Figures of Prayers in William Shakespeare's *Richard III*

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0. Introduction

Before his execution, Buckingham, once complicit in Richard's plot, vividly remembers an incident on All Souls' Day:

Why then, All Souls' Day is my body's doomsday.
This is the day that in King Edward's time
I wished might fall on me when I was found
False to his children or his wife's allies.
This is the day wherein I wished to fall
By the false faith of him I trusted most.
This, this All Souls' Day to my fearful soul
Is the determined respite of my wrongs.
That high all-seer that I dallied with
Hath turned my feignèd prayer on my head,
And given in earnest what I begged in jest.

Now Margaret's curse is fallen upon my head. (V. i. 12-25)

Thus, his "dallying" in perjury was requited with its verbatim realization. While he "confessed the whole fact & conspiracie [against King Richard], vpon All soules daie" in Holinshed's *Chronicles* (3: 418), Buckingham regrets only one point here in Shakespeare's play. In his confession, he keeps thinking about what he "begged in jest" and hence his memory of prayer.

Shakespeare's *Richard III* is abundant in prayers. If the curses of Margaret are included, the frequency of prayer is quite high. It seems, however, that prayer in Shakespeare's *Richard III* has received relatively little critical attention in proportion to its high frequency, except that Ramie Targoff, in her paper published in 2002, explored its theological as well as dramatic connotation in the play. Along with her exhaustive study on the historical connotation of the word "amen" as an act of ratification, she focuses on the three scenes where the conference of kingship is particularly concerned: III. vii, V. iv, and V. vii. Thoroughly examined as her diachronic approach is, the rest of the prayers in the play remain unexplored.

Current critical indifference to the prayers in the play might be partly ascribed to the fact that some of the prayer scenes, such as Richmond's prayer at the end of the play, are taken from its chronicle sources. It is generally agreed that Shakespeare relies for his source mainly on both
Holinshed’s and Hall’s versions of Sir Thomas More’s *History of Richard III*. However, the prayers in the play are by no means the faithful echoes of the prayers in those chronicles, but with some alterations came to acquire somewhat different meanings by the time the play was brought into performance. In fact, what is striking in Shakespeare’s *Richard III* is, I think, the characters’ preoccupation with the details of prayer words.

Characters’ sensitivities to the paradigmatic structure of prayers can be illustrated when Richard cries “Margaret” as if to turn the trajectory of Margaret’s curse away from himself:

**RICHARD.** Margaret . . .
**MARGARET.** O let me make the period to my curse.
**RICHARD.** ’Tis done by me, and ends in ‘Margaret’. (I. iii. 231–39)

As if to justify their anxiety, there are constantly considerable disagreements over the way people interpret the prayers. Their awkwardness can be particularly prominent when they surmise which anaphoric objects prayer words refer to. In the play, the character’s expectation of an intended referent of a prayer often turns out to be a wrong one. They assign to prayer what they consider to be an unambiguously fixed meaning, only to find later that their prayers have gained somewhat different meanings during the course of the play. There is always the possibility of the discrepancy between the actual subject of prayer and the object the prayer intends to refer to.

Sometimes, the backward pronominalization is realized with sense of dramatic irony. Anne, the daughter-in-law of the late Henry VI, one of the victims of Richard’s ambition, prays for revenge and curses Richard’s unknown future wife, only to find later that she is the one who dares to get married to him:

Lo, ere I can repeat this curse again,
Even in so short a space, my woman’s heart
Grossly grew captive to his honey words,
And *proved the subject of my own soul’s curse*,
Which ever since hath kept my eyes from sleep; (IV. i. 73–77; emphasis added)

Another instance is Prince Edward. After Richard says defamatory things about the queen’s close relatives, he makes Prince Edward pray for the deliverance from those “dangerous” (III. i. 12) uncles: “**RICHARD.** God keep you from them, and from such false friends. / **PRINCE.** God keep me from false friends, but they were none” (III. i. 15–16). As soon as Edward prays, he specifies the referents of his “false friends.” Although Richard means the uncles other than himself, it is all too evident that the audience will instantly find Richard a real danger to the prince and hence the subject of their prayer.

The salient example of this discrepancy between the speaker’s intended referent and the actual subject of prayer is certainly Richmond’s prayer at the end of the play:

**O now let Richmond and Elizabeth,**
The true succeeders of each royal house,
By God’s fair ordinance conjoin together,
And let their heirs, God, if thy will be so,
Enrich the time to come with smooth-faced peace,
With smiling plenty, and fair, prosperous days. (V. vii. 29–34)

Quite literally, “Elizabeth” in the prayer refers anaphorically to the daughter of King Edward, Richmond’s future wife. At the same time, however, for the contemporary audience of the play, as many critics have observed, “Elizabeth” definitely means Richmond’s granddaughter as well as his wife. By the time this play was publicly performed, the reign of Queen Elizabeth I had lasted for more than thirty years, making the latter interpretation much more accessible to the audience.

In this essay, I would like to look at the prayers in the play and see how each prayer contributes to the representation of the figures of the monarch. Through the essay, I intend to use Richard’s practice of prayer as a kind of tip-off to understand a larger, more profound prayer issue in the play. I hope to argue that Richard’s secular, political exploitation of prayer sheds light on prayer of other monarchs as well. To illustrate this point, I will first examine the way Richard’s “performance of prayer” functions, and consider how his fraudulent performance shapes the audience’s reaction to Richmond’s prayer. I will then examine the prayers with regard to their roles of modifying past events, the late Catholic past. Finally, I hope to focus on the figures of prayers themselves and see how Catholic as well as Protestant elements coexist in those figures in the play. Through my essay, I would like to consider how the play, which depends for its source on the chronicles’ Protestant appropriation of More’s Catholic account, staged prayers in the presence of more or less anti-Catholic audience. Richard III was presumably written in the early 1590s, the period of intense Spanish Campaign. Due to the political situation, it has been claimed that rebellions and wars were associated with Catholic threat to England.

1. Fashioning the Present

First, prayer in the play functions as the medium to convey the highly theatrical nature of the monarchs’ religious performances. In the play, Richard and Buckingham say their prayers to convince others of Richard’s kingly virtue. During his brother’s reign, Richard uses prayer to show his brotherly affection:

Poor Clarence did forsake his father Warwick,
Yea, and forswore himself, which Jesu pardon——

I would to God my heart were flint, like Edward’s,
Or Edward’s soft and pitiful, like mine. (I. iii. 135–41)

Actually, earlier in his soliloquy, he prays “God take King Edward to his mercy / And leave the world for me to bustle in” (I. i. 150–51), and intends to get rid of his brother with defamatory
slander. However, his performance of prayer is so impressive that no one questions Richard’s brotherly affection even at his report of Clarence’s wrong execution.

Similarly, he asks for his mother’s blessing, whose effectiveness he secretly slights:

RICHARD. Humbly on my knee
I crave your blessing.

DUCHESS OF YORK. God bless thee, and put meekness in thy mind,
Love, charity, obedience, and true duty.

RICHARD. Amen. [Aside] And make me die a good old man:
That’s the butt-end of a mother’s blessing.
I marvel why her grace did leave it out. (II. ii. 92–98)

By the same token, he even prays for those who treat him rather coldly:

RICHARD. God pardon them that are the cause of it.
RIVERS. A virtuous and a Christian-like conclusion,
To pray for them that have done scathe to us.

RICHARD [speaks to himself]. So do I ever, being well advised,
For had I cursed, now I had cursed myself. (I. iii. 315–19)

Not only Richard, but also Buckingham uses his prayer as his political means. His prayer in the mayor’s presence, for instance, is meant to justify their illegal execution of Hastings: “God and our innocence defend and guard us!” (III. v. 18). His fraudulent performance of prayer likewise convinces King Edward of his sincerity. When King Edward summons a meeting to reconcile the relatives of his wife to other members of the royal family, they exchange vows as a token of their reconciliation. Urged by the king, Buckingham takes an oath of allegiance, which he later calls “feigned prayer” (V. i. 20):

Whenever Buckingham doth turn this hate
On you or yours, but with all duteous love
Doth cherish you and yours, God punish me
With hate in those where I expect most love;
When I have most need to employ a friend,
And most assured that he is a friend,
Deep, hollow, treacherous, and full of guile
Be he unto me. This do I beg of God
When I am cold in zeal to you or yours. (II. i. 32–40)

However, their political exploitation of prayer is nowhere more evident than in the last scene of Act III, the scene preceding Richard’s coronation, where performance of prayer is assumed to be the most effective means to appeal to the citizen. At the beginning of the scene, Buckingham tells Richard of his oratory he made for Richard’s sake. In order to confer kingship
upon Richard, he first insists on the illegitimacy of Edward’s children. He then tries to impress the citizens with Richard’s legitimacy in vain:

BUCKINGHAM. Your discipline in war, wisdom in peace,
      Your bounty, virtue, fair humility;
Indeed left nothing fitting for the purpose
Untouched or slightly handled in discourse.
And when mine oratory grew to an end,
I bid them that did love their country’s good
Cry, ‘God save Richard, England’s royal king!’

RICHARD. Ah, and did they so?
BUCKINGHAM. No, so God help me,
      But like dumb statues or breathing stones
Gazed each on other and looked deadly pale; (III. vii. 13–22; emphasis added)

Despite his effort, only his followers echo his prayer for King Richard (III. vii. 30–32). Richard’s virtues, which he vehemently enumerated above, did not suffice. After recounting his failure thus, Buckingham proposes a more effective way to meet with the public approval: a performance of prayer. He cunningly advises Richard to appear to the citizen with a performance of prayer: “look you get a prayer book in your hand, / And stand betwixt two churchmen, good my lord, / For on that ground I’ll build a holy descant” (III. vii. 42–44).

Later in the scene, when the mayor comes over with the citizen Catesby, another confederate, shows up and tells them that Richard would not see them because he is so absorbed in his prayer (III. vii. 58–59), to which Buckingham correspondingly reacts:

       Aha, my lord, this prince is not an Edward.
       He is not lolling on a lewd day-bed,
       But on his knees at meditation;
       Not dallying with a brace of courtesans,
       But meditating with two deep divines;
       Not sleeping to engross his idle body,
       But praying to enrich his watchful soul.
       Happy were England would this gracious prince
       Take on himself the sovereignty thereof. (III. vii. 66–74)

Convinced of Richard’s piety, the mayor now expresses his wish: “Marry, God forbid his grace should say us nay [to his coronation]” (III. vii. 76). Shortly after his wish, Richard himself appears at last with two churchmen. On his arrival, Buckingham quickly observes “a book of prayer in his [Richard’s] hand, / True ornaments to know a holy man” (III. vii. 93–94). It is at this point, in view of his pseudo-pious posturing, the mayor fully approves Richard’s aptitude as a king:
MAYOR. God bless your grace! We see it, and will say it.
RICHARD. In saying so you shall but say the truth.
BUCKINGHAM. Then I salute you with this kingly title:
    Long live Richard, England's royal king!
MAYOR. Amen. (III. vii. 219-23)

In contrast, the citizen of Sir Thomas More's *History of Richard III* differs considerably from Shakespeare's in that the former knows Richard's pious humility is nothing but a series of fraudulent performance. As Ramie Targoff reminds us:

The people understand instinctively that what they have seen is no more than an elaborate charade. They depart "marveill[ing] of the manner of this dealing" as if neither Buckingham nor Richard had communicated with one another beforehand, although there was no one so "dull" that he knew not that the matter had been well arranged between them. "Howbeit," More continues, "somme excused that agayne, and sayde all must be done in good order through. And menne must sometime for the manner sake not bee a knowen what they knowe." ("'Dirty' Amens" 74-75)

Besides, consultation with his chronicle sources suggests that the emphasis on Richard's praying posture is characteristic of Shakespeare's *Richard*. In view of other fraudulent prayers quoted so far, a brief note of alteration made in this scene by Shakespeare might be pertinent. Though Richard stands between two bishops in Hall's version of *Richard III*, the similarity ends there: no further mention of prayer is made in the chronicle (372-73). Moreover, such description is totally absent from Holinshed, the primary source of Shakespeare's play (3: 394-95). Therefore we might safely ascribe Richard's posture of prayer in the scene to his own insertion, and assume the audience is thereby provided with the impression that the monarch's fake prayer receives the sincere prayers of the people.

The crux is that we cannot argue Richard's political exploitation of prayers without discussing that of Richmond as well. Prayer not only justifies Richard's kingship, but also justifies that of Richmond. I am not alone in my view to regard the religious devotions of Richmond as the necessary basis of his kingship. In fact, I partly share my understanding with Ramie Targoff, when she points out Richmond's claim of kingship is based on a weaker lineage than that of Richard. Moreover, she also observes that Richmond does not appear until Act IV, and speaks little ("'Dirty' Amens" 76-77). Prayer is one of the few opportunities Richmond has to appeal to the audience.

The enabling forces of prayer are two-fold. For one thing, Richmond's practice of prayer contributes to his image as a virtuous king. Also, the people's prayers select Richard for their legitimate king. First, Richmond contrasts with Richard in regard to the practice of prayer. While the theatricality of Richard's prayer is often emphasized, Richmond's prayer is not directly criticized in a similar way. Immediately after he is introduced to the audience, Richmond retires to his tent and begins praying in solitude. Thus Richmond's piety is instantly conveyed to the audience through his prayer.
O thou whose captain I account myself,
Look on my forces with a gracious eye.
Put in their hands thy bruising irons of wrath,
That they may crush down with a heavy fall
Th’usurp’d helmets of our adversaries.
Make us thy ministers of chastisement,
That we may praise thee in the victory.
To thee I do commend my watchful soul
Ere I let fall the windows of mine eyes.
Sleeping and waking, O defend me still! He sleeps. (V. iv. 87–96)

The phrase “watchful soul” above might remind the audience of Richard’s prayer to enrich his “watchful soul,” which Buckingham so fervently claims to be Richard’s own property (III. vii. 66–74). Immediately after his victory at Bosworth, Richmond prays again, attributing the victory and his succeeding coronation to God’s blessing. Thus, his practice of prayer contributes to his image as an ideal, virtuous monarch.

His practice of prayer might have been impressive to the contemporary audience, given how frequently some of the contemporary audience witnessed such performance of prayer. Records of services at court show that Elizabeth I possessed strong interests in presenting herself as the praying monarch (McCullough 76–77, 156–57). She prefers to kneel in prayer before the audience, and delivered long prayers on certain occasions. Such contemporary connotation might have made the prayers in the play all the more relevant.

Secondly, Richmond is also distinguished as an ideal king by the prayers he receives; the prayers of other people also select Richmond for their future king. To begin with, the two royal mothers differ considerably from each other in their attitudes towards their sons. Before the battle at Bosworth Stanley Earl of Derby, Richmond’s stepfather, comes over and tells him “I, by attorney, bless thee from thy mother, / Who prays continually for Richmond’s good” (V. iv. 62–63). His mother’s affectionate prayer presents a striking contrast to the curse of Richard’s mother, who appears with her daughter-in-law and speaks to Richard:

DUCHESS OF YORK. Therefore take with thee my most heavy curse,
Which in the day of battle tire thee more
Than all the complete armour that thou wear’st.
My prayers on the adverse party fight,
And there the little souls of Edward’s children
Whisper the spirits of thine enemies,
And promise them success and victory.
Bloody thou art, bloody will be thy end.
Shame serves thy life, and doth thy death attend. Exit

QUEEN. Though far more cause, yet much less spirit to curse
Abides in me; I say ‘Amen’ to all. (IV. iv. 177–87)
Furthermore, Richmond’s rebellion against Richard is also vindicated by the voices of the victims of Richard’s ambition, viz. the prayer of the “souls whose bodies Richard murdered” (V. iv. 209). Those ghosts appear one by one in Richmond’s dream and encourage him, saying they are praying for his victory, while they curse Richard in his nightmare (V. iv. 96–155). For Richmond, even “The prayers of holy saints and wronged souls, / Like high-reared bulwarks, stand before our [Richmond’s] forces” (V. iv. 220–21).

However, Richard’s fraudulent performance of prayers permits certain deduction about Richmond’s devotions as well. With both Richard’s fake prayer and the people’s sincere prayer in mind, the audience might not be able to fully celebrate Richmond’s practice of prayer. On the contrary, the audience might well doubt Richmond’s own sincerity of prayer. There are certain ambiguities attendant on the kings’ prayer and the people’s prayers for their virtuous kings throughout the play, thereby preventing the audience from fully celebrating Richmond’s practice of prayer.

2. Fashioning the Past

So far, I have looked at some of the prayer scenes in Richard III to see how performances of prayer contribute to the image of an ideal monarch in the play. The constant gap between the prayer words and the sincerity of the praying person seems never to be resolved in the play. In what follows, I hope to look at the prayers from slightly different perspectives, in terms of memory construction. Some prayers, I think, subjectively make alterations to the memory of the past events: prayers do not simply reflect the past events but also revise them. To illustrate this point, I will first look at Margaret’s curses and see how her curse constantly reminds others of their criminal past. Secondly, I will view Richard’s use of prayer and his attempt to revise his vicious past. The practice of prayer, however, is not confined to them. Certain elements in Richmond’s prayer intentionally rewrite past events.

a. Margaret’s Curse

Margaret’s curse is always the reminder of cruel past events in the former plays of the tetralogy, 1.2.3.Henry VI. Through her curses, people are constantly reminded of the cruel slaughter of Henry VI and Prince Edward. For her, the art of cursing does not lie simply in recollection but in turning of the memory into something more “sharp and pierce” (IV. iv. 119). After Richard assassinated her two princes, Queen Elizabeth asks Margaret the way to curse effectively. In reply, Margaret strongly recommends her to modify the past events so that she can get more intense feeling out of them:

QUEEN [rising] O thou well-skilled in curses, stay a while,
And teach me how to curse mine enemies.
MARGARET. Forbear to sleep the nights; and fast the days.

  Compare dead happiness with living woe.
  Think that thy babes were fairer than they were,
And he that slew them fouler than he is.
Bett'ring thy loss makes the bad causer worse.
Revolving this will teach thee how to curse.

QUEEN. My words are dull. O quicken them with thine.
MARGARET. Thy woes will make them sharp and pierce like mine. (IV. iv. 110-19; emphasis added).

Thus, the women’s curses are closely bound up with, or rather, intended as, the act of remembrance, reminding the Yorkists of their cruelty.

b. Richard’s Prayer

Similarly, Richard’s use of prayer can also be understood as an attempt at modification of history. It secretly undermines the impression of his infamies. In other words, his treatment of prayer is closely connected with the process he uses to effectively erase the place of his misdeeds in the mind of the listeners. In the first place, such an attempt can be seen in his conversation with Anne. At the beginning of I. ii, Anne accompanies the corpse of Henry VI and mourns for her slain father-in-law. “Be it lawful,” she speaks to the corpse, “that I invoke thy ghost / To hear the lamentations of poor Anne” (I. ii. 8-9). As John Jowett reminds us, OED shows that words such as “invocate” or “invoke” had not been employed without allusion to prayers before 1602 (Jowett 158). She goes on to pray, or more accurately, curse Richard and his future wife by recollecting how cruelly he slew both her husband and father-in-law (I. ii. 10126).

At the very moment she gets absorbed in her curse, Richard suddenly appears and interrupts her (I. ii. 30. 1). At first, she does not listen to what he says and just prays for the divine punishment (I. ii. 60). To Anne, however, Richard cunningly says that he killed both her husband and father-in-law in order to gain her love. By alleviating her hatred thus, he reminds her of the “rules of charity, / Which renders good for bad, blessings for curses” (I. ii. 66-67). Through his tenacious persuasion, Richard gradually lessens Anne’s hatred and successfully woos her. Anne, though not totally convinced, comes to feel sympathy for him. In fact, by the time they depart, Anne feels such sympathy for him that she willingly consents to Richard’s suggestion that she leave it to him to carry the corpse and mourn for the deceased in prayer:

RICHARD. And if thy poor devoted supplicant may
But beg one favour at thy gracious hand,
Thou dost confirm his happiness for ever.
LADY ANNE. What is it?
RICHARD. That it would please thee leave these sad designs
To him that hath more cause to be a mourner,
And presently repair to Crosby Place,
Where after I have solemnly interred
At Chertsey monastery this noble king
And wet his grave with my repentant tears,
I will with all expedient duty see you.
For divers unknown reasons, I beseech you
Grant me this boon.

LADY ANNE. With all my heart, and much it joys me too
To see you are become so penitent. (I. ii. 192–206)

After Anne makes an exit, he tells his servants to change the destination of the corpse from Chertsey to Whitefriars. Thus, Anne is deprived of the opportunity to mourn for Henry VI within such a short time. The next time she appears on stage, she is already the wife of Richard. As has been seen, his control of her mourning is bound up with his control of her prayer.

The connection can also be confirmed by the contemporary theological controversy. As Stephen Greenblatt and others have demonstrated, the sixteenth-century England witnessed a large shift in the interpretation of suffrages. Along with the newly emphasized doctrine of Predestination, the very existence of purgatory came to be discredited. In post-Reformation England, where suffrage for the souls in purgatory is assumed to be somewhat redundant, the act of family remembrance is a focal point of controversy over such intercessory prayer. Moreover, Richard did not historically move the corpse from Chertsey Abbey to Windsor until 1484 (McCoy 124), a year before the battle at Bosworth. In addition to it, his chronicle sources do not show that Anne attended the body of Henry VI (Lull 60). Thus, Richard’s scheme to eradicate the past in Anne’s mind is intentionally connected with his interruption of her mourning prayer in Shakespeare’s Richard.

Richard’s use of prayer to control the past events can also be seen in his treatment of Clarence’s children. After Richard’s assassins murdered Clarence, Richard gave his bereaved children the distorted account of his death (II. ii. 19–25) and put the blame on King Edward. As one of the children puts it,

Then, grammam, you conclude that he [Clarence] is dead.  
The king my uncle is to blame for this.  
God will revenge it, whom I will importune  
With daily prayers, all to that effect. (II. ii. 12–15)

Strongly convinced that King Edward is to blame, the children accept his wrong explanation and agree to pray against the king.

Later, Richard also teaches Prince Edward to pray. Following the demise of King Edward, the prince came all the way from Ludlow to London for his coronation (II. ii. 107–09). As his uncle, Richard teaches him to pray: “RICHARD. God keep you from them, and from such false friends. / PRINCE. God keep me from false friends, but they were none” (III. i. 15–16). Those “dangerous” uncles are soon afterwards to be executed by Richard. As anywhere else, his use of prayer supports his otherwise unconvincing explanation. By this act of prayer, Richard tries to impose a different perspective on the prince and hence to reorganize the events.

Sometimes the practice of prayer is used to make an excuse for not recollecting the past. When Buckingham tries to remind Richard of his former promise of reward, Richard interrupts him by mentioning meditation (IV. ii. 110–18). In addition, prayer is also related to others’
memory in a figurative way. After Anne passes away, Richard asks for the former queen’s permission to get married to Lady Elizabeth. Imploring her to forget his former cruelty (IV. iv. 226-28), he professes his love of Lady Elizabeth. The language of his entreaty is embellished with the phrase “Immaculate devotion, holy thoughts” (IV. v. 324).

He even revises his own memory when he tries to pray. On the eve of the battle, the deceased victims of Richard’s plot appear in his dream and curse him. Disturbed by his nightmare, he wakes up and tries to have recourse to prayer. However, as soon as he begins praying, he suddenly changes his mind and, on second thought, thinks his dream of no significance. With prayer as a turning point, he re-interprets his dream: “Give me another horse! Bind up my wounds! / Have mercy, Jesu! - Soft, I did but dream. / O coward conscience, how dost thou afflict me!” (V. iv. 156-58).

As has been seen, Richard’s use of prayer clearly reflects his treatment of the past events and his modification of other people’s memory. While Margaret overstates his cruelty, Richard thus undermines his infamy by modifying her account of history. Through his use of prayers, he represents the past events by lessening and eliminating the impression of his cruelty.

c. Richmond’s Prayer

These functions of prayer serve to revise and represent the past events and are not confined to those talkative characters. In fact, when we look at the prayers of Richmond, we see a similar process working here and there in his devotions.

In his oration before the battle at Bosworth, Richmond tries to inspire his soldiers by ordering them to “Remember . . . The prayers of holy saints and wronged souls / Like high-reared bulwarks, stand before our forces” (V. iv. 218-21). Both the saints’ prayer and the prayer of the souls departed, to which I will later return, are questioned as one of the ambiguous Catholic practices in post-Reformation England. Nonetheless, their prayers defend Richmond as a future king on the post-Reformation stage; because the ghosts are the victims of what Richard did in the past, they are eloquent testifiers to his cruelty. Richmond adroitly exploits their appearances in his dream to his advantage:

Methought their souls whose bodies Richard murdered
Came to my tent and cried on victory.
I promise you, my soul is very jocund
In the remembrance of so fair a dream. (V. iv. 209-12)

In his oration, Richmond almost reduces the connotations of their ambiguous prayers to an act of remembrance. He thus derives his polemical valence out of them:

Yet remember this:
God and our good cause fight upon our side;
The prayers of holy saints and wronged souls,
Like high-reared bulwarks, stand before our forces.
Richard except, those whom we fight against
Had rather have us win than him they follow. (V. iv. 218-23)

He refers to their prayers as a token of his divine favor. Here, as in other parts of Richmond’s lines, those victims’ prayers are recalled in order to remind the audience of the failure of Richard’s reign and hence the legitimate claim of Richmond. This might impress the audience with striking contrast to Richard, who, though determined to remember his Englishness, unconsciously reverses his own claim in his prayer. His order to “Remember whom you are to cope withal: / A sort of . . . / A scum of Bretons, and base lackey peasants” (V. vi. 44-46) is curiously contradicted by his prayer, which unconsciously puts his own soldiers in the position of the dragon defeated by St. George (Jowett 353), England’s Saint: “Our ancient word of courage, fair Saint George, / Inspire us with the spleen of fiery dragons. / Upon them! Victory sits on our helms” (V. v. 78-80). Although he tells them to remember that they are fighting against “A scum of Bretons,” his self-contradictory prayer reminds the audience he has been acting the enemy of England.

Furthermore, Richmond’s effective use of prayer culminates in his declaration of victory, his prayer at the end of the play. Here I quote at length:

Great God of heaven say ‘Amen’ to all . . .
Smile, heaven, upon this fair conjunction,
That long have frowned upon their enmity.
What traitor hears me and says not ‘Amen’?15

England hath long been mad, and scarred herself:
The brother blindly shed the brother’s blood,
The father rashly slaughtered his own son,
The son, compelled, been butcher to the sire.
All this divided York and Lancaster,
Deformed in their dire division.
O now let Richmond and Elizabeth,
The true succeeders of each royal house,
By God’s fair ordinance conjoin together,
And let their heirs, God, if thy will be so,
Enrich the time to come with smooth-faced peace,
With smiling plenty, and fair, prosperous days.
Abate the edge of traitors, gracious Lord,
That would reduce these bloody days again
And make poor England weep in the streams of blood.
Let them not live to taste this land’s increase
That would with treason wound this fair land’s peace.

Now civil wounds are stopped, peace lives again.
That she may long live here, God say ‘Amen’. (V. vii. 8-41; emphasis added)16

As editors remind us, “The father rashly slaughtered his own son?” would probably remind
the audience of the pathetic sight of the civil war in *3 Henry VI* (II. v. 54. 1–93), where a father kills his son and a son his father without knowing it. As the scene is usually ascribed to Shakespeare’s invention, Richmond’s reference to it seems to be significant.

The final scene of *3 Henry VI* ends with the demise of Henry VI, and hence the end of a civil war. At the beginning of *Richard III*, Richard ironically celebrates peace after the war. The audience in *Richard III*, however, tends to forget the peaceful reign of King Edward, for the beginning of *Richard III* is already near the end of Edward’s reign. Because of this paralysis of the intervening years, the peaceful reign of King Edward, which approximately amounts to ten years, is almost forgotten. As a consequence, in *Richard III*, the audience is given the impression that Richmond does not begin a rebellion, but ends one.

In Shakespeare’s day, rebellion against a prince was strictly prohibited. Every effort made to this effect can be seen in *the Elizabethan Homilies*, which were constantly to be read in church. Instead of rebellion, people are strongly encouraged to pray for their monarchs. According to “An Homilie against Disobedience and Wilful Rebellion,” for instance, the duty of the obedient subjects is unconditional prayer for their monarch:

> And shall the old Christians, by Saint Pauls exhortation, pray for Caligula, Claudius, or Nero? Shall the Iewes pray for Nabuchodonosor? these Emperours and Kings being strangers vnto them, being pagans and infidels being murtherers, tyrantes, and cruell oppressours of them, and destroyers of their countrey, countreymen, ... ? Shall wee not pray for the health of our most mercifull, most louing Soueraigne, ... What shall wee say of those Subiects? may wee call them by the name of Subiects? Who neither bee thankefull, nor make any prayer to GOD for so gracious a Soueraigne: but also themselues take armour wickedly, assemble companies and bands of rebels, to breake the publique peace so long continued, and to make, not warre, but rebellion, to endanger the person of such a gracious Soueraigne, to hazarad the estate of the countrey, ... and being Englishmen, to robbe, spoyle, destroy and burne in England Englishmen, to kill and murther their owne neighbours and ... to doe all euill and mischiefe, yea and more to, then forreigne enemies would, or could doe? (pars. 11–12)

It was their duty to pray either for the prosperity of an ideal monarch or the edification and improvement of a pernicious monarch. Following the logic, therefore, Richmond’s rebellion can no way be desirable unless defended somehow. It seems, however, Richmond’s prayer, at the end of the play, does exploit somewhat confusing memory of the War of Roses, thereby completely freeing himself of the audience’s censure of being disobedient. In other words, his prayer might be described as an attempt to re-present what has happened in the whole play.

The ironic tone of Richmond’s prayer for peace may be more evident when contrasted with the prayers of Henry VI in *3 Henry VI*, who is less politically competent yet much more pious. In *3 Henry VI*, a father kills his son without recognizing him in the civil war. Another anonymous figure likewise kills his father in the battle. On identifying the corpses, mourning and prayers ensue:
SON. Pardon me, God, I knew not what I did; And pardon, father, for I knew not thee. . . .
FATHER. O pity, God, this miserable age!

What stratagems, how fell, how butcherly,
Erroneous, mutinous and unnatural,
This deadly quarrel daily doth beget! (II. v. 69–91)

Accidentally, King Henry witnesses their sorrow and desperately prays for peace: “Woe above
woe! Grief more than common grief! / O that my death would stay these ruthless deeds! / O pity,
pity, gentle heaven pity!” (II. v. 94–96).

King Henry himself prays a similar prayer elsewhere in the play when he sees the corpse of
the Duke of York, whom his wife Margaret cruelly slew. He prays for forgiveness, claiming his
innocence. There is an echo of the anonymous prayers above. King Henry says to God that he
did not know what they did:

Ay, as the rocks cheer them that fear their wrack,
To see tp—Rsight it irks my very soul.
Withhold revenge, dear God. ’Tis not my fault,
Nor wittingly have I infringed my vow. (3 Henry VI II. ii. 5–8)

In contrast, Richmond’s prayer cannot be separated from his political intention. To
Richmond, prayer is a kind of weapon: “The prayers of holy saints and wrongèd souls / Like
high-reared bulwarks, stand before our forces” (V. iv. 220–21). In fact, prayer is sometimes
treated as a kind of weapon in Richard III. To Buckingham, who used his prayers as his
political means, prayer turns out to be “the swords of wicked men” which “That high all-seer . . .
force . . . / To turn their own points on their master’s bosom” (V. i. 20–24). To female figures
as well, prayer is one of the few means left for women to take revenge:

DUCHESS OF YORK. Therefore take with thee my most heavy curse,
Which in the day of battle tire thee more
Than all the complete armour that thou wear’st.
My prayers on the adverse party fight,
And there the little souls of Edward’s children
Whisper the spirits of thine enemies,
And promise them success and victory. (IV. iv. 177–83)

This role of remembrance in Richmond’s prayer can be cast into the wider historical context
as well. Anaphorically, these lines “Abate . . . peace” in Richmond’s prayer (V. vii. 35–39)
refer to Richard’s reign of terror. At the same time, however, the contemporary connotation of
the prayer has been pointed out. For instance, Jowett speculates that the lines “Abate . . . peace”
refer to the recent Marian Catholic threat, citing as a proof the influence of the 1550 pageant
whose theme “‘Unity’, referred specifically to a concord aimed at healing the strife between
church reformers and Catholic” (70). Wilbur Sanders sees there the figure of “the Rheims
Jesuits, one of whom—Parsons—had recently smuggled a tract against Elizabeth into the country; perhaps the Spanish sympathizers-traitors anyway” (72). Aside from these claims, the prayer’s attitudes towards Catholicism seems to be significant, for the prayer of victorious Richmond was, originally in Holinshed’s Chronicles, one of the opportunities for “beseeching his goodnesse to send him grace to aduance and defend the catholike²³ faith” (3: 445).

In Elizabethan Age, how to cope with the recent Catholic past and make a definition and identity of Protestant England out of it was, for sure, an urgent issue. Their ambivalent attitudes towards the denomination can be easily inferred from the official Anglican attempt to stress the continuity with Catholicism while dismissing some of the former Marian practices as idolatrous. Lorri A. Ferrell explains the outcome as follows:

The queen’s moderation disappointed many of her reform-minded subjects and some of her bishops, who had hoped finally to strip the English church of all its popish ceremonies, the remnants and reminders of a disconcertingly recent Catholic past. (76)

I want to conclude this topic by citing one of the extant prayers in the sixteenth century. It was first recorded in 1588, the year of the Armada, and presumably very famous among Shakespeare’s contemporaries, for it “was a prayer to be said for God’s assistance of the Queen’s forces, and their good success, when they went out, and to be continued while they were abroad” (Nichols 2: 540). The prayer begins in retrospect. It first introduces the recent Spanish threat as the divine punishment to the negligence of England. It acknowledges the people’s sin in the past, and identifies the cause of the threat in it:

We cannot but confess, O Lord God, that the late temible intended invasion of most cruel enemies was sent from thee, to the punishment of our sins, our pride, our covetousness, our excess in meat and drink, our security, our ingratitude, and our unthankfulness towards thee, for so long peace and other thine infinite blessings, continually poured upon us; and to the punishment of other our innumerable and most grievous offences, continually committed against thy Divine Majesty: and indeed our guilty consciences looked for, even at that time, the execution of that terrible justice upon us, so by us deserved.

However, once it acknowledges the defects on the side of the threat, it dwells on the point:

But thou, O Lord God, who knowest all things, knowing that our enemies came not of justice to punish us for our sins committed against thy Divine Majesty (whom they by their excessive wickedness have offended, and continually do offend, as much or more than we); but that they came with most cruel intent and purpose to destroy us, our cities, towns, countries, and people; and utterly to root out the memory of our nation from off the earth for ever; and withal wholly to suppress thy Holy Word, and blessed Gospel of thy dear Son our Saviour Jesus Christ: which they, being drowned in idolatry and superstition, do hate most deadly; and as likely only for the profession of
the same, and not for any offences against thy Divine Majesty, or injuries done to themselves.

Interesting enough, the Spanish attempt to invade England is described here in terms of the process of historiography, viz. his attempt to eradicate the memory of Protestant England and her Protestant faith in world history. With a slight shift in focus, they now ask to be remembered:

Wherefore it hath pleased thee, O Heavenly Father, in thy justice to remember thy mercy towards us; turning our enemies from us, and that dreadful execution which they intended towards us, into a fatherly and most merciful admonition of us, to the amendment of our lives, and execute justice upon our cruel enemies; turning the destruction that they intended against us upon their own heads. For the which the same thy most gracious protection, and all other thy graces, without our deserts, continually and most plentifully poured upon our Church, our Queen, and Realm, and people of the whole land; we beseech thee, add and pour also the grace of gratitude and thankfulness into our hearts: that we never forgetting, but bearing in perpetual memory this thy merciful protection and deliverance of us from the malice, force, fraud, and cruelty of our enemies,” &c. (2: 540; emphasis added)

Finally, they express their wish to remember “the merciful protection and deliverance” of England from “the malice, force, fraud, and cruelty of our enemies.” In accordance with the last hope, as I have mentioned, it was the duty of her subject to recite this prayer on certain occasions. Through constant repetitions, the recitation might have been accompanied by, to some extent, the remembrance of the English account of world history. Here, a moment of prayer is closely bound up with the act of selective remembrance: not the remembrance of England’s Catholic faith in the past, nor the execution of Mary Stuart, but the remembrance of English victory over Spain, the queen’s virtue, and divine assistance of Queen Elizabeth I.

Such patriotic prayer again appears in Shakespeare’s plays around 1601 when the warlike jingoism against Spain was revived by the political circumstance. On the eve of the battle at Agincourt, Henry V prays by himself. Frightened by the “memories” of his father’s usurpation and his subsequent succession, as Jonathan Baldo puts it, “Henry reminds his Maker, in prayer the night before Agincourt, of his public reinstatement of Richard’s memory by interring him in Westminster Abbey” (139):

KING [Kneels.] O God of battles, steel my soldiers’ hearts;
Possess them not with fear. Take from them now
The sense of reckoning, if th’opposed numbers
Pluck their hearts from them. Not today, O Lord,
O not today, think not upon the fault
My father made in compassing the crown.
I Richard’s body have interred new,
And on it have bestowed more contrite tears

43 Reading 24 (2003)
Than from it issued forced drops of blood.
Five hundred poor I have in yearly pay,
Who twice a day their withered hands hold up
Toward heaven to pardon blood; and I have built
Two chantries, where the sad and solemn priests
Sing still for Richard’s soul. More will I do,
Though all that I can do is nothing worth,
Since that my penitence comes after all,
Imploring pardon. (IV. i. 286–302)

As Baldo observes in Shakespeare’s Henry V,

Memory is the larger, moveable battlefield to which King Henry, England, and
Elizabeth, England’s last Tudor monarch, were repeatedly called to arms. Collective
memory is an extension of the kinds of power and even the brutality exercised in war.
Wars of memory are not bloodless but intimately tied to the loss of lives and limbs.
Control over how a nation remember a momentous event like a war is almost as
significant as the outcome of the war itself, given how crucial memory is for the
legitimation and exercise of power. . . . consolidation of the collective memory was
becoming a timely and challenging issue in the 1590s, a period of shifting
self-definition for England. (133; emphasis added)

Admittedly, there is certain reservation in applying his analysis to Richard III, for his analysis of
“the consolidation of national memory” is confined to the latter tetralogy of Shakespeare. As he
himself puts it, “The shift from dynastic realm to nation-state, I believe, is apparent in differences
between Shakespeare’s first and second tetralogies” (134). Nevertheless, the memory of the
former Catholic reign is pertinent throughout Richard III, and prayers, I think, show us the way
they deal with the past.

3. Fashioning the Prayers

So far, I have argued that prayers are interwoven in the play to represent secular exploitation
of religious practice. In the previous section, I have examined the prayers by focusing on the act
of remembrance. I have especially attempted to see the contemporary effort to define the recent
Catholic past. As I have quoted above, Richmond’s prayer at the end of the play is sometimes
seen as the attempt to reorganize “these bloody days” (V. vii. 36), so that it would give the
impression that the prayer is also the justification of contemporary Anglicanism against
Catholicism. Raymond D. Tumbleson explains the political climate as follows:

The object was to identify Papism with alien Irish barbarism, French despotism, and
corrupt Roman luxury. Directing attention to the indistinguishability of the English
Catholic poor from their Protestant neighbors would have been counterproductive for
the half-conscious program of identifying Protestantism with a coherent English nation. (13)

Nevertheless, the prayers in Richard III are not only the passive tools of politicians, but sometimes have a strong influence per se. Rather, it might be claimed that the audience’s real memory figures in the representation of prayers. Those figures of prayers in the play have, I think, both Protestant and Catholic characteristics. On one hand, while all the characters are historically Catholic, their prayers share Calvinist elements in Shakespeare’s play. On the other hand, there are certain Catholic elements, though written in the period of the Spanish Campaign. In fact, Shakespeare seems to have intentionally emphasized their Catholic nature. While they remind the audience of the recent Catholic past, they are simultaneously consistent with Calvinist future. In order to see how those two denominations are engraved in the figures of prayer in the play, I will first pay attention to the Calvinist tone of the prayers by seeing the influence of Predestination. I will then re-examine the prayers to see how Catholic elements are intentionally added to the chronicle sources by Shakespeare.

a. Protestant Characteristics

On one hand, the prayers in the play have Calvinist characteristics. First, I think the prayers are strongly influenced by the idea of Predestination, one of the familiar Calvinist doctrines in 1590s: Some people are predestined to be saved, while others are not. In other words, some prayers for salvation are to be answered, while others are not. It explains the apparent arbitrariness of prayer’s effectiveness in the play.

The prayers’ indebtedness to such a contemporary theological topic can be illustrated by the effectiveness with which literal meanings of the prayers are answered. Sometimes, a set form of prayer is accidentally changed, by a slip of the tongue, for instance, so that it is consistent with the future outcome. This association with Predestination can be demonstrated by the Duchess’ blessing, where the literal meaning, rather than the speaker’s intention, prominently counts:

DUCHESS OF YORK. God bless thee, and put meekness in thy mind,
Love, charity, obedience, and true duty.
RICHARD. Amen. [Aside] And make me die a good old man:
That’s the butt-end of a mother’s blessing.
I marvel why her grace did leave it out. (II. ii. 94–97)

Her blessing proves to be both effective and ineffective. In the course of the play, the audience finds that he will not “die a good old man,” hence realizing the significance of the omission. On the other hand, her prayer for her son’s edification is never requited in the play. They pray for Richard’s virtues like meekness, charity, and true duty, which, according to the play, he never receives. It seems that prayers do not have the power to transform the worshippers’ internal state. Richard is certainly not edified by his performance of prayer in the play. As I mentioned, in order to dissuade people from rebellion against their monarch, the official Homilies constantly urge people to pray for the monarch. They must not rise in rebellion, but pray for the
improvement of their prince should they have a vicious one. At first sight, the Duchess' ineffective prayer for the king's improvement seems repugnant to the Anglican reliance on the transformative power of such prayer, for her prayer on that point is never answered: after all, in this play Richard "prove[s] to be a villain" (I. ii. 30) from the beginning. Nevertheless, the audience can still attribute it to providence.

Furthermore, some prayers are answered despite the worshipper's want of zeal. In II. i, Buckingham says his prayer to convince others of his friendship:

Whenever Buckingham doth turn this hate
On you or yours, but with all duteous love
Doth cherish you and yours, God punish me
With hate in those where I expect most love;
When I have most need to employ a friend,
And most assured that he is a friend,
Deep, hollow, treacherous, and full of guile
Be he unto me. This do I beg of God
When I am cold in zeal to you or yours. (II. i. 32-40)

Buckingham utters all these sentences in order to deceive others. Although he does not mean it, he later finds himself precisely in the same situation prescribed above:

Why then, All Souls' Day is my body's doomsday.
This is the day that in King Edward's time
I wished might fall on me when I was found
False to his children or his wife's allies.
This is the day wherein I wished to fall
By the false faith of him I trusted most.
This, this All Souls' Day to my fearful soul
Is the determined respite of my wrongs.
That high all-seer that I dallied with
Hath turned my feign'd prayer on my head,
And given in earnest what I begged in jest.
Thus doth he force the swords of wicked men
To turn their own points on their master's bosom.
Now Margaret's curse is fallen upon my head.
'When he,' quoth she, 'shall split thy heart with sorrow,
Remember Margaret was a prophetess.'
Come, sirs, convey me to the block of shame.
Wrong hath but wrong, and blame the due of blame. (V. i. 12-30)

In addition, Anne's wish might also convey her trust in the effectiveness of prayer. She would die before people say "God save the Queen":

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I would to God that the inclusive verge
Of golden metal that must round my brow
Were red-hot steel to sear me to the brain.
Anointed let me be with deadly poison,
And die ere men can say ‘God save the Queen’. (IV. i. 54-58)

Moreover, the surface structure of Richard’s own prayer may also conform to providence at the expense of his wish for victory. At the end of his oration to his soldiers, he prays: “Our ancient word of courage, fair Saint George, / Inspire us with the spleen of fiery dragons. / Upon them! Victory sits on our helms” (V. v. 78–80). Obviously, there is something odd about this prayer, for Saint George is England’s saint who is said to have beaten the fiery dragons. Richard compares his English army to the dragon. Thus his intention to encourage is betrayed and denied by the literal meaning of the prayer. Considering the outcome of the battle, his death is consistent with his prayer words.

As has been seen, the intended content of a prayer is sometimes replaced with other words, so that it gives the audience the impression that they are witnessing divine providence. The seemingly arbitrary distinction between effective prayer and ineffective prayer can thus be associated with divine providence.

Furthermore, the influence of Predestination can also be seen in the people’s prayer at the last moments of their lives. The art of dying itself, Ars Moriendi, had been the focal point of people’s concern since the Middle Ages. Traditionally, in pre-Reformation England, an ideal death meant that people cleanse their sins before their death. According to the Catholic doctrine, people should make every effort to avoid death, “Unhouseled, disappointed, unaneled” (Hamlet I. v. 77). In order to lessen the pain in purgatory, one has to see to it that these rites are done and their sins cleansed before the last moment. However, due to the changes caused by the Reformation, prayer before one’s death gradually lost its significance as a process of absolution and came to be identified with the sign of divine Grace.25

The historical shift in meaning is clearly represented, in Richard III, by some characters’ prayers near the end of their lives. Unlike Claudius (Hamlet III. iii. 36–95), none of them actually pray for their own absolution. On the contrary, they almost pray with fatalistic resignation. Instead, prayer before one’s death in the play is depicted as an occasion to remember, to show family affection and to pray for them. Clarence, for instance, prays for his family as the end of his life draws near:

O God, if my deep prayers cannot appease thee,
But thou wilt be avenged on my misdeeds,
Yet execute thy wrath in me alone.
O spare my guiltless wife and my poor children. (After I. iv. 65)26

Thus he remembers his family. The close relatives of Queen Elizabeth likewise pray:
GREY (to Ratcliffe) God keep the Prince from all the pack of you! 
A knot you are of damnèd bloodsuckers. . . .
Now Margaret’s curse is fallen upon our heads,
For standing by when Richard stabbed her son.
RIVERS. Then cursed she Hastings, then cursed she Buckingham,
Then cursed she Richard. O remember, God,
To hear her prayers for them as now for us;
And for my sister and her princely sons,
Be satisfied, dear God, with our true bloods,
Which, as thou knowest, unjustly must be split. (III. iii. 5-20)

The contents of their prayers consist of the remembrance of their family and Margaret’s curse. Another example is the two princes of King Edward. After their assassination, Tyrell comes to inform Richard of their death:

A book of prayers on their pillow lay,
Which once, ’quoth Forrest, ’almost changed my mind.
But O, the devil—'There the villain stopped,
Whilst Dighton thus told on: ‘We smotherèd
The most replenishèd sweet work of nature
That from the prime creation e’er she framed.’
Thus both are gone with conscience and remorse.
They could not speak; and so I left them both,
To bring this tidings to the bloody King. (IV. iii. 14-22)

In pre-Reformation England, some people held the superstitious belief that they could avoid the sudden, unnatural death by bringing certain prayers with themselves (Duffy 226–75). Although that was not the case with the two princes, their book of prayer is still reminiscent of their virtue. Although the children do not recollect others in prayer, they are later to be remembered along with their prayer-book. As has been seen, some aspects of prayers might remind the audience of their contemporary religious denomination.

b. Catholic Reminiscence

However, prayers in Richard III are by no means exclusively Calvinist in their characteristics. On the contrary, some prayers in the play actively work as the reminder of Catholicism. Rather than simply conforming to its historically Catholic origin and simply echoing the prayers in his chronicle sources, Shakespeare seems to have intentionally emphasized their Catholic nature. Their Catholic nature can be seen in their treatment of death. An illustrative example is Anne’s invocation of Henry VI, which I quoted above. Her hesitation to invoke Henry VI might remind the audience of the Catholic prayers. While she may be hesitating to “invoke Henry as a saint even before he is canonized” (Lull 60), such hesitation is hardly necessary in post-Reformation England: as we can see in such documents as the
contemporary official Homilies, people in post-Reformation England were no longer encouraged to pray to the dead.  

In turn, prayers of the dead people also illustrate the play’s Catholic elements. As has been mentioned (Greenblatt 177–80), the devil’s cry for revenge in More’s Richard was replaced with the prayers of the deceased people in Shakespeare’s Richard III. Prayer of the dead is, as can be seen in the Elizabethan Homilies, one of the most ambiguous practices in post-Reformation England. For one thing, the negation of purgatory entailed the negation of prayer for the dead.  

Also, the Anglican ban on intercessory prayer came to include those of the saints in heaven:

And albeit some thinke they doe, yet Saint Augustine a Doctour of great authoritie, and also antiquitie, hath this opinion of them: that they knowe no more what wee doe on earth, then wee know what they doe in heauen (Augustine, ‘Lib. de Cura pro Mort. Agenda’, chap. 13, Augustine, ‘De Vera Reli.’, chap. 22). For proooke whereof, he alleageth the worde of Esay the Prophet, where it is sayd, Abraham is ignorant of vs, and Israel knoweth vs not (Isaiah 63.16). His minde therefore is this, not that wee should put any religion in worshipping of them, or praying vnto them: but that wee should honour them by following their vertuous and godly life. For as hee witnesseth in anotherplace, the Martyrs and holy men in times past, were wont after their death to bee remembred, and named of the Priest at diuine seruice: but never to bee inuocated or called vpon (Augustinem ‘De Civit. Del,’ chap. 10). And why so? because the Priest (saith he) is GODS Priest, and not theirs: Whereby he is bound to call vpon GOD, and not vpon them. (“Homily on Prayer” pars. 11)

By emphasizing that saints in heaven may not pray for people on the earth, they claim that “the Martyrs and holy men in times past, were wont after their death to bee remembred, and named of the Priest at diuine seruice: but never to bee inuocated or called upon.” The view also differs significantly from the Catholic view on remembrance of the dead in The Supplication of Souls, where More defends the Catholic prayers for the dead. There, the ghosts in Purgatory promise to requite the prayers they receive from the living and, in future, “shall set hand to help” them from Heaven (qtd. in Greenblatt 144). It is these ambiguous prayers “of holy saints and wronged souls” that Richmond later tells his soldiers to “remember” (V. iv. 218–20).

Finally, I would like to return to the prayer of Buckingham with which I began my essay. Buckingham’s prayer is given the connotation of All Souls’ Day, the Catholic day to pray for deceased people. The importance of the day in Shakespeare’s Richard III can be inferred if we consider the death date of Buckingham (V. i. 12–29). Lull comments on the effect as follows: “Shakespeare compresses events over two years apart to make the occasion of Buckingham’s death anticipate the appearance of the ghosts of Richard’s victims at Bosworth” (187). In his chronicle sources, Buckingham passed away on 2 November 1483, almost two years before the battle of Bosworth, i.e. 22 August 1485. However, the battle of Bosworth comes right after his execution in Act V. Moreover, Shakespeare’s Clarence was also assassinated on All Souls’ Day, and the late Warwick appeared in his dream immediately before his departure. By this modification of the historical coincidence, the Catholic significance of remembrance in All
Souls’ Day is added to Buckingham’s prayer.

Therefore, as has been seen, prayers in Richard III are also treated as the vestige of Catholicism. Given the political exploitation of prayers, the implication is significant. As I have viewed, the play was written during the time when religion was often employed as political justification. The political effort to re-define the Catholic past was then undertaken and the war could be justified by her Protestant cause. However, prayers in Richard III present an alternative to the political efforts. Prayers certainly justify Richmond’s kingship, and celebrate peace after rebellion. Nevertheless, they simultaneously encourage the audience to re-examine their prayers with both Catholic and Protestant elements.

4. Conclusion

In the preceding sections, I have viewed figures of prayers in Richard III. Throughout this essay, I have attempted to examine the place of religion in the play by focusing on the figures of prayers. I have especially attempted to see how prayers are organized and interwoven in the play to show Shakespeare’s open attitude towards religious minorities. In the first section of my essay, I looked at Richard’s fraudulent performance of prayer and saw how his prayer claims his kingly virtues. His use of prayer is significant because it is a prayer that also claims Richmond’s kingly virtue and provides his rebellion with a good cause. Making striking contrast to the impious devotions of Richard, the prayers of Richmond nevertheless share the same motives with the prayers of Richard. With the calculated posture of piety, the prayers of Richmond also claim his own right to the throne.

Secondly, the prayers also serve as Richard’s means to eradicate other people’s memory of his cruel past. However, the similar effort to justify his rebellion in the past can be seen in Richmond’s prayer at the end of the play. After looking closely at Richmond’s prayer for peace, I considered the role of Catholic memory in defining the contemporary Protestant England. To illustrate this point, I also quoted one of the extant public prayers during the Spanish Campaign.

The prayers in the play, however, do not simply comply with the official demand to suppress Catholic. Prayers also actively accommodate both Protestant and Catholic elements. Along with the Protestant tones, vestiges of Catholic practice are also emphasized in the play. In fact, comparison with the chronicle sources suggests that certain Catholic elements are intentionally added to the prayers. Thus, in the last section, I looked at the significant coexistence of both Calvinist and Catholic elements in the prayers. After mentioning the possibility of Calvinist influence, I paid attention to such Catholic elements as All Souls’ Day, the Catholic day to pray for deceased.

However, I am by no means suggesting that the Catholic cast in the prayers criticizes the Anglican faith. Instead, I would like to suggest that the prayers in Shakespeare’s Richard III encourage the audience to re-examine their Christian faith and its role in everyday life by presenting the different way of discussing peace from Spanish Campaign. Within those figures are vividly inscribed both remnants and signs of the two denominations. Therefore, the prayers in the play give the audience the opportunity to re-examine the official religion and their faith, and, I think, those figures of prayers give voice to religious minorities.
Notes


2 Margaret repeatedly "pray"s against her enemies: "God I pray him / That none of you may live your natural age, / But by some unlooked accident cut off" (I. iii. 209-11). Although what she says is curse rather than prayer, they refer to it as prayer (III. iv. 17). In this play, the boundary between prayer and curse is hard to tell, for they are so closely intertwined. The victim's prayer for Richmond, for instance, is bound up with their curse of Richard.

3 Other than Targoff, Bruce W. Young examined the significance of parental blessing in the play (169–78).

4 A study on prayers in Shakespeare has tended to be treated as a subcategory and subsumed under other issues on Shakespeare. A possible reason for this might be the parliamentary act of May 1606 which forbade the actors to use the divine name on the stage. Subsequent alteration of the dictions of prayers made it quite difficult to tell what definitely constitutes a prayer in a play.

5 The phrase "performance of prayer" was first introduced by Ramie Targoff in 1997.

6 In the Folio, the line is assigned to the citizens (Jowett 279).


8 Anne Righter also observed that Shakespeare’s citizen’s “amen” to their future king is sincere while that of More’s citizen is not. In other words, Shakespeare’s citizen is convinced of Richard’s selfless piety while More’s is not (Righter 98).

9 Ramie Targoff also refers to Richmond’s act of prayer as the evidence of his virtue when she says “Richmond has been shown, moreover, to have a clear spiritual advantage over Richard in his ability to pray” (“‘Dirty’ Amens” 77). When I first thought of the general argument of this essay, her paper was not yet published. However, my approach is different from hers in that I am claiming that Richard’s fraudulent prayer not only sets off Richmond’s pious prayer but also functions as the basis to criticize Richmond’s prayer.

10 If we take the advantage of hindsight, the praying posture of Elizabeth I might be more impressive. It has been said that James I prefers sermons to prayers by far, which provides a striking contrast with the queen (MacCullough 51–99).

11 In his introduction to the Oxford edition of Richard III, John Jowett contrasted Richard’s political scheme with Margaret’s curse. According to Jowett, “death creates absence, and memory sustains it” in Margaret’s framework, while “His [Richard’s] spirit is revolutionary, in that his emphasis on the destroying moment of here and now crumples up and eradicates the past” (37).

12 For the connection between prayer for the dead and family remembrance, see Greenblatt 143-44, 249; Duffy 327-37.

13 After Margaret goes back to France, Richmond comes from Bretagne to rise in rebellion against Richard.

MARGARET. Earth gapes, hell burns, fiends roar, saints pray,
To have him suddenly conveyed away.
Cancel his bond of life, dear God, I plead,
That I may live to say, 'The dog is dead'. (IV. iv. 70-73)

As has been pointed out, Richmond later echoes her argument of “saints[’] pray [er]”, as if to show their continuity (V. iv. 220). He also proclaims “the bloody dog” to be dead: “God and your arms be praised, victorious friends, / The day is ours; the bloody dog is dead” (V. vii. 1–2).

14 According to The Oxford English Dictionary, the earliest record of the relevant meaning is Shakespeare’s A Midsummer Night’s Dream. III. ii. 379.
Jowett observes that some recent directors see the sign of Richmond’s future tyranny in this line (206). However, it seems to be a platitude in Shakespeare’s day. For a similar phrase employed in the funeral of Elizabeth I, see Nichols 3: 619.

Some critics interpret these lines as the sign of his future tyranny. My point is partly consistent with their readings. Wilbur Sanders, for instance, suggests that the audience may well take his prayer as “a pious shell and a hard core of prudential self-interest” (73): “it remains that Shakespeare has here shown the total inadequacy of blind obedience to whatever head happens to be under the crown” (75). Their point can also be vindicated by Michael A. Mullet’s explanation:

We begin with a study of the early English Catholic recusant community and its location and with Catholic aristocrats leading a predominantly plebeian in the worst periods actively persecuted on political grounds, for in the course of Elizabeth’s reign from 1558 to 1603 England’s Catholics were to become linked in the official and the public mind with treasonable conspiracy in alliance with Spain. (1)

Richmond Noble claims the influence of Matt. X. 21 and Mic. VII. 6: “For the sonne dishonorueth his father, the daughter riseth against her mother, the daughter in lawe against her mother in lawe: and a mans foes are even they of his owne household” (138). The prayer as a proof of obedience can be found in Woodstock, one of the sources of Shakespeare’s Richard II. In the play, there is a scene where a man boasts of his lampoon. What seems so commendable to him is that he narrowly escapes the official censorship by just adding a simple prayer at the end of every stanza:

SCHOOLMASTER. Mark then. Here I come over them for their blank charters; sha’t hear else:

Will ye buy any Parchment knives?
We sell for little gain:
Whoe’er are weary of their lives
They’ll rid them of their pain.
Blank charters they are called
A vengeance on the villain,
I would he were both flayed and bald:
God bless my lord Tresilian.
Is’t not rare?

SCHOOLMASTER. Nay, look ye sir, there can be no exceptions taken, for this last line helps all, wherein with a kind of equivocation I say, “God bless my lord Tresilian”. Do ye mark, sir? Now here, in the next verse I run o’er all the flatters i’the court by name. Ye shall see else:— (III. iii. 170-87)

He continues to recite his lampoon until the officers, who have secretly listened to him, appear and arrest them for treason (III. iii. 183-208).

Moreover, Shakespeare’s Richard does not usurp the crown. Shakespeare’s Richard assassinates Prince Edward after his own coronation.

Shaheen points out the influence of the Gospel of Luke Chapter 23 verse 34 (329).

Whilst Richard says, “Priests pray for enemies, but princes kill” (2 Henry VI V. ii. 71), such distinction is blurred in Richard III.

For similar examples, see Henry V: “KING HENRY. Alas, your too much love and care of me / Are heavy orisons ’gainst this poor wretch” (II. ii. 52-53).

According to The Oxford English Dictionary, various definitions had been already available in the late sixteenth century. Though it is not clear which meaning was actually intended by the passage, it
should be noted that the contemporary Church of England claimed that it belongs to the “Catholic Church,” i.e. “the Church Universal” (OED s.v. “Catholic,” II. 5a). At the same time, however, OED shows that association with the Roman Catholic had also been available by the time the chronicle was published (OED s.v. “Catholic,” II. 7a). For the conflicting arguments on the religious stances of those chronicles in post-Reformation England, see Patterson and Clegg.

For the Past and Present debate, see for example, Nicholas Tyacke, Peter White and Peter Lake. As it is not my intention to discuss the controversy here, I simply use “Predestination” as a blanket term.

As Alan Sinfield writes, William Perkins, a famous preacher, listed some of the current “errors” in a preface to The Foundation of Christian Religion (1590): “That howsoever a man live, yet if he call upon God on his deathbed and say, Lord have mercy upon me, and so go away like a lamb, he is certainly saved” (qtd in Sinfield 12). In addition, such an influence can be seen in the hostess’ way of thinking in Henry V:

HOSTESS. Nay, sure, he[Falstaff]’s not in hell; he’s in Arthur’s bosom, if ever man went to Arthur’s bosom. ‘A made a finer end, and went away an it had been any christom child…. So ‘a cried out ‘God, God, God!’ three or four times. Now I, to comfort him, bid him ‘a should not think of God; I hoped there was no need to trollble himself with any such thoughts yet. (II. iii. 9–25)

When the end of a person’s life draws near, people gather to witness the person’s Ars Moriendi, a strong way of professing one’s faith. On the theatricality of Ars Moriendi, see, for example, Cressy 382–95.

This prayer is in the First Folio.

This can be prominently seen in the funeral rites in post-Reformation England: “Here the dead person is spoken not to, but about, as one no longer here, but precisely as departed: the boundaries of human community have been redrawn” (Duffy 475).

As Greenblatt reminds us, there are prayers for deceased people in The Book of Common Prayer (309–10).

Works Cited

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