true honour consisteth not in vaine boasting of swelling tytles, but in the moderacion of the minde" (47). He even connects such moderation with Christian humility:

Therefore as yt ys the part of humilites to beat downe vayne and swelling cogitations, and yet to know the good which ys in vs, and to geue god thanckes for the same, least by not knowing the goodnes of the same we be also ignoraunt what we owe vnto God: so ys yt likewise the part of a modest desire of Honour not to wishe to haue Honour geuen vs of others, as yf with our whole mind we longed after yt, but rather when yt ys offered to accept yt moderately, as reioycing that others do see and approoue some vertue in vs: which ought to be of more account with vs then the reputacion thereof; which yf yt be too much desired of vs, yt cannot be but we must needes fall into a great fault of ambicion and arrogancie. . . . Not that they attribute those good thinges vnto themselves without acknowledging the goodnes of God towards them; but because yt ys the part both of modestie and wise humanitie to know the vertue that ys in themselves, to referr yt thanckfully vnto God, and to endeavour to profitt others therewith. (59; 61-62)

It is significant that Ashley here addresses the two major oppositions to the quest for honor in the Renaissance. In advocating "a moderate desire" for honor he addresses the charge that seeking honor is simply a cover for ambition. In connecting honor and virtue he addresses the claim (in part from Christianity) that honor has no legitimate moral function or value. Ashley's careful defenses, however, point out that the concept of honor in the Renaissance was complex, often contradictory, and, while widely held, nonetheless subject to controversy.

The orthodox secular perspective on honor (the most popular view of the time) was "Aristotelian in its assumption that honour is something external to man which may be gained only by virtuously performing appropriate deeds" (Council 26-27). To desire too much honor or to

desire honor for its own sake rather than virtue's was considered the vice of ambition; to desire less honor than one deserved was considered mediocrity. A secondary and frequently contradictory secular perspective held that honor was "an innate moral capacity" rather than an "external reward for virtuous action." The difference, as Council points out, is significant--"rather than encouraging action judged virtuous by a widely understood and carefully defined ethical system, this other attitude towards honour provides a basis for an entirely subjective and personal ethic" (27). Council terms this perspective "decadent" because, as he states,

Whenever the idea appears . . . it is coupled with the assumption that the world is in moral decay, a condition which only this private sense of what is right--i.e. honour--can alleviate. Thus those men who possess this sense of honour must obey its dictates at all costs, even if the action thus generated be contrary to more public and widespread principles of behaviour. (27)

Though this concept is Aristotelian in its ultimate origins, its development in the Renaissance by such works as Count Annibale Romei's The Courtiers Academie led away from the Greek philosopher's precise formulation.

The secular perspective, however popular and widespread it was despite the conflict within itself and however some of its expositors might try to reconcile it with religion, was not without a foil from the religious perspective. The church--Catholic and Protestant--continued to speak against the futility and mutability of worldly, human estimation. Calvin in his Institutes frequently asserts that man is incapable of virtuous action apart from God's grace and that honor for good works is due not to man but to God. For example, he writes: "[Man] cannot claim for himself ever so little beyond what is rightfully his without losing himself in vain confidence and without usurping God's honour, and thus becoming guilty of monstrous sacrilege" (McNeill II.ii.10). This religious perspective found a popular voice in Fulke Greville's Inquisition upon Fame and Honour which catalogues all the

major Renaissance views on honor and rejects all on the Calvinistic basis that only God deserves honor. Greville begins his poem with a dramatic statement of the illusions to which man is subject:

What are Mens liues, but labyrinths of error,
Shops of deceit, and Seas of misery?
Yet Death yeelds so small comfort, so much terror;
Gaine, Honour, Pleasure, such illusions be.

(1, 1-4)

He acknowledges the powerful motivation that honor provides in men's lives:

For else, what Gouvernour would spend his dayes,
In enuious trauell, for the publike good?
Who would in Bookes, search after dead mens wayes?
Or in the Warre, what Souldier lose his blood?
Liu'd not this Fame in clouds, kept as a crowne;
Both for the Sword, the Scepter, and the Gowne.

(7)

This quest for honor, he believes, separates men from God and causes them to lose their proper way in life:

Without his God, Man thus must wander euer,
See moates in others, in himselfe no beames,
Ill ruines good, and ill erecteth neuer,
Like drowning torrents, not transporting streames:
The vanity from nothing hath her being,
And makes that essence good, by disagreeing.

(25)

He advocates adherence to Christian virtues:

For Mans chiefe vertue, is Humilitie;
True knowledge of his wants, his height of merit;

This pride of minde, this Magnanimity,
His greatest vice, his first seducing spirit;
With venomous infection of his fall,
To Serpent-like appearance euer thrall.

(33)

He concludes with a dramatic statement equating the quest for honor with sin:

Who worship Fame, commit Idolatry,
Make Men their God, Fortune and Time their worth,
Forme, but reforme not; meer hypocrisie,
By shadowes, onely shadowes bringing forth,
Which must, as blossomes, fade ere true fruits springs,
Like voice, and eccho ioyn'd, yet diuers things.

(86)

It is virtually inevitable that the complex issue of honor would be addressed in the art of the Renaissance. As Council states, "Political, intellectual, and social life was so intertwined with and influenced by prevalent assumptions about honour that much artistic expression of that life inevitably deals with the intricate and contradictory honour was presumed to play in men's behaviour" (13). For example, Shakespeare in the Henry VI plays examines honor as it clashes with a Christian sense of virtuous action. As Council argues,

Henry VI's refusal to risk his life for honour's sake is not dramatized as an act of individual cowardice; Shakespeare, rather, exploits the dilemma implicit in orthodox assumptions about the ethics of honour. Henry knows his claim is shaky; he prefers virtuous to honorable action; and some of the central conflicts of the play depend on Shakespeare's having given him the uncanny and quite unusual capacity to see that virtuous and honorable behaviour are not necessarily the same. It is a revolutionary insight. (18)

The medieval plays of Abraham's sacrifice and Renaissance dramas which deal with a parent's effecting the death of his or her child constitute fertile material for examining the alteration of values from era to era, particularly the changing view of honor. Though few direct, clear lines of influence can be drawn from any of the philosophies--classical or Christian--to specific works of medieval or Renaissance drama, it is nonetheless reasonable that at some level the drama of those eras reflect some of the commonly understood notions of their time. The medieval plays, inherently religious, clearly reflect the scholastic, Christian ethos rather than the chivalric code or any specific classical philosophy. Abraham epitomizes the man of faith--the man of the ultimate virtue, according to Aquinas's assessment of virtue. He also epitomizes the humility to which St. Francis and Thomas a Kempis aspired. Abraham is willing to sacrifice his son out of his sense of duty to God and his faith in God. Abraham acts not out of desire for worldly approbation, for that (if we can refer to the Dublin play in which Sarah scolds him for his action) is far from what he receives; Abraham does act out of a sense that he is defined not in relation to other men but in relation to God. The Renaissance plays which deal with child sacrifice, however, depict parents who reveal a collection of different motivations related to the more secular notion of honor and including related concepts such as patriotism and justice. Frequently the parent's assessment of these concepts is flawed or inaccurate, rendering his or her action, ironically, not praiseworthy but condemnable. Each of the Renaissance plays, however, reveals a portion of the general Renaissance preoccupation with the dilemma posed by the clash of religious and secular ethics.

Before examining specific plays for their treatments of honor in the context of a parent's killing of a child, it is necessary to examine two points tangential to the Renaissance concept of honor and which factor in several of the plays to be discussed--the notion of a woman's honor and the role of honor in relation to a king or ruler. Each of these notions has both classical and Christian roots.

Within both classical and Christian frameworks a woman's preeminent virtue was considered to be her chastity. The sexual purity of an unmarried woman and the sexual fidelity of a married woman were most prized possessions. Another important aspect of her virtue was her dutiful

obedience and subjection to her father or husband, or whatever man was responsible for her. For a woman to lose her chastity was considered a fate worse than death, and for her to part willingly from her virtue was the most heinous vice of which a woman was capable. In the Christian framework a woman's loss of chastity was sin; in the classical framework of Renaissance morality such loss was loss of honor. From both perspectives a woman's best defense against loss of virtue or honor was obedience to the man to whom she belonged. This duty was a natural outgrowth of the hierarchical society supported by the Church through the Middle Ages and by classical philosophy.

The hierarchical system of medieval and Renaissance society had at its head the king who was, from the Christian perspective, God-ordained. During both eras, however, church and state were frequently at odds over which had ultimate control over temporal existence. During both eras the monarch exercised considerable influence over the nobility through the more secular system of honor, for to a considerable degree honors were the monarch's to bestow. Furthermore, to serve and please the king (or queen) was honorable. Conversely, certain actions which caused affront to the monarch were a cause of dishonor. For example, when Gorboduc learns that Porrex has killed Ferrex, he is not only grieved as a father but affronted as a monarch at the shedding of blood in his court, and he consequently banishes Porrex, thereby bringing dishonor on Porrex.

Both the notion of woman's honor and its preservation and the concept of the honor due to a king and to be sought from a king come to play in Renaissance dramas dealing with a parent's killing of a child. In several plays a daughter's loss of chastity (and, consequently, her honor) precipitates her death. Also, as discussed in previous chapters, filial obedience is parallel to obedience to a king which is itself parallel to obedience to God. In the medieval Abraham and Isaac plays (as, indeed, in the Genesis 22 episode), Isaac is called upon to obey Abraham (and, indirectly, God) just as Abraham is called upon to demonstrate obedience to God's painful command. Children in the Renaissance dramas are confronted with the issue of obedience to parents who are

like (and who often in fact are) monarchs. And, as the Renaissance dramatists demonstrate, frequently with considerable power and poignancy, the issue goes beyond obedience to the even more complex issue of honor.

It is important to note that in several of the Renaissance plays the children submit willingly to their deaths just as Isaac in several of the medieval plays submits willingly. The motivation of these Renaissance children differs from that of the medieval Isaacs. The child Isaacs of most of the medieval versions submit either out of duty to Abraham or out of obedience to God when Abraham reveals God's command. The adult Isaac of the York version demonstrates his own mature submission to God's will which can even be said to surpass Abraham's submission in that the York Isaac reveals more confidence and less reluctance than does Abraham. The willing children of the Renaissance plays, however, submit less out of a sense of duty and more from a desire for honor or a wish to be spared dishonor.

The title page of R. B.'s Aprius and Virginia reveals that it is a play "Wherein is liuely expressed a rare example of the vertue of Chastitie, by Virginias constancy in wishing rather to be slaine at her owne Fathers handes, then to be deflowred of the wicked Iudge Aprius." Virginia poignantly requests that her father kill her to spare her from such shame:

Oh father, oh friendship, oh fatherly fauour,
Whose dulcet words, so sweetly do fauour,
On knees I beseeche thee to graunt my request,
In all things according, as lyketh thee best:
Thou knowest, O my father, if I be once spotted,
My name and my kindred, then forth wilbe blotted:
And if thou my father, should die for my cause,
The world would accompt me as guilty in cause:
Then rather deare father, if it be thy pleasure,
Graunt me the death, then keepe I my treasure?
My Lampe, my light, my life undefiled,

And so may Judge Apius, of flesh be begiled:
This upon my knees with humble behest,
Graunt me O father my instant requeste.

(ll. 921-935)

The Epilogue reiterates the moral: "by this Poets faining here example do you take,/ Of Virginias life, of chastetie, of duty to thy make" (ll. 1209-1210). Such a scenario as R. B. depicts is common in classical literature and, consequently, in Renaissance literature which draws heavily on classical stories such as Shakespeare's Titus Andronicus. In the final act of that drama Titus Andronicus kills his daughter Lavinia who has been raped and maimed, sparing her the continued pain of living with her dishonor. Though Lavinia has had her tongue cut out and cannot speak, it is understood that, since she is a noble Roman, death to her is preferable to shame. Titus Andronicus, before he kills her, alludes to the story of Apius and Virginia in a question to the emperor Saturninus:

My lord the Emperor, resolve me this:
Was it well done of rash Virginius
To slay his daughter with his own right hand,
Because she was enforc'd, stain'd, and deflower'd?

(V.iii.35-38)

When the emperor responds affirmatively, Titus Andronicus asks him to explain his reason: "Because the girl should not survive her shame/ And by her presence still renew his sorrows" (V.iii.41-42). Titus Andronicus then claims the reason as his own and dramatically kills Lavinia:

A reason mighty, strong, and effectual;
A pattern, president, and lively warrant
For me, most wretched, to perform the like.
Die, die, Lavinia, and thy shame with thee;
And with thy shame thy father's sorrow die!

(V.iii.43-47)

Decades later, in his late Renaissance version of the Apius and Virginia story, John Webster also depicts this same classical reasoning about honor. He, too, depicts Virginia as pleading with her father to kill her to spare her from incurring the shame of loss of chastity:

O my dear Lord and father, once you gave me
A noble freedom, do not see it lost
Without a forfeit; take the life you gave me
And sacrifice it rather to the gods
Then to a villains Lust. Happy the Wretch
Who born in bondage lives and dies a slave,
And sees no lustful projects bent upon her,
And neither knowes the life nor death of honor.

(IV.i.31-38)

In two of the dramas it is a man rather than a woman who faces death willingly, and, since the issue of a man's honor was more complex than a woman's these plays grapple with more of the facets of the Renaissance concept of honor. Both Coriolanus and Hotspur in Henry IV, Part 1 face confidently their certain deaths in order to die with their honor intact. Both not only seek an honorable death but they also welcome death as a means of preserving honor won or diminishing the sting of honor tarnished.

Henry IV, Part 1 has long been considered one of Shakespeare's most detailed examinations of the Renaissance concept of honor. As Council notes, this play marks "[t]he first time that Shakespeare gives a play its basic form and defines the action of the principal characters by reference to the idea of honour. . ." (36). The juxtaposition of Falstaff (who little values honor) with Hotspur (whose esteem of honor seems to many critics to slip into the vices of overweening pride and ambition) has become a primary focus for the study of honor. Falstaff is the hedonistic

buffoon who refuses to value honor over life as the accepted social ethos dictates. When reminded by Prince Hal that he "owest God a death," Falstaff responds,

'Tis not due yet, I would be loath to pay him before his day--what need
I be so forward with him that calls not on me? Well, 'tis no matter,
honour pricks me on. Yea, but how if honour prick me off when I come
on, how then? Can honour set to a leg? No. Or an arm? No. Or
take away the grief of a wound? No. Honour hath no skill in surgery
then? No. What is honour? A word. What is in that word honour?
What is that honour? Air. A trim reckoning! Who hath it? He that
died a-Wednesday. Doth he feel it? No. Doth he hear it? No. 'Tis
insensible, then? Yea, to the dead. But will it not live with the living?
No. Why? Detraction will not suffer it. Therefore I'll none of it.
Honour is a mere scutcheon--and so ends my catechism.

(V.i.127-144)

It is interesting to note that the reasons Falstaff rejects the notion of honor are similar to the church's teachings about the futility and fragility of human estimation. Hotspur, on the other hand, is seen to represent the fullest manifestation of the classical martial code of honor which was valued in the Renaissance. Confident that he seeks to depose a usurping king, he is driven in quest of honor. His father remarks, "Imagination of some great exploit/ Drives him beyond the bounds of patience" (I.iii.197-198). Hotspur's response reveals his eagerness for glory:

By heaven, methinks it were an easy leap
To pluck bright Honour from the pale-faced moon,
Or dive into the bottom of the deep,
Where fathom-line could never touch the ground,
And pluck up drowned honour by the locks,

So he that doth redeem her thence might wear
Without corrival all her dignities.

(I.iii.199-205)

He does not lament the reduction in his cause's forces due to his father's illness but instead relishes the greater honor which will come to a victorious few:

I rather of his absence make this use:
It lends a lustre and more great opinion,
A larger dare to our great enterprise,
Than if the Earl were here; for men must think,
If we without his help can make a head
To push against a kingdom, with his help
We shall o'erturn it topsy-turvy down.
Yet all goes well, yet all our joints are whole.

(IV.i.76-83)

When Worcester tells him that "[t]here is no seeming mercy in the King," Hotspur responds, "Did you beg any? God forbid!" (V.ii.34-35). He reasserts the justice of their cause in a speech which expounds the honorable attitude toward life and death:

O gentlemen, the time of life is short!
To spend that shortness basely were too long
If life did ride upon a dial's point,
Still ending at the arrival of an hour.
An if we live, we live to tread on kings,
If die, brave death, when princes die with us!
Now, for our consciences, the arms are fair
When the intent of bearing them is just.

(V.ii.81-88)

He does not shy away from the battle which will mean his certain death because such cowardice would bring him dishonor. He, like his uncle and his father who sends him into battle devoid of his aid, knows that the gauntlet they have thrown down cannot be retrieved without dishonor. As Council notes, "Hotspur [is] so committed to honour that he can happily dismiss success--and life--to serve it" (48). Hotspur approaches battle with brave resignation: "Doomsday is near; Die all, die merrily" (IV.i.134). Even as he lies dying from wounds received from Prince Hal, his only regret is the honors the Prince has won from him:

O Harry, thou hast robb'd me of my youth!
I better brook the loss of brittle life
Than those proud titles thou hast won of me;
They wound my thoughts worse than thy sword my flesh.

(V.iv.76-79)

Coriolanus, too, seeks an honorable death to ameliorate what he perceives to be a tarnishing of his honor. Rather than stand with Tullus Aufidius and conquer Rome as he has vowed, he breaks his vow in submission to his mother's emotional pleas. He therefore breaks two vows--his vow to stand with the Volscians to conquer Rome and his vow to abhor all familial ties and sentiments: "I'll never/ Be such a gosling to obey instinct, but stand/ As if a man were author of himself/ And knew no other kin" (V.iii.34-37). He convinces the Volscians to seek peace and returns with them to their camp. He knows he goes to certain death because he has tarnished Tullus Aufidius's honor and his own because he has, in Aufidius's words, "set [his] mercy and [his] honor at difference. . ." (V.iii.200-201). As Aufidius complains,

At a few drops of women's rheum, which are
As cheap as lies, he sold the blood and labour
Of our great action. Therefore shall he die,
And I'll renew me in his fall.

(V.vi.46-49)

Coriolanus brings on his death to ease the sting of his diminished honor by insulting the Volscians who call him a traitor:

Cut me to pieces, Volscies, men and lads,
Stain all your edges on me. Boy! False hound!
If you have writ your annals true, 'tis there,
That like an eagle in a dove-cote, I
Flutter'd your Volscians in Corioles.
Alone I did it.

(V.vi.111-116)

While in these plays the children killed go willingly to their deaths just as did Isaac in several versions of the medieval play, in certain Renaissance plays the child's death is brought on by the parent without consideration of the child's feelings. In certain of these plays, however, the playwright clearly wishes the audience to be sympathetic and approving of the parent's actions, thereby affirming the code of honor to which the parent adheres.

In R. B.'s Apus and Virginia, for example, Virginius (who does consider his daughter's wishes) is much like the regretful Abraham of the medieval plays who is pained by what he must do but is nonetheless convinced that he must do it:

O weary wittes of wo, or wealth, oh feble aged man,
How can thy arme geue such a blow, thy death I wish thee than:
But sith that shame with endles trompe, wil sounde if case thou ioy,
By meanes of false iudge Apus he, my selfe will thee destroy.

(ll. 961-964)

Though in despair Virginius wishes to die, Comfort persuades him that his pain will be eased when Apus is brought to justice. Justice and Reward then enter to effect Apus's rightful end. The clear implication is that though killing Virginia brings him grief, Virginius was right to do so. It is

interesting to note that in this play the classical values are followed precisely, notwithstanding Virginius's remorse, and that at the same time the execution scene parallels the sacrifice scenes of the Abraham and Isaac plays.

In Coriolanus, too, Shakespeare presents Volumnia's motivation in such a way that the audience can approve of it. Her motive in bringing about her son's death is patriotism, an important outlet for honorable behavior in the framework of classical pagan-humanist values and a spirit highly valued in Renaissance England. Though she, like her son, scorns the fickleness of the mob of Rome, she nonetheless encourages her son to bend his sense of honor and dignity to seek the citizens' favor to gain the consulate. The leadership of Rome is to her a position of honor worth a personal sacrifice. She makes an even greater sacrifice in her country's interest when she pleads with Coriolanus to stop his march on Rome with the Volscians and reconcile Rome with its old enemies. She knows that such a breach of his and the Volscians' honor will result in his death, but she considers the safety of Rome to be worth that sacrifice. Powerfully and poignantly Volumnia equates herself with Rome when she says to her son,

If I cannot persuade thee
Rather to show a noble grace to both parts,
Than seek the end of one, thou shalt no sooner
March to assault thy country than to tread--
Trust to 't, thou shalt not--on thy mother's womb
That brought thee to this world.

(V.iii.120-125)

She, ironically, in fact does what Coriolanus unsuccessfully vows to do. Coriolanus succumbs to filial emotion when Volumnia makes her plea; she is able to deny maternal devotion long enough to make that plea knowing what the outcome may be for her son. While the play overall is unclear about a true estimation of Coriolanus's character, the clear sentiment about Volumnia is that she is an admirable woman of honor.

It is important to note in these plays, however, that the audience's positive sentiments toward the parent are aided by the fact that in each version the child also seeks death due to some cause of honor. Often, however, like the Isaac of the Towneley version, the child is resistant to death. In plays which follow this scenario, the child's death results from some dishonor which the parent feels he has received from the child. In effect, the child's death results from the clash of values between parent and child. It is interesting to note that in most of these plays the prevailing sentiment which the playwright seems to want to stimulate in his audience is one of disapproval of the parents' actions. This perspective on the part of the playwright suggests that, though the pagan-humanist ideal of honor prevailed in the Renaissance moral ethos, there was by no means universal and unproblematic acceptance and understanding of how that code was to be enacted in every situation.

Marlowe's Tamburlaine, Part II is an excellent demonstration of how easily adherence to the classical code of honor can be carried too far into the realm of ambition, overweening pride, and tyranny. Tamburlaine carries the dictates of the martial code of honor to excess, and in his zeal for glorious victory, bravery, and renown in battle he falls into dishonorable bloodlust, with his sword his only answer. He admonishes his sons, "Be all a scourge and terror to the world,/ Or else you are not sons of Tamburlaine" (I.iii.63-64). His son Calyphas, on the other hand, represents the mediocrity of one who aims for less glory than he ought. Calyphas rejects the martial code of honor and attempts to avoid battle. His values clash with his father's and the results are bloody. Calyphas asks to avoid battle:

But while my brothers follow arms, my lord,

Let me accompany my gracious mother:

They are enough to conquer all the world,

And you have won enough for me to keep.

(I.iii.65-68)

Tamburlaine angrily responds,

Bastardly boy, sprung from some coward's loins,
And not the issue of great Tamburlaine,
Of all the provinces I have subdued
Thou shalt not have a foot unless thou bear
A mind courageous and invincible.

(I.iii.69-73)

"A mind courageous and invincible" is certainly consistent with the classical code of honor and would have been more acceptable to the Renaissance audience than Calyphas's timidity, but Tamburlaine perverts that honorable quality into "scourge and terror." When Tamburlaine attempts to teach his sons the arts of war--an appropriate, honorable endeavor from the classical and Renaissance perspectives--Calyphas again displays cowardice which enrages his father. When reluctant to join battle, Calyphas remarks,

I know, sir, what it is to kill a man--
It works remorse of conscience in me.
I take no pleasure to be murderous,
Nor care for blood when wine will quench my thirst.

(IV.i.27-30)

Though Tamburlaine seeks too much "honor," Calyphas seeks, by Renaissance standards, too little. His brother Celebinus chides him: "O cowardly boy! Fie! for shame come forth!/ Thou dost dishonor manhood and thy house" (IV.i.31-32). Tamburlaine, too, seeks out Calyphas and berates him:

Image of sloth and picture of a slave,
The obloquy and scorn of my renown
The scum and tartar of the elements,

Wherein was neither courage, strength, or wit,
But folly sloth and damned idleness

(IV.i.91-92; 124-126)

Enraged at the dishonor he feels his son brings to him, Tamburlaine kills Calyphas in front of his royal prisoners, prompting them to descry his deed as "barbarous damned tyranny" (IV.i.139). The King of Jerusalem cries, "O damned monster, nay, a fiend of hell--/ Whose cruelties are not so harsh as thine,/ Nor yet imposed with such a bitter hate!" (IV.i.169-171). Tamburlaine's quest for honor results not in virtue but in the vice of tyrannical ambition. Tamburlaine's murder of his son to rid himself of dishonor is interpreted as another manifestation of Tamburlaine's viciousness. The play suggests that what motivates Tamburlaine's actions is in fact not honor but pride.

Another parent who mistakes pride for honor is Barabas in Marlowe's The Jew of Malta. Barabas, like Tamburlaine, considers his personal sense of honor to be more important than his daughter's life. In this play the concept of faith becomes a factor in the discernment of honor and dishonor, though that concept is somewhat perverted in that Barabas reflects the vicious and negative stereotype of the Jew so pervasive in medieval and Renaissance England. In this sense the play is a mockery of Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac.

From the beginning of the play Barabas is set up as the antithesis of Abraham and the epitome of the stereotypical Renaissance Jew. In the Prologue Machiavel notes that Barabas is like him. The opening scene shows Barabas in his counting house savoring his usurious wealth. He claims his wealth is part of the promises made to Abraham and his descendants, and he scorns the Christian faith and both the Christian and pagan-humanist notions of honor:

Thus trolls our fortune in by land and sea,
And thus are we on every side enriched;
These are the blessings promised to the Jews,
And herein was old Abram's happiness.
What more may heaven do for earthly men
Than thus to pour out plenty in their laps,

Ripping the bowels of the earth for them,
Making the sea their servant, and the winds
To drive their substance with successful blasts?
Who hateth me but for my happiness?
Or who is honoured now but for his wealth?
Rather had I, a Jew, be hated thus,
Than pitied in a Christian poverty.
For I can see no fruits in all their faith
But malice, falsehood, and excessive pride,
Which methinks fits not their profession.

(I.i.102-117)

He claims to love his daughter "as dear/ As Agamemnon did his Iphigen" (I.i.136-137), a remark by which Marlowe connects Barabas to a classical paradigm of a parent who sacrifices a child just as the reference to Abraham connects him to the Christian paradigm. Though he claims to love Abigail, he without a qualm uses her to his own ends, encouraging her to do what the Renaissance audience would have considered to be dishonorable deeds in order to preserve his wealth and achieve revenge. He encourages her to feign conversion to Christianity in order that she may join the nuns occupying his house and retrieve his gold hidden there. He encourages her to promise herself to Lodowick, knowing she loves Don Mathias, in order to be revenged on both men. In a perverse reference to Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac he remarks that he would rather kill Abigail than give her to Lodowick: "e'er he shall have her,/ I'll sacrifice her on a pile of wood" (II.iii.52-53). Neither does Barabas intend to give her to Don Mathias; he angrily complains to Abigail, "Are there not Jews enow in Malta,/ But thou must dote upon a Christian?" (II.iii.361-362). Though he willingly compromises Abigail's honor, when she genuinely converts to Christianity he rejects her and considers her a threat: "False and unkind! What, hast thou lost thy father?" (III.iv.2). He fears that she has not only dishonored him by rejecting his faith but also that she will reveal his

machinations behind Lodowick's and Don Mathias's deaths: "For she that varies from me in belief/
Gives great presumption that she loves me not,/ Or loving, doth dislike of something done"
(III.iv.10-12). He therefore sends the nuns, whom Abigail has rejoined, some poisoned rice with the
coolly calculated intention that Abigail die. Abigail's death therefore becomes a mockery of Isaac's.
Barabas's faith is as perverse and self-serving as Abraham's is genuine. While Abraham sacrifices
Isaac out of a sincere faith and devotion to God, Barabas sacrifices Abigail as much to save his own
life as to uphold the dignity of his hollow faith which rests not so much on God but on the material
wealth he feels he has because he is an heir of Abraham.

Another Jewish father who perverts Abraham's sacrifice of faith with a sacrifice for wealth
is Shylock in The Merchant of Venice. In this play, however, Shakespeare does not exploit the
inversion of the Genesis paradigm to the extent that Marlowe does. Like Barabas, Shylock is shown
to be concerned primarily with money. While Barabas is compared to Machiavel, Shylock is
described as a "devil [who] can cite Scripture for his purpose" (I.iii.93). Shakespeare, as does
Marlowe in The Jew of Malta, goes to great pains to have Shylock express the abuse experienced
by the Jews primarily due to the stereotypes of their wealth and usury. To Antonio Shylock says:

many a time and oft

In the Rialto you have rated me
About my moneys and my usances:
Still I have borne it with a patient shrug,
(For suffrance is the badge of all our tribe.)
You call me misbeliever, cut-throat dog,
And spet upon my Jewish gaberdine,
And all for use of that which is mine own.

(I.iii.101-108)

Like Barabas, Shylock calls on Abraham, thereby making a connection in the minds of the audience
between the Jew depicted before them and the patriarch: "O father Abram, what these Christians
are,/ Whose own hard dealings teaches them suspect/ The thoughts of others!" (I.iii.156-158).

Shylock, like Barabas, has a daughter, but, unlike Abigail in the beginning of Marlowe's play, Jessica is already displeased with her father. She calls her house "hell" (II.iii.2). She remarks that she is "ashamed to be [her] father's child" and that she hopes to marry the Christian Lorenzo and become a Christian (II.iii.17). She elopes with Lorenzo, taking with her a sizeable portion of Shylock's money and some valuable jewels, and, when Shylock finds out, he laments equally over the loss of his daughter and his ducats, claiming, "She is damn'd for it" (III.i.29). He cries, "I would my daughter were dead at my foot, and the jewels in her ear: would she were hears'd at my foot, and the ducats in her coffin." (III.i.80-82). It is clear that the loss that most pains him is the loss of his money. When he hears of Jessica's spendthriftiness he laments, "I shall never see my gold again" (III.i.100-101). That his daughter has married a Christian and rejected the Jewish faith is only secondary importance to him compared to the loss of his wealth. He does not even seem to feel a sting of dishonor as Barabas does at his child's rejection of his faith. What he values most in the situation is his wealth; his wealth is the source of his self-esteem, in contradiction to what the Renaissance code of honor would have dictated.

In King Lear conflicting points of the code of honor clash in the exchange between Lear and Cordelia, resulting in Lear's complete rejection of his daughter for what he perceives to be her dishonorable treatment of him as her father and king. When Cordelia refuses to give him the extravagant protestations of her love and devotion which he feels he deserves, being her father and king, he is enraged. Norman Council notes that "[Richard] Hooker, the voice of orthodoxy, had described the duty men have to honour other men, particularly their parents and their kings, and it is clear that, were Lear calling for honour and obedience and love in appropriate ways, every right-thinking member of Shakespeare's first audiences would automatically have assumed his right to

claim them" (136). Such a protestation as Lear requires, however, would violate Cordelia's sense of honor. She professes an appropriate degree of love for him relative to the love she will give to her future husband:

Good my Lord,
You have begot me, bred me, lov'd me: I
Return those duties back as are right fit,
Obey you, love you, and most honour you.
Why have my sisters husbands, if they say
They love you all? Happily, when I shall wed,
That lord whose hand must take my plight shall carry
Half my love with him, half my care and duty:
Sure, I shall never marry like my sisters,
To love my father all.

(I.i.95-104)

Cordelia here acts according to the honorable notion of plainspeaking, or being truthful and not dissembling in speech. As Watson explains,

For the Elizabethans, to be honest and to be honorable were, in effect, one and the same thing. Honor was sometimes used as a synonym for honesty and integrity; conversely, the word honesty had both its present meaning and the more inclusive one of honor and moral rectitude. The importance of this ideal of complete sincerity can not be overstressed in considering the relation between Renaissance moral values and those of Shakespeare. (254)

Cordelia's desire to speak plainly and unextravagantly of her genuine love for her father is a point of honor for her which conflicts with Lear's sense of the honor due him. In the realm of parent-child relations, the various points of the code of honor come into conflict, for it is unclear to what extent, if at all, a child should compromise his or her personal honor in order to render appropriate

honor to his or her parent. In Cordelia's case the issue is further complicated by the fact that Lear is also deserving of honor as a king. Cordelia's choice of plain speaking over the flattery to which Lear feels entitled enrages Lear and prompts him to disown her and essentially wish her dead:

Let it be so; thy truth then be thy dower:
For, by the sacred radiance of the sun,
The mysteries of Hecate and the night;
By all the operation of the orbs
From whom we do exist and cease to be,
Here I disclaim all my paternal care,
Propinquity and property of blood,
And as a stranger to my heart and me
Hold thee from this for ever. The barbarous Scythian,
Or he that makes his generation messes
To gorge his appetite, shall to my bosom
Be as well neighbour'd, pitied, and reliev'd,
As thou my sometime daughter.

(I.i.108-120)

Lear believes that dishonor is worse than murder. When Goneril and Regan later mistreat his emissary Kent, he exclaims, "'tis worse than murder,/ To do upon respect such violent outrage" (II.iv.23-24).

That Shakespeare intends for his audience's sympathies to be with Cordelia rather than Lear is indicated when he presents Kent as the voice of reason for what is true honor in the situation. Lear's sense of honor here is misplaced; he is not in fact dishonored by Cordelia's truthfulness

because the flattery he seeks from his daughters is food for his pride rather than devotion required by honor. Kent speaks out of his sense of what honor requires of a loyal subject--he makes Lear aware of his folly:

Think'st thou that duty shall have dread to speak
When power to flattery bows? To plainness honour's bound
When majesty falls to folly. Reserve thy state;
And, in thy best consideration, check
This hideous rashness.

(I.i.147-151)

Kent points out that Lear is dishonored not by Cordelia but by Lear's own prideful erroneous judgment. Lear mistakes his pride for his honor.

Shakespeare presents a comparable though slightly more problematic situation in Cymbeline, in which Imogen displeases her father and king by marrying the poor but worthy Posthumus rather than Cloten, her father's choice. Cymbeline feels he is dishonored both as a father by his daughter's undutifulness in rejecting his choice and as king by her marrying a poor man rather than the son of his queen. He chides Imogen, "O disloyal thing,/ That shouldst repair my youth, thou heap'st/ A year's age on me!" (I.ii.62-64). Imogen's response is almost rude in its honesty: "I am senseless of your wrath; a touch more rare/ Subdues all pangs, all fears" (I.ii.66-67). Her father, astonished, replies, "Past grace? obedience?/ . . . That mightst have had the sole son of my queen!" (I.ii.67; 69). Imogen then speaks what the remainder of the play proves to be true: "O blessed, that I might not! I chose an eagle,/ And did avoid a puttock" (I.ii.70-71). Cymbeline, however, does not see the truth of her assessment and cites the affront he perceives to have been done to his monarchy: "Thou took'st a beggar, wouldst have made my throne/ A seat for baseness" (I.ii.72-73). When Imogen

remarks that Posthumus in fact adds "lustre" to his throne, Cymbeline, enraged, exclaims, "O thou vile one!" (I.ii.74). Imogen's response is to point out how Cymbeline is in fact responsible for her love for Posthumus:

Sir,

It is your fault that I have lov'd Posthumus:

You bred him as my playfellow, and he is

A man worth any woman: overbuys me

Almost the sum he pays.

(I.ii.74-78)

Cymbeline becomes even more enraged, feeling she dishonors him further by extolling Posthumus's worth in comparison to her own as his daughter. Though he has already imprisoned Imogen and banished Posthumus, he further wishes Imogen dead: "Nay, let her languish/ A drop of blood a day, and being aged/ Die of this folly" (I.ii.87-89). Though from both Christian and pagan perspectives a child was supposed to honor and obey his parents, particularly when his parent was the monarch, Shakespeare here presents a situation in which what the parent wishes is actually dishonorable to himself and his child. The remainder of the play demonstrates that Cymbeline is a victim of his own pride and misjudgment. That his sense of honor is clouded is further revealed when he encourages Cloten to pursue Imogen and win her despite the fact that she is already married. Cloten is shown to be disreputable; his mother, Cymbeline's queen, is revealed to be a schemer who has no love for Cymbeline but only ambition for her son; Posthumus is shown ultimately to be the worthy man Imogen claims him to be. True honor ultimately triumphs, but the play demonstrates the conflicting concepts of honor present in the Renaissance.

Like Lear and Cymbeline, Leontes in The Winter's Tale demonstrates the folly perpetrated by a king and father who mistakes his pride for his honor and acts on the basis of his misjudgments. Unreasonably suspicious of his wife's kindness toward his best friend, he rashly decides that his infant daughter is a bastard and condemns her and his queen to die. He sees not only his personal honor but also the honor of his royal line tarnished by the hint of bastardy. Like Kent in King Lear,

Paulina, a woman of the court, steps forward to speak the truth despite the fact that she displeases Leontes. She calls him "most unworthy and unnatural" (II.iii.112) for ordering his child burned to death and points out that he is actually dishonoring himself with such rash injustice:

It is an heretic that makes the fire,
Not she which burns in 't. I'll not call you tyrant;
But this most cruel usage of your queen--
Not able to produce more accusation
Than your own weak-hing'd fancy--something savours
Of tyranny, and will ignoble make you,
Yea, scandalous to the world.

(II.iii.114-120)

Leontes orders the baby left to die and banishes Paulina, demonstrating the results of a king's misplaced sense of honor and the results of a courtier's honorable actions in the face of a king's displeasure. One of the trickiest parts of the Renaissance code of honor was the balance between respecting the parents' and monarch's judgments and denouncing them when they were erroneous. The Winter's Tale, like King Lear and Cymbeline, point out Shakespeare's sympathy with truly honorable children and courtiers and with criticism of foolish parents and monarchs. The pagan-humanist code of honor was by no means a clear guide in every situation.

Clearly in these plays the playwright takes a more negative attitude toward the parents than the medieval playwrights took toward Abraham. The classical code of honor was evidently even more problematic to enact than was the Judeo-Christian ethos of love and charity and ultimate duty to God and God's truth. Abraham's reason for sacrificing Isaac was more readily accepted and approved than the killing of Renaissance children on the basis of a more complex code of honor. Further, it is likely that however widespread the approval of pagan-humanist values, Christian values

continued to exert a pull. The Renaissance could no more dispense with the historical Christian ethos than could the medieval philosophers neglect to address the classical pagan ethos. As Watson notes,

To excel in virtue, to aspire after a moral perfection which ignored the cardinal Christian virtues of piety and humility and the cardinal Christian doctrine of man's sinful and fallen nature, was the chief goal of Renaissance pagan-humanist ideals. Nor were the writers of that age unaware that they were trying to reconcile two moral systems fundamentally irreconcilable. (102-103)

Watson quotes Cornelius Agrippa's Of the Vanitie and Uncertaintie of Artes and Sciences:

Ye have harde howe some Philosophers have placed felicitie or blessedness . . . in honour, fame, and greatnesse of name, but Christe in sclaunder, and hatred of men . . . some in glorie of warre and subduinge of countries, but Christe in peace: some in honour and pompe, but Christe in humilitie, calling the meke blessed. . . . Christe teacheth that perfect vertue is not gotten but by grace geuen from above, the Philosophers saie, that it is gotten by our owne strength and exercise. . . . Christe teacheth . . . not to take revengment of any, that we ought to geve to every one that asketh: contrary-wise the Philosophers saie, that we should geve to none but them onely, which doe requite benefite for benefite, moreover it is lawfull to be angrie, to hate, to fighte, to make warre, and to practice usurie.¹

This dual conscience of Renaissance morality is reflected in the works of the time. As Watson argues, "The Renaissance reflects [the] pagan-humanist tradition of self-congratulation for one's good qualities side by side with the Christian ethics of humility and self-abasement" (113), citing by

¹Henry Cornelius von Nottesheim Agrippa, Of the Vanitie and Uncertaintie of Artes and Sciences, trans. James Sanford, London, 1569, LIV, 75a, 75b, as cited by Watson 103.

way of example the juxtaposition of the heroes of the first two books of Spenser's The Faerie Queene. Sir Guyon, the hero of Book Two who epitomizes the classical virtue of temperance, is quite self-satisfied: "And evermore himselfe with comfort feeds,/ Of his owne vertues, and praise-worthy deedes" (II, vii, 2, ll. 4-5). The Red Crosse Knight, on the other hand, a symbol of Christian virtue, rejects fame and glory for his achievements:

His be the praise, that this atchiev'ment wrought,
Who made my hand the organ of his might;
More than goodwill to me attribute nought:
For all I did, I did but as I ought.

(II, i, 33, ll. 2-5)

This duality, this juxtaposition of pagan and Christian values, coupled with the complexity of the pagan system, accounts in large measure for the ambiguities and ambivalence of values found in certain Renaissance plays which deal with a parent's killing of a child.

Shakespeare's Henry IV, Part 1 grapples with the complexities of the issue of honor to an extent that no other play of the English Renaissance does. The common critical assessment is that the play reflects the concept of the Aristotelian mean, with Falstaff demonstrating a deficit of honor, Hotspur representing surfeit of honor bordering on overweening pride, and Hal representing, appropriately, the mean between the two. The issue seems a bit more complex, however, because of the different perspectives the various characters take on honor. Falstaff may be seen as representing the mediocrity of undervaluing honor, or he may represent the pride of putting one's own standards ahead of the standards of one's society. (Here, too, the complexity of honor as self-esteem versus honor as public approbation arises.) Hotspur may be seen as the epitome of the honorable soldier, or he may be seen as valuing honor for its own sake and not for the sake of virtue

and therefore being guilty of the vices of pride and ambition. Hotspur is repeatedly praised for his honor, courage, and chivalry, even by the king. The King remarks that he sins

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

(I.i.78-85)

But the king nonetheless has occasion to wonder if pride makes Hotspur keep the prisoners the king has requested. He remarks,

What think you, coz,
Of this young Percy's pride? The prisoners
Which he in this adventure hath surpris'd
To his own use he keeps, and sends me word
I shall have none but Mordake, Earl of Fife.

(I.i.90-94)

Westmoreland believes Hotspur to be prideful as a result of Worcester's instigation:

This is his uncle's teaching, this is Worcester,
Malevolent to you in all aspects,
Which makes him prune himself, and bristle up
The crest of youth against your dignity.

(I.i.95-98)

Further, upon killing Hotspur Hal both praises and laments Hotspur's deeds, noting that the once-glorious "brave Percy" is reduced to food for worms:

Fare thee well, great heart!

Ill-weav'd ambition, how much art thou shrunk!
When that this body did contain a spirit,
A kingdom for it was too small a bound;
But now two paces of the vilest earth
Is room enough. This earth that bears thee dead
Bears not alive so stout a gentleman.
If thou wert sensible of courtesy
I should not make so dear a show of zeal;
But let my favours hide thy mangled face,
And even in thy behalf I'll thank myself
For doing these fair rites of tenderness.
Adieu, and take thy praise with thee to heaven!
Thy ignominy sleep with thee in the grave,
But not remember'd in thy epitaph!

(V.iv.86-100)

This entire speech, though poignant, reflects ambivalence both about the pagan-humanist code of honor itself and about that code in relation to Christian beliefs. Hal seems both to praise Hotspur for his honorable nature and behavior and yet lament his "ill-weaved ambition" and his "ignominy." The young Percy's honors are depicted as being temporal food for worms, as accompanying him to heaven, and as remaining in his epitaph untarnished by his "ignominy."

Hal may indeed represent the Aristotelian mean, but he apparently comes to value honor not solely for the sake of virtue but for pragmatic reasons as well. The "nimble-footed madcap Prince of Wales" (IV.i.95), as Hotspur calls him, makes clear early in the play that his association with

rogues and buffoons will only make his eventual transformation look more brilliant and admirable.

When he removes himself from his comrades at one point he remarks:

I know you all, and will a while uphold
The unyok'd humour of your idleness.
Yet herein will I imitate the sun,
Who doth permit the base contagious clouds
To smother up his beauty from the world,
That when he please again to be himself,
Being wanted he may be more wonder'd at
By breaking through the foul and ugly mists
Of vapours that did seem to strangle him.
If all the year were playing holidays,
To sport would be as tedious as to work;
But when they seldom come, they wish'd-for come,
And nothing pleaseth but rare accident:
So when this loose behaviour I throw off,
And pay the debt I never promised,
By how much better than my word I am,
By so much shall I falsify men's hopes;
And like bright metal on a sullen ground,
My reformation, glitt'ring o'er my fault,
Shall show more goodly and attract more eyes
Than that which hath no foil to set it off.
I'll so offend, to make offence a skill,
Redeeming time when men think least I will.

(I.ii.190-212)

Hal thus reveals his truant behavior to be calculated to bring him greater glory when he begins to behave more honorably. Yet he seems genuinely moved to more honorable behavior when he confronts his long-suffering father's tears: "I shall hereafter, my thrice gracious lord,/ Be more myself" (III.ii.92-93). When the king laments Hal's dissolute and degenerate behavior, Hal responds,

I will redeem all this on Percy's head,
And in the closing of some glorious day
Be bold to tell you that I am your son,
When I will wear a garment all of blood,
And stain my favours in a bloody mask,
Which, wash'd away, shall scour my shame with it

(III.ii.132-137)

This statement seems sincere and virtuous, but there is also a hint of the same pragmatic purpose he made clear in the first act. Hal seems here to value honor, but he has not clearly left his pragmatism behind. Later Hal notes with seemingly genuine dismay his own deficits compared to Hotspur. To Worcester he says,

Tell your nephew,
The Prince of Wales doth join with all the world
In praise of Henry Percy: By my hopes,
This present enterprise set off his head,
I do not think a braver gentleman,
More active-valiant or more valiant-young,
More daring or more bold, is now alive
To grace this latter age with noble deeds.
For my part, I may speak it to my shame,
I have a truant been to chivalry,
And so I hear he doth account me too;
Yet this before my father's majesty--

I am content that he shall take the odds
Of his great name and estimation,
And will, to save the blood on either side,
Try fortune with him in a single fight.

(V.i.85-100)

While Hal's sentiments seem genuine and virtuous, they do not contradict or counteract his initial pragmatic purpose. In fact, Vernon later gives a glowing report of the Prince's metamorphosis which suggests that his pragmatism has come to fruition. He describes Hal:

All furnish'd, all in arms;
All plum'd like estridges that with the wind
Bated, like eagles having lately bath'd;
Glittering in golden coats like images,
As full of spirit as the month of May,
And gorgeous as the sun at midsummer;
Wanton as youthful goats, wild as young bulls.
I saw young Harry with his beaver on,
His cushes on his thighs, gallantly arm'd,
Rise from the ground like feather'd Mercury,
And vaulted with such ease into his seat
As if an angel dropp'd down from the clouds
To turn and wind a fiery Pegasus,
And witch the world with noble horsemanship.

(IV.i.97-110)

After hearing the Prince's noble speech Vernon indicates by his praise that Hal's prediction of the response to his metamorphosis has indeed come about:

No, by my soul, I never in my life
Did hear a challenge urg'd more modestly,
Unless a brother should a brother dare
To gentle exercise and proof of arms.
He gave you all the duties of a man,
Trimm'd up your praises with a princely tongue,
Spoke your deservings like a chronicle,
Making you ever better than his praise
By still dispraising praise valu'd with you,
And, which became him like a prince indeed,
He made a blushing cital of himself,
And chid his truant youth with such a grace
As if he master'd there a double spirit
Of teaching and of learning instantly.
There did he pause: but let me tell the world--
If he outlive the envy of this day,
England did never owe so sweet a hope,
So much misconstru'd in his wantonness.

(V.ii.51-68)

Though Vernon is moved by Hal's metamorphosis, Hotspur's response serves as a reminder of Hal's pragmatic purpose: "Cousin, I think thou art enamoured/ On his follies" (V.ii.69-70).

While the sense of ambiguity and ambivalence about the nature and motivation of honor is depicted primarily in Hotspur, Falstaff, and Hal, Shakespeare also presents comparable ambiguity and ambivalence in the motivation of Northumberland and Worcester to send Hotspur out undermanned to face certain defeat and death at the hands of the king's forces. The two older men

know that, according to the code of honor, once the gauntlet has been thrown down it cannot be retrieved again without dishonor. They have engaged the king in a treasonous rebellion; they must see it through because they will not be forgiven. But whether they fear their deaths or dishonor more is unclear. Northumberland is taken ill but encourages his son to proceed despite his absence. Worcester, however, expresses a more pragmatic concern that he will be unable to outlive the suspicion with which he will be tainted if the rebellion does not proceed to a martial conclusion. When he hears of the king's offer of pardon, his response suggests that he feels a defeat on the battlefield would resolve the issue more to his benefit than would acceptance of the pardon. When Vernon encourages him to tell Hotspur of the king's offer, Worcester responds that if Hotspur were to know,

Then we are all undone.

It is not possible, it cannot be,
The King should keep his word in loving us;
He will suspect us still, and find a time
To punish this offence in other faults:
Supposition all our lives shall be stuck full of eyes,
For treason is but trusted like the fox,
Who, never so tame, so cherish'd and lock'd up,
Will have a wild trick of his ancestors.
Look how we can, or sad or merrily,
Interpretation will misquote our looks,
And we shall feed like oxen at a stall,
The better cherish'd still the nearer death.
My nephew's trespass may be well forgot,
It hath the excuse of youth and heat of blood,
And an adopted name of privilege--
A hare-brained Hotspur, govern'd by a spleen:

All his offences live upon my head
And on his father's. We did train him on,
And, his corruption being ta'en from us,
We as the spring of all shall pay for all:
Therefore, good cousin, let not Harry know
In any case the offer of the King.

(V.ii.3-25)

Worcester's reasoning here sounds less like that of an honorable nobleman avoiding the dishonor of backing down from a conflict and more like that of a desperate man seeking only to save himself. He consequently allows Hotspur to bear the brunt of the rebellion, and Hotspur's death pays the price of the rebellion for his father and uncle. Hotspur's death is, in effect, brought about in large measure by his father and uncle for less than the most honorable reasons.

Just as it is unclear exactly how to evaluate the pivotal characters in Henry IV, Part 1 on the issue of honor, so, too, do the characters of Coriolanus and Volumnia in Coriolanus display some ambiguity or ambivalence on the issue. Like Hotspur, Coriolanus's characterization demonstrates both honor and pride. Like Hal, Volumnia seems to use honor for pragmatic purposes and not simply seek it for virtue's sake alone. Of Coriolanus Norman Rabkin notes, "As he had done in Henry IV, Shakespeare is exploring the double implications of a word on which are built some of our most important ethical and social structures" (131). Coriolanus, like Hotspur, is depicted as the epitome of the honorable soldier, and most of what he does conforms to the accepted classical code of honor. But many of those around him--particularly the common people--consider him proud. He is called "a very dog to the commonality" (I.i.27-28), and though the citizens admit that he has rendered great service to his country, they say that "he pays himself with being proud" (I.i.32-33). One citizen attributes his good deeds to a complex set of motivations: "though soft-conscienced men can be content to say it was for his country, he did it to please his mother, and to be partly proud, which he is, even to the altitude of his virtue" (I.i.36-39). One citizen defends Coriolanus on the

grounds of nature: "What he cannot help in his nature, you account a vice in him. You must in no way say he is covetous" (I.i.40-42). Another citizen responds, "If I must not, I need not be barren of accusations. He hath faults, with surplus, to tire in repetition" (I.i.43-45). This early exchange on Coriolanus's nature sets forth one of the prevailing issues of the play--is Coriolanus to be honored or despised? Is he truly honorable, or is he prideful? As Norman Rabkin notes, Coriolanus is

a protagonist whose virtues are his vices, whose moral assets disqualify him for political success. . . . He is motivated by honor, by the desire for fame, by patriotism, by the desire to please his mother, by pride. Moreover, his pride and his virtues are linked and his pride can be seen as not so much a vice as a part of his nature that he cannot help, a tic, a neurosis. (120-121)

The code of honor warns against pride but also dictates against undervaluing oneself. The code also speaks of seeking the approval of those of appropriate standards. One officer remarks that he is "a brave fellow; but he's vengeance proud, and loves not the common people" (II.ii.5-6). Another officer puts forth an assessment: "[F]or Coriolanus neither to care whether they love or hate him manifests the true knowledge he has in their disposition, and out of his noble carelessness lets them plainly see 't" (II.ii.12-15). Like an honorable man Coriolanus does not wish to have tales of his valor recited:

Your honours' pardon:

I had rather have my wounds to heal again
Than hear say how I got them. . . .
I had rather have one scratch my head i' th' sun
When the alarum were struck, than idly sit
To hear my nothings monster'd.

(II.ii.68-70; 75-77)

Neither, however, does he wish to "[p]ut on the gown, stand naked, and entreat them/ For my wounds' sake to give their suffrage" (II.ii.137-138). Humbling himself to that extent and using his deeds for that purpose are distasteful to him and, he believes, dishonorable. Norman Rabkin explains:

For Caius Marcius [Coriolanus] . . . the deed is its own reward, honorable or dishonorable regardless of what people think of it; honor is a quality of action, not of action's effects; honest praise is flattery and lies because all words that describe what is ultimately personal and subjective must miss the point. . . . Marcius feels special justification in his position because he feels those who would "honor" him to be so unworthy (131)

He speaks scornfully yet perhaps truthfully to himself of the need to beg an honor that is already deserved and earned:

Most sweet voices!
Better it is to die, better to starve,
Than crave the hire which first we do deserve.
Why in this wolvisish toge should I stand here,
To beg of Hob and Dick that does appear
Their needless vouches? Custom calls me to't,
What custom wills, in all things should we do't,
The dust on antique time would lie unswept
And mountainous error be too highly heap'd
For truth to o'er peer. Rather than fool it so,
Let the high office and the honour go
To one that would do thus. I am half through
The one part suffer'd, the other will I do.

(II.iii.111-123)

Is he prideful here or simply adhering to the honorable trait of plainspeaking? He knows he should value time-honored custom, but at what price to himself? He is trapped in the ambiguities and contradictions in the code of honor. When his mother encourages him to humble himself and feign respect for the peoples' voices, he asks her a penetrating question: "Would you have me/ False to my nature?" (III.ii.14-15). When he is chosen consul and then stripped of the title due to a false charge of tyranny, he refuses to plead again for the honor. He does, however, proclaim an honorable patriotism:

I have been consul, and can show for Rome
Her enemies' marks upon me. I do love
My country's good with a respect more tender,
More holy and profound, than mine own life,
My dear wife's estimate, her womb's increase
And treasure of my loins.

(III.iii.110-115)

When the citizens nonetheless call for his banishment, scorning him for his refusal to plead rather than valuing his honorable deeds, he reveals his true feelings about them:

You common cry of curs! whose breath I hate
As reek o' th' rotten fens, whose loves I prize
As the dead carcasses of unburied men
That do corrupt my air: I banish you!
And here remain with your uncertainty!
Let every feeble rumour shake your hearts!
Your enemies, with nodding of their plumes,
Fan you into despair! Have the power still
To banish your defenders, till at length
Your ignorance--which finds not till it feels,
Making but reservation of yourselves,

Still your own foes--deliver you as most
Abated captives to some nation
That won you without blows! Despising
For you the city, thus I turn my back;
There is a world elsewhere!

(III.iii.120-135)

Explaining Coriolanus's sudden rejection of the country he has just professed to love, Rabkin states,

Rome is an idea for Coriolanus, the idea of honor, and paradoxically that idea has led him to reject the state which had been its avatar. With increasing painfulness for the audience, Shakespeare explores the implications of this paradox as the play moves toward its bitter end. His honor drives the only honorable man in Rome to treachery, to the betrayal of the state with whom not only his fortunes but also his values are inextricably associated. The process means the destruction of the man. Having accepted his identity and his name as Rome's defender, he must now reject that identity until nothing is left but his ever more intense sense of personal honor and a consuming hatred for what he takes to be the source of his humiliation. (135-136)

Is he prideful or simply speaking the truth about the mob? Is he guilty of neglecting society's standards in favor of his own standards which he believes to be higher? Here honor as public esteem conflicts with honor as self-esteem, and the play presents no clear solution or resolution. Pointing out the universality of the situation Shakespeare depicts, Norman Rabkin states,

In the situation Shakespeare has taken from Plutarch he finds a vehicle for a political question as relevant to our democratic society as to Roman democracy, the question in fact that John F. Kennedy asked in Profiles in Courage: What is the role of the man of principle in politics? Can he act, involve himself in the world, and retain his honor?

Can he uncompromisingly stand by his principles and yet be a force in the world? Or, if he must compromise his principles in order to gain the popular support he needs to give him force, can those principles remain operative? (134)

When he joins the Volscians Coriolanus claims to know no family and vows, "I'll never/ Be such a gosling to obey instinct, but stand/ As if a man were author of himself/ And knew no other kin" (V.iii.34-37). This is a vow, however, which even he cannot keep, and he ultimately is swayed from destroying Rome by his mother. Tullus Aufidius claims that Coriolanus has lapsed from the code of honor: "[T]hou hast set thy mercy and thy honour/ At difference in thee" (V.iii.200-201). Though the setting of the play is ancient Rome, the Renaissance audience would have perceived the essential conflicts Coriolanus faces not only within the code of honor itself but also between that pagan-humanist code and the basic Christian virtues of humility and mercy. Is Coriolanus correct in choosing mercy over honor? The play provides no clear answer. Coriolanus is a mixture of good and bad, strength and weakness. One cannot help but see him as a man caught between conflicting values.

Volumnia, too, is caught up in a similar conflict. She freely admits to having shaped her son into the man he is and valuing his honor even above his life:

When yet he was but tender-bodied, and the only son of my womb;
when youth with comeliness plucked all gaze his way; when for a day
of kings' entreaties, a mother should not sell him an hour from her
beholding; I, considering how honour would become such a
person--that it was no better than picture-like to hang by th' wall, if
renown made it not stir--was pleased to let him seek danger where he
was like to find fame. To a cruel war I sent him, from whence he

returned, his brows bound with oak. I tell thee, daughter, I sprang not
more in joy at first hearing he was a man-child, than now in first seeing
he had proved himself a man.

(I.iii.5-18)

She takes pride in his injuries:

O, he is wounded; I thank the gods
for't. . . . I' th' shoulder, and i' th' left arm:
there will be large cicatrices to show
the people when he shall stand for his place. He received in the repulse
of Tarquin seven hurts i' th' body.

(II.i.120; 146-149)

However, when she wishes her son to become consul, she encourages him to be gentle and seek the voices of the common people. To Coriolanus it seems she is asking him to deny the very sense of honor she instilled in him: "Why do you wish me milder? Would you have me/ False to my nature? Rather say I play/ The man I am" (III.ii.14-16). Volumnia's response reveals her pragmatism:

O sir, sir, sir.

I would have had you put your power well on
Before you had worn it out. . . .
You might have been enough the man you are,
With striving less to be so: lesser had been
The thwartings of your dispositions, if
You had not show'd them how ye were dispos'd,
Ere they lack'd power to cross you. . . .

I have a heart as little apt as yours.
But yet a brain that leads my use of anger
To better vantage.

(III.ii.16-23; 29-31)

When Coriolanus balks at the suggestion that he be pragmatic and seek the forgiveness of the people for his harsh words to them, Volumnia reminds him of the very practical use of gentle words and appeals to his honor from a different angle:

[N]ow it lies you on to speak

To th' people; not by your own instruction,
Nor by the matter which your heart prompts you,
But with such words that are but roted in
Your tongue, though but bastards and syllables
Of no allowance to your bosom's truth.
Now, this no more dishonours you at all
Than to take in a town with gentle words,
Which else would put you to your fortune and
The hazard of much blood.
I would dissemble with my nature where
My fortunes and my friends at stake requir'd
I should do so in honour. I am in this
Your wife, your son, these senators, the nobles;
And you will rather show our general louts
How you can frown, than spend a fawn upon 'em
For the inheritance of their loves and safeguard
Of what that want might ruin.

(III.ii.52-69)

She appeals to his sense of honor and duty toward his friends and loved ones, but she does acknowledge his difficulty in humbling himself before his inferiors:

Prithee now,
Go and be rul'd; although I know thou hadst rather
Follow thine enemy in a fiery gulf
Than flatter him in a bower.

(III.ii.89-92)

Coriolanus vacillates:

Well, I must do 't.
Away, my disposition, and possess me
Some harlot's spirit! My throat of war be turn'd,
Which choir'd with my drum, into a pipe
Small as an eunuch, or the virgin voice
That babies lull asleep! The smiles of knaves
Tent in my cheeks, and schoolboys' tears take up
The glasses of my sight! A beggar's tongue
Make motion through my lips, and my arm'd knees,
Who bow'd but in my stirrup, bend like his
That hath receiv'd an alms! I will not do 't,
Lest I surcease to honour mine own truth,
And by my body's action teach my mind
A most inherent baseness.

(III.ii.110-123)

Volumnia then cites her own self-abnegation before him, suggesting that he is honor-bound to do her bidding:

At thy choice, then:

To beg of thee, it is my more dishonour
Than thou of them. Come all to ruin; let
Thy mother rather feel thy pride than fear
Thy dangerous stoutness, for I mock at death
With as big heart as thou. Do as thou list.
Thy valiantness was mine, thou suck'st it from me,
But owe thy pride thyself.

(III.ii.123-130)

This point, a complication in the code of honor, moves him. What Volumnia has revealed about herself, however, is interesting in its ambiguity. She is a temporizer. She seems to adhere to the classical code of honor but advocates its virtual dismissal for pragmatic reasons. Perhaps, as Stauffer suggests, she is "aware that pure nobility may itself be a disastrous extreme" (258). However, she is willing to interpret the confusing and contradictory aspects of the code to her advantage, according to her desires. She is also willing to chide her son's "pride" when his adherence to honor means he does not do as she wishes. "She is unmistakably the source of his values, though paradoxically he has learned to love honor and Rome with a totally different understanding from hers of what they mean" (Rabkin 141). And, as a last resort, she reminds him that as his mother she should not have to beg him to do anything. Not once but twice in the play she moves him by this ultimate persuasive tactic. She uses it to convince him to humble himself to gain personal power, a pragmatic motivation of questionable honor. Yet she also uses it to save her country, a perhaps more worthy

goal. And to save her country she is willing to persuade her son to go willingly to certain death. In Rabkin's words,

For the Roman matriarch Rome comes first, and she has raised her son as an offering to it. But Rome for Volumnia is not, as it is for Marcius, an abstract ethical idea, but a city, a people, a state, a history. For Rome anything can be sacrificed, and always in honor. . . . Honor is her theme as it is her son's. But we have seen from the beginning that for Volumnia honor is the glory that Rome can confer on its loyal servants, and that honor can therefore employ policy, political expediency. Her notion of honor is the most tempting alternative to Marcius' idea, but finally it, too, is unsatisfactory. Volumnia's honor requires that Coriolanus violate his sworn word to the Volscians in order to give up the battle against Rome. It demands that Coriolanus see his virtue not in terms of what he has accomplished, but in terms of what it can get him. It concedes that value is dictated not by the nature of the object but by the tastes of the valuer, so that Coriolanus is honorable not so much when he rescues Rome as when he receives the accolades of its worthless citizens. (138)

To persuade him to halt his advance on Rome Volumnia appeals to Coriolanus's honor and she kneels before him. She reminds him that if he should destroy Rome he will in effect destroy his wife, his child, and his mother:

[T]hou shalt no sooner
March to assault thy country than to tread--
Trust to 't, thou shalt not--on thy mother's womb
That brought thee to this world.

(V.iii.122-125)

"[T]he hero cannot reach his final destruction without learning from the mother who has instilled his virtue and his passion in him the meaning of his action" (Rabkin, 136). Volumnia culminates her appeal:

Thou know'st, great son,
The end of war's uncertain, but this certain,
That if thou conquer Rome, the benefit
Which thou shalt thereby reap is such a name
Whose repetition will be dogg'd with curses,
Whose chronicle thus writ: 'The man was noble,
But with his last attempt he wiped it out,
Destroy'd his country, and his name remains
To th' insuing age abhorr'd.' Speak to me, son:
Thou hast affected the fine strains of honour,
To imitate the graces of the gods

(V.iii.140-150)

She deftly uses to her advantage and to effect her goals the complexities inherent in the discernment of true honor; her son is strapped by those same complexities, not knowing what course is truly honorable. Rabkin explains:

[T]o Marcius himself it is a shock to realize that he has betrayed the Roman faith of his mother which he had thought he was emulating and gratifying; and once he makes the concession (which Volumnia maneuvers with great subtlety and skill), he recognizes the ambiguity of his position. Each time, he yields to Volumnia: first to agree to submit himself once more to popular judgment, second to betray his new Volscian allies. Each time he gives up his own principle for Volumnia, and each time the result is disaster. . . .

What makes Volumnia twice successful in shifting Coriolanus' course when Cominius, Menenius, and the rest consistently fail is her ability to make her son doubt the integrity of his own faith. If she taught it to him, and if from her point of view he has not got it right, then he cannot have that godlike sense of his own power and independence; in granting Volumnia a favor he is broken as banishment from Rome and military defeat could never have broken him. He would rather not know that the source of his behavior lies in character rather than rational principle. (141-142)

He is caught between the part of him that is the honorable man of war and the part of him which is, despite his best intentions, "a gosling to obey instinct" (V.iii.35). Tullus Aufidius offers an apt assessment of the difficulties which Coriolanus faces in attempting to reconcile his nature and his will, his humanity with his drive toward honor:

Whether 'twas pride,
Which out of daily fortune ever taints
The happy man; whether defect of judgement,
To fail in the disposing of those chances
Which he was lord of; or whether nature,
Not to be other than one thing, . . . but one of these--
As he hath spices of them all, not all,
For I dare so far free him made him fear'd,
So hated, and so banish'd.

(IV.vii.37-48)

He is caught between mercy and honor, between pure nobility and pragmatism. Volumnia is able to function amid the ambiguities of honor; Coriolanus cannot successfully negotiate passage between his own Scylla and Charybdis. Volumnia is actually able to do what Coriolanus is not--she can, in the interest of honor and patriotism, put aside maternal sentiment. Coriolanus cannot ultimately

turn his back on his family despite the risk to his martial honor. Again Rabkin notes, "It is Shakespeare's demonstration of the dominance of character over what we would like to be, of the priority of personality over principle in the motivation of human action, that brings this play as close to being a depressing experience as any tragedy of Shakespeare ever gets" (142). Further, Donald A. Stauffer notes, "The play is a continuous quest for a responsible authority. To whom or to what should allegiance be accorded--in the state, in the family (that microcosm of the state), in the hierarchy of man's own faculties?" (250). When Coriolanus assents to his mother's pleas to save Rome has he in fact lost or won in his quest for honor? As J. M. R. Margeson notes, the play is

concerned with the divisive effects of love, pride, or honour upon those who seek worldly success as well as personal fulfilment. . . . It is . . . a considerable simplification of Coriolanus to say that the play consists of two opposed worlds, two sets of values between which Coriolanus is forced to choose. Yet it is clear that there is an opposition in the play between Coriolanus's sense of his own integrity, a personal code of values, and the code of patriotism, duty, and traditional rights, which is social in its origins and in its demands. . . . Shakespeare reveals in serious terms a conflict between civic duty and loyalty on the one hand and personal wholeness or integrity on the other . . . (161-162; 166)

The play's dramatic highlighting of the inconsistencies and ambiguities in the concept of honor and the authoritative source of honor suggests that despite whatever uneasy synthesis the Renaissance achieved between Christian and pagan values and between personal and social honor, for a man to follow the way of honor was no easy task. Glynne Wickham argues that the play itself, in its representation of conflicting values, is representative of the melange of values of Shakespeare's day: "The play is Senecan in that it recounts in dramatic dialogue the fall of a hero from a state of prosperity to one of adversity; but it is also the product of a Christian society in so far as it attaches blame for this fall within the character of the hero" (235). As Stauffer remarks,

Shakespeare in *Coriolanus* presents a world--perhaps the world--in its essential complexity, with "its vertical warp of passion held firmly in place by the horizontal weaving of compassion" (265).

Just how difficult it was to follow the classical dictates of honor (though certainly following the Christian code of ethics was also no easy task) is revealed in certain Renaissance dramas which highlight the parent's anguish at bringing about a child's death. These parents, like Abraham, do what they feel they must, but they reveal vividly the toll that such action takes on them. The Abrahams in the medieval plays express reluctance, pain, and anguish at having to sacrifice Isaac even though they know that God's will must be done. Just as *Coriolanus* cannot rid himself of the emotional bond to his family, so the fathers in Titus Andronicus, Massinger and Field's The Fatal Dowry, and Webster's Appius and Virginia cannot without emotion and regret bring about their children's deaths, even when they are convinced that honor and justice require those deaths. Such parental anguish reveals the cost of honor and raises the question of whether honor is worth that cost.

In Shakespeare's Titus Andronicus the title character is the vehicle for revealing the difficulties and ambiguities in the classical code of honor. In the course of the play he kills two of his children, both for reasons of honor. In both cases, however, the code of honor is shown to be complex, contradictory, and antagonistic to certain undeniable and valuable human emotions.

In the first scene of the play Titus gives his daughter to the emperor Saturninus even though she has already been promised to Bassianus. The emperor seeks to honor Titus for his service and also wants Lavinia for himself, so he asks for Lavinia to connect Titus with the royal family:

Titus Andronicus, for thy favours done
To us in our election this day,
I give thee thanks in part of thy deserts,
And will with deeds requite thy gentleness:
And for an onset, Titus, to advance
Thy name and honourable family,
Lavinia will I make my emperess,

Rome's royal mistress, mistress of my heart,
And in the sacred Pantheon her espouse.
Tell me, Andronicus, doth this motion please thee?

(I.i.234-243)

Titus responds gratefully to the honor the emperor bestows:

It doth, my worthy lord, and in this match
I hold me highly honoured of your grace:
And here in sight of Rome, to Saturnine,
King and commander of our commonweal,
The wide world's emperor, do I consecrate
My sword, my chariot, and my prisoners;
Presents well worthy Rome's imperious lord:
Receive them then, the tribute that I owe,
Mine honour's ensigns humbled at thy feet.

(I.i.244-252)

Bassianus, however, seizes Lavinia to escape with her, claiming that he "justly may/ Bear his betroth'd from all the world away" (I.i.285-286). Titus tries to stop him but is prevented from doing so by his own sons. Three of his sons assist Bassianus and one, Mutius, attempts to halt his father's attempt. Titus, enraged, exclaims, "What, villain boy/ Barr'st me my way in Rome?" (I.i.290-291), and then Titus kills his son. Another son, Lucius, points out Titus's unjust rashness: "My lord, you are unjust, and, more than so,/ In wrongful quarrel you have slain your son" (I.i.292-293), Titus argues that his sons have dishonored him and, by implication, that Mutius deserved to die for that offense: "Nor thou, nor he, are any sons of mine;/ My sons would never so dishonour me./ Traitor, restore Lavinia to the emperor" (I.i.294-296). Titus believes that he has a right to give his daughter to anyone he pleases, and he has just struck a bargain with the emperor concerning her. He feels it would bring him and his family honor to be connected with the emperor, and he believes it

dishonorable to fail to please the emperor and to break their agreement. Lucius, however, reminds his father that to give Lavinia to the emperor would break a prior promise, a circumstance which would also dishonor Titus. When commanded to return Lavinia he says, "Dead, if you will; but not to be his wife/ That is another's lawful-promis'd love" (I.i.297-298). Saturninus scorns Titus for his sons' actions, though the audience has already seen that the emperor's affections have turned to Tamora. Titus is discouraged at being dishonored by the emperor and, when confronted by his son Marcus who reminds him that he has "[i]n a bad quarrel slain a virtuous son" (I.i.342), he again condemns his sons for his dishonor:

No, foolish tribune, no; no son of mine,
Nor thou, nor these, confederates in the deed
That hath dishonoured all our family:
Unworthy brother, and unworthy sons!

(I.i.343-346)

Titus here is trapped by the contradictions in the code of honor and perhaps also by pride which he mistakes for honor. When Lavinia is raped and maimed, however, the classical code of honor is clear--death is preferable to living with shame. Titus confronts Saturninus with the story of Apius and Virginia, and the emperor agrees that Virginius was right to kill his daughter "[b]ecause the girl should not survive her shame/ And by her presence still renew his [Virginius's] sorrows" (V.iii.41-42). Titus then claims Virginius's justification for his own and kills Lavinia:

A reason might, strong, and effectual;
A pattern, president, and lively warrant
For me, most wretched, to perform the like.
Die, die, Lavinia, and thy shame with thee;
And, with thy shame, thy father's sorrows die!

(V.iii.43-47)

Saturninus calls him “unnatural and unkind,” but Titus claims that he is “as woeful as Virginius was,/ And have a thousand times more cause than he/ To do this outrage: and it now is done” (V.iii.50-52). Though Titus feels honor demands that Lavinia be spared her shame and he his subsequent pain, he nonetheless is “woeful” at committing the “outrage.” Though he is himself soon killed by Saturninus, the implication is that his removing Lavinia from dishonor, while considered an “honorable” deed, gives Titus even greater pain than her dishonor. Titus kills two of his children in what he believes to be the service of honor, but he seems to be in reality more a victim of the conflicting and painful demands of honor.

Titus’s pained willingness to kill his children for the sake of honor is contrasted in Aaron’s willingness to fight and cajole to keep his bastard infant alive. Though the Moor is clearly a scheming, devious character, Shakespeare’s depiction of him with his baby is quite sympathetic. When Demetrius and Chiron attempt to kill the baby to protect their mother from the dishonor of adultery, Aaron exclaims,

Now, by the burning tapers of the sky
That shone so brightly when this boy was got,
He dies upon my scimitar’s sharp point
That touches this my first-born son and heir.
I tell you, younglings, not Enceladus,
With all his threat’ning band of Typhon’s brood,
Nor great Alcides, nor the god of war,
Shall seize this prey out of his father’s hands.

(IV.ii.89-96)

Aaron calls his child

my self;
The vigour and the picture of my youth:
This before all the world do I prefer;

This maugre all the world will I keep safe,
Or some of you shall smoke for it in Rome.

(IV.ii.107-111)

Aaron further betrays Tamora and all their schemings to Lucius in order to save his baby. The juxtaposition of Aaron's willingness to do anything to save his child with Titus's willingness to kill his children for the ephemeral and elusive "Honor" casts a shadow on Titus's character.

Another parent who brings about his child's death for reasons of honor but suffers himself as a result is Rochfort in Massinger and Field's The Fatal Dowry. He is called upon to judge his daughter for adultery, an offense which according to the classical concept of honor is worthy of death. Rochfort, knowing his daughter has parted with her honor in parting with her chastity, and knowing the honor of her husband Charalois has been violated, pronounces,

The wrong that's done to the chaste marriage bed,
Repentant teares can never expiate,
And be assured, to pardon such a sinne,
Is an offence as great as to commit it.

(IV.iv.156-159)

When Charalois notes that he may not then forgive Beaumelle without himself being guilty of a crime, Rochfort proclaims,

Nor she hope it.
Nor can shee wish to live: no sunne shall rise,
But ere it set, shall shew her ugly lust
In a new shape, and every one more horrid:
Nay, even those prayers, which with such humble fervour
She seemes to send up yonder, are beate backe,

And all suites, which her penitence can proffer,
As soone as made, are with contempt throwne
Off all the courts of mercy.

(IV.iv.161-169)

When Charalois kills Beaumelle, citing Rochfort's own judgment, Rochfort chastizes Charalois for his lack of mercy:

But I pronounc'd it
As a Judge onely, and friend to justice,
And zealous in defence of your worng'd honour,
Broke all the tyes of nature: and cast off
The love and soft affection of a father.
I in your cause, put on a Scarlet robe
Of red died cruelty, but in returne,
You have advanc'd for me no flag of mercy:
I look'd on you, as a wrong'd husband, but
You clos'd your eyes against me, as a father.
O Beaumelle, my daughter. . . .
Keep from me--could not one good thought rise up,
To tell you that she was my ages comfort,
Begot by a weake man, and borne a woman,
And could not therefore, but partake of frailty?
Or wherefore did not thankfulness step forth,
To urge my many merits, which I may
Object unto you, since you prove ungratefull,
Flinty-hearted Charaloys?

(IV.iv.183-193; 195-202)

Charalois states that Rochfort is forgetting honor and succumbing to paternal emotion: "Nature does prevaile above your vertue" (IV.iv.203). Rochfort, however, accuses Charalois of plotting against him:

No: it gives me eyes,
To pierce the heart of designe against me.
I finde it now, it was my state was aym'd at,
A nobler match was sought for, and the houres
I liv'd, grew teadious to you: my compassion
Towards you hath rendred me most miserable,
And foolish charity undone my selfe:
But ther's a Heaven above, from whose just wreake
No mists of policy can hide offenders

(IV.iv.204-212)

When brought before a judge himself, Rochfort asserts that he has been betrayed by the "Vertue" or honor on which he built his life because it caused him to value Charalois who brought sadness upon him:

'Tis I alone am sorry, that I rays'd
The building of my life for seventy yeeres
Upon so sure a ground, that all the vices
Practis'd to ruine man, though brought against me,
Could never undermine, and no way left
To send these gray haire to the grave with sorrow.
Vertue that was my patronesse, betrayd me:
For entring, nay, possessing this young man,
It lent him such a powerfull Majesty
To grace what ere he undertooke, that freely
I gave my selfe up with my liberty,

To be at his disposing; had his person,
Lovely I must confesse, or far fam'd valour,
Or any other seeming good, that yet
Holds a neere neyghbour-hood, with ill wrought on me,
I might have borne it better: but when goodnesse
And piety it selfe in her best figure
Were brib'd to my destruction, can you blame me,
Though I forget to suffer like a man,
Or rather act a woman?

(V.ii.164-183)

When Charalois is proven innocent of any conspiracy against Rochfort and his estate, Rochfort forgives Charalois but despondently exits to seek his death:

I am not of the world, if it can prosper,
(And yet being justly got, Ile not examine
Why it should be so fatall) doe you bestow it [his estate]
On pious uses. Ile goe seeke a grave.
And yet for prooffe, I die in peace, your pardon
I aske, and as you grant it me, may Heaven
Your conscience, and these Judges free you from
What you are charg'd with. So farewell for ever--

(V.ii.278-285)

Rochfort is in fact in one sense a victim of the classical code of honor. He is honor-bound to pronounce his daughter's doom for her adultery, yet her subsequent death pains him and teaches him the necessity of mercy even above honor.

John Webster presents a similar situation in his version of Appius and Virginia. When Webster's Virginius realizes that he must kill Virginia as she requests in order to spare her from shame, he laments the unhappiness of his situation:

O you Gods,
Extinguish it with your compassionate tears,
Although you make a second deluge spread,
And swell more high then Tenerife's high head.
Have not the Wars heapt snow sufficient
Upon this aged head, but they will stil
Pile winter upon winter?

(IV.i.44-50)

His final words to Virginia are moving in their paternal love and tenderness:

Farewel my sweet Virginia, never, never
Shall I taste fruit of the most blessed hope
I had in thee. Let me forget the thought
Of thy most pretty infancy, when first
Returning from the Wars, I took delight
To rock thee in my Target; when my Girl
Would kiss her father in his burganet
Of glittering steel hung 'bout his armed neck
And viewing the bright mettall, smile to see
Another fair Virginia smile on thee:
When I first taught thee how to go, to speak:
And when my wounds have smarted, I have sung
With an unskilful, yet a willing voice
To bring my Girl asleep. O my Virginia,

When we begun to be, begun our woes,
Increasing still, as dying life still growes.

(IV.i.321-336)

After killing her he escapes to his camp and confesses his guilt to his comrades, explaining,

For 'twas mine honor, my paternal pity,
And the sole act, for which I love my life . . .
Then lustful Appius, he that swayed the Land,
Slew poor Virginia by this fathers hand.

(IV.ii.153-156)

Though the soldiers proclaim him innocent and Appius guilty, Virginius rejects honor and tries to kill himself:

What's honor unto me, a weak old man,
Weary of life, and covetous of a grave?
I am a dead man now Virginia lives not--
The self same hand that dar'd to save from shame
A child, dares in the father act the same.

(IV.ii.184-188)

He is later confronted by Icilius who, pointing out the discrepancy between the code of honor and the dictates of nature, condemns Virgilius for his murder of Virginia:

Old man, thou has shewed thy self a noble Roman,
But an unnatural Father; thou hast turned
My Bridal to a Funeral. What diuel
Did arme thy fury with the Lions paw,
The Dragons taile, with the Bulls double horne,
The Cormorants beak, the Cockatrices eyes,

The Scorpions teeth? and all these by a father
To be employed upon his innocent child!

(V.i.110-117)

Virginius asserts that his action was honorable despite its unnaturalness:

Young man, I love thy true description;
I am happy now, that one beside my selfe,
Doth teach me for this act. Yet were I pleased,
I cou'd approve the deed most Just and noble;
And, sure, posterity, which truly renders
To each man his desert, shal praise me for't.

(V.i.118-123)

Icilius counters, "[T]was unnatural and damnable" (V.i.124). Virginius explains his point:

You are a Roman Knight.
What was your oath when you receiv'd your Knighthood?
A parcel of it is, as I remember,
Rather to die with honour, then to live
In servitude. Had my poor girle been ravish'd,
In her dishonour, and in my sad grieve,
Your love and pity quickly had ta'ne end.

(V.i.126-132)

He and Icilius are reconciled, and Icilius remarks, "There's hope yet you man live,/ To outwear this sorrow" (V.i.177-178). Virginius disagrees:

O impossible.
A minutes joy to me, would quite crosse nature,
As those that long have dwelt in noisome rooms,
Swoun presently if they but scent perfumes.

(V.i.179-182)

When he confronts Virginia's corpse he is overcome:

This sight hath stiffned all my operant powers,
Ic'd all my blood, benum'd my motion quite.
I'l powre my soul into my daughters belly,
And with a soldiers tears imbalm her wounds.
My only dear Virginia!

(V.ii.108-112)

Though Appius comes to his deserved fate and Virginius is honored with a consulship, it is clear from Webster's expansion on Virginius's grief that honor is not always satisfying and being honorable is not always completely admirable.

The pain that Virginius and other Renaissance parents feel in bringing about their children's deaths in order to serve the dictates of Honor suggests that in certain circumstances to serve Honor requires a denial of humanity. Titus Andronicus's pained response to his killing of Lavinia even though he is convinced that it is the honorable thing to do raises another related question about the Renaissance code of honor. In several plays the parent's despair at killing his child raises the question of whether all actions which fit the code of honor are in the truest sense virtuous. Abraham in several of the medieval versions expresses his pain at the necessity of doing God's bidding, with the result being that the plays risk making God seem like a cruel tyrant. Indeed, except for the general understanding of the necessary outcome of his experience, Abraham could be considered a tragic hero, "a great man plunged from prosperity into adversity" (Wickham 49). In a number of the Renaissance plays the parent who kills his child is in fact tyrannical or at least the servant of his own foolish pride rather than of any truly virtuous code; frequently that parent is faced with a truly tragic dilemma. In the Renaissance, secular moral values became more popular, but their implementation was problematic due both to the complexities and frequent contradictions in the system itself and to the continuance of the Christian ethos. While both the classical ethos and the Christian ethos were subject to perverse applications due to human weaknesses, flaws, and self-interested motivations, even a positive application of one or the other or both could place man

between what Stauffer describes as the “tragic choice between two goods” (263). Norman Rabkin offers an apt summary assessment:

It is not surprising that the Renaissance, that age in which the syncretism of western culture was felt most urgently and in which much that is important in philosophy, statecraft, and the arts was the result of an often conscious tension between Hebrew-Christian and classical elements, should have produced so many literary works in which the idea of honor in its opposed meanings is crucial. The ambiguity of the idea, classically developed in the implicit debate between Hotspur and Falstaff, is crucial as well in numerous plays by Shakespeare’s contemporaries, and by the mid-seventeenth century has become one of the few subjects left to tragedy. (131-132)

CHAPTER VI

PARADIGM AND THEME: THE CONTINUITY OF A HUMAN ISSUE

The story of Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac in Genesis 22 has through the ages remained compelling both for its pathos and for its provocative ethos. Martin Luther captures the essence of the story: "Thus . . . all the devout believers enter with Abraham into the darkness of faith, and put reason to death, saying, 'Reason, you are besotted.'"¹ Centuries after Luther, Soren Kierkegaard, in his Fear and Trembling, called Abraham "the Knight of Faith." The question of what would prompt a parent to kill his own child has been a puzzle to mankind from the earliest records of civilization. Abraham, the paradigm in the Judeo-Christian heritage, has counterparts in the pagan tradition in Agamemnon and Virginius.

Among the more powerful dramatic treatments of this theme of child sacrifice are the medieval Corpus Christi mystery cycle plays based on the biblical episode. While these plays generally reflect and represent the doctrine of the Roman church insofar as it was understood by the laity, they nonetheless display varying degrees of dramatic power and skill. The enduring vitality and popularity of the mystery cycles--along with other forms of medieval drama--meant that the cycle plays were an established theatrical institution inherited by later dramatists which compelled their attention. As Weimann notes,

For Shakespeare, the art and experience of playing handed down via the popular stage was part of a meaningful cultural past in the process of its present reawakening, assimilation and change. For him the popular tradition was an ever changing phenomenon in which the imprint of the past and the impact of his present constantly interacted. Shakespeare excelled as a playwright precisely because of his ability to relate the

¹Cited by Kinsman 1.

dramatic vitality of a still living past to the drama of contemporary life. (xvii)

Though one should not diminish or detract from the other traditions which influenced English Renaissance drama, in a very particular way medieval drama shaped the drama of the Renaissance, even though the lines of influence may not be clear or direct. As Margeson notes,

The actual debt of Elizabethan tragedy to the mystery plays was not the result of direct succession. Nevertheless, the debt exists, because the popular drama began to acquire many of its lasting characteristics in the late medieval period. There came into existence a large body of drama, widely played to great audiences, which dealt seriously with themes of tragic implication

In terms of form, medieval drama supplied a legacy of archetypal characters of general significance--the kings of the world acting as enemies of God, the sinners who deserted God and suffered remorse and punishment, and the innocent victims of the world's evil. Attached to these representative figures were situations, Biblical or legendary, also of doctrinal significance, but capable of generating strong emotions polarized in the directions of pathos and horror. Popular drama had been through these experiences during the fifteenth century, and had discovered means of exploiting them within the strict limits of the religious cycles. In the sixteenth century it was ready to accept wider ranges of experience and new forms of expression. (27-28)

With the sixteenth century, however, came the dramatic and slowly-evolving changes of the Renaissance and the Reformation, and the overall result of these movements was a faster-paced life of broadening social and economic bases which naturally affected the drama of the era. Robert Weimann offers the following assessment:

When the Elizabethan theater flowered in the 1580's, England was in the midst of an economic expansion and national awakening. The medieval structures of life, which still predominated in other European countries, with their rural agricultural systems based on payment in kind and their unwieldy guild organization in the towns, had been greatly weakened or even superseded in England. The growth of a market--first for goods, then for land and labor, and finally for money--as well as the development of an extensive cloth industry serving overseas export markets, the great influx of American gold and silver, and the sharp rise in prices dating from the midcentury all proved powerful dissolvents of the traditional economy. As productivity accelerated, so did building, shipping, and trade. The decline of feudal social organization and medieval habits of life ushered in a new era of prosperity for England--an age fundamentally of an economic revolution which nonetheless, despite the profound disruptions, was also an era of social compromise that achieved a temporary political stability and a cultural synthesis of old and new. Here was the basis of a modern national consciousness and of a newly found creative cultural potential that enriched and transformed the sixteenth-century theater. (161)

Sixteenth-century England was a more secular society, less metaphysical and more enamored of the ancient classical world and all its cultural products than was the medieval era. Coupled with this greater secularization was the emerging new religious perspective of the Reformation which challenged the supremacy of the Roman church both politically and doctrinally. The result of these

changes, however, was not a complete rejection of the medieval past and its culture but a new way of considering them. Above all, the more secular society of Renaissance England did not--and could not--escape the moral and ethical concerns of the medieval era which were profoundly and ultimately inescapable human issues, as many classical writings demonstrated. A. L. Rowse notes that the "exploration of man's nature" was "the essence of the Renaissance experience":

Since religion had lost its universal validity with the breakdown of medieval Catholicism, and the security of one faith with the rise of the sects, the elect intelligences of the age were faced with the problem of man's nature in itself--not without God, or independent of God, but nevertheless a microcosm in himself. This was another commonplace of the age: it led to the glorification of man on the one side, of his marvelous potentialities . . . ; on the other hand it sharpened the sense of the evil in him (186)

The modern theater of the Renaissance became, like other social arenas, a forum for examining enduring issues from new perspectives. Margeson argues that the increasing secularization of drama did not mean the demise of all moral content: "secular elements, in the form of comic action, individual personality, and narrative suspense, began increasingly to disguise the moral themes of the original, purely didactic, drama" (61). Similarly, Weimann argues that the theater was a laboratory in which various cultural forces were combined, examined, and analyzed with the result that "[j]ust as in education, religion, philosophy, social ethics and other moral attitudes, the old confronted, and often held its own against, the new" (169). Further, Margeson notes,

No writer, especially a writer for the popular theatre, could altogether escape the force of medieval drama, though . . . [he might be inclined] to scorn it as superstitious and barbarous. Even Marlowe was aware of its emotional and metaphysical power. . . . [T]he religious drama provided to the dramatic imagination certain characteristic situations of undeniable tragic force, and a religious vision of the meaning of such

experiences. It saw the universe divided between forces of evil and forces of good, and man's nature divided also between rebellion and obedience--a view which seemed to make tragic experience inevitable, even if contained within a larger providential scheme that was not tragic. The predicament of innocence in a world that is defiantly and cruelly evil, and the predicament of the sinner who discovers the nature of his sin and the terror of rebellion against God, became the heritage of the later drama in a number of vivid dramatic images. . . . Though the tragedy of the English Renaissance is not in the main Christian tragedy, there is no doubt that religious levels of experience run through almost all its forms. Without the conception that human aspiration might be fulfilled or that ultimate justice might be achieved in a universe willing to accept such dreams, the poignancy and irony of tragedy would scarcely exist. (70-71; 185)

One of the most vivid of the images in medieval drama was that of Abraham sacrificing his beloved son. The Abraham of Genesis as reflected in the medieval plays functions as a paradigm against which the parents of Renaissance dramas are implicitly measured and from which they developed. As Rosemary Woolf notes, "[W]ith the help of the mystery plays the [Renaissance] dramatist observed the pathos and dramatic force of the theme of a father compelled by some higher law to kill his child," and, consequently, a number of Renaissance plays build on this premise in a number of different ways ("The Influence of the Mystery Plays" 93). The Renaissance dramas in which a parent kills his child or brings about the death of his child differ from the Genesis story and the medieval plays based on it in that none of the Renaissance parents is responding to God's command. The Renaissance playwrights examine the ethics of a parent's killing a child within the context of more secular motivations. Such motivations range from pure materialism, pride, anger at the child's disobedience, and obedience to an earthly ruler to the more metaphysical concept of sacrifice for the sake of such intangibles as patriotism, justice, and honor. While the playwrights'

implied judgments concerning the Renaissance parents in their dramas range from absolute condemnation to hearty approval--with a full measure of ambivalence included--always apparent in the background is the perplexing and awesome figure of Abraham whose willingness to kill his child at God's command remains a monument to religious faith. The pervasive story of Genesis 22 and the enduring medieval plays based on it mean that to whatever extent a Renaissance playwright treated a parent's killing of a child he was consciously or unconsciously inviting a comparison between that parent and Abraham, though clearly the Renaissance playwrights invited such a comparison from the more contemporary and more secular perspectives of their society. Such reshaping of an enduring human ethical concern stands as a monument both to the ever-changing yet ever the same human condition and to the human creative capacity to give life, through art, to that condition.

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