

Chapter 7

Cymbeline

... wipe thine eyes.

Some falls are means the happier to arise

(*Cymbeline* 4.2.405–6)¹

In chapter 6, we examined the humiliation that led to the cooling of Leontes's jealous rage. In this final chapter, we examine *Cymbeline*, wherein the humiliation of Posthumus results in a similar cooling, as well as a miraculous clearing of vision. In Shakespeare's *Cymbeline*, Posthumus displays a tragic moral blindness. Posthumus's inability to see and judge properly leads him to make several horrifying decisions that have the potential to destroy his own life and the lives of many others. The struggle to see clearly, one of the central themes of the play, is described by Innogen in this way: "Our very eyes / Are sometimes, like our judgments, blind" (*Cymbeline* 4.2.301–2).² While Posthumus is guilty of great evil and at times takes on the role of the play's villain, his life is spared and his soul redeemed by a miraculous series of events. The nature of Posthumus's redemption is of great importance, requiring that he suffer through an experience of humiliation modeled after a Reformation understanding of salvation. This chapter is about the influence of the Reformation, and particularly the writings of Martin Luther, on Shakespeare's delicately constructed *Cymbeline*. Additionally, this chapter will focus on the depravity of Posthumus and the nature of his powerful redemption. It is weak logic and poor discernment that draw Posthumus into a fog of violent jealousy from which he is rescued by a process of redemptive humiliation.

Through a study of the redemptive humiliation at work in *Cymbeline*, we see morally blind characters receive vision with which they are able to make good decisions and heal broken relationships. In this chapter, I hope to avoid common misreadings and misinterpretations of *Cymbeline*³ while bringing new understanding of the depth of Posthumus's character and his experience in the play. Posthumus is not simply ignorant or merely misinterpreting signs and signals. Posthumus is, rather, morally and spiritually depraved. He swiftly becomes an antagonizing force within the play, and it is clear that he must be redeemed. In his work on the Nativity in *Cymbeline*, Robin Moffet briefly describes Posthumus's condition as a tragic "bondage of sin."⁴ Moffet's conclusion is supported by Posthumus's confession: "My conscience, thou art fetter'd / More than my shanks and wrists" (*Cymbeline* 5.4.11–12). This confession of bondage is also reminiscent of Martin Luther's famous text published in 1525, *The Bondage of the Will*. It was in this text that the Reformer attacked Erasmus's position on grace and works, arguing that man is unable to bring himself to God. Peggy Simonds describes Posthumus's experience in the play as a refinement through a "fire of suffering."⁵ At the beginning of the play, Posthumus is stumbling in a fog of misunderstanding and making morally base decisions. In *Cymbeline*, the issue of moral vision becomes important as the characters make life-and-death judgments about the integrity of loved ones. Geoffrey Hill is correct when he describes *Cymbeline* as "a study of situation, relationship, environment, and climate of opinion."⁶ A character's moral vision affects his ability to make good decisions, and the actions that follow these decisions lie at the forefront of this play. Richard Harp describes the regaining of a character's moral vision in this way: "Indeed, since fortune / destiny / fate is the instrument of providence it seems to be true in [Shakespeare's late plays] that the more radically one experiences the turns of fortune's wheel, the better he will be able to see beyond to providence."⁷ Harp's study recognizes the important "personal" nature of providential involvement in the late plays, his work carefully identifying the redeeming strokes of fortune that bring about restored vision.⁸ The strong redemptive theme at work invites one to consider the historical context of the play, standing at the moment when the Old Testament gives way to the New.⁹ While I do not explore the implications of the birth of Christ in this work, it is worth noting the great redemptive promise associated with this event.¹⁰ Robin Moffet and Robert Miola

contend that Shakespeare intends for *Cymbeline* to symbolize the movement from a pagan world to a Christian world. Although I have great respect for the work of Moffet and Miola, I do not agree that the play offers enough compelling evidence for this claim. The birth of Christ does indeed line up with Cymbeline's reign, but absolutely nothing is made of this event in the play. This leads me to believe that Shakespeare was not as much concerned about the ushering in of a new Christian era as he was about the nature of redemption newly and powerfully portrayed in Reformation literature.

Posthumus's moral blindness is first evidenced, as Ruth Nevo claims, when he allows himself to be separated from Innogen, leaving her "in virtual imprisonment in Britain."¹¹ As he leaves Britain, the only fight we witness from Posthumus is one in which he "rather play'd than fought" with Cloten.¹² Posthumus's moral depravity is further witnessed through his dealings with Iachimo and through the shallow faith he reveals to Innogen. Through his dealings with Iachimo, Posthumus takes on a most disturbing role of pimp, offering Innogen's "dearest bodily part" to the seductive influences of his rival (*Cymbeline* 1.5.158). Prior to striking the horrible wager with Iachimo, Posthumus is revealed by the Frenchman as a man of poor judgment. The Frenchman reveals the fact that this is not the first time Posthumus has entered into a debate over the issue of Innogen's chastity:

Frenchman: . . . this gentleman at that time
vouching—and upon warrant of bloody
affirmation—his [Innogen] to be more fair, virtuous, wise,
chaste, constant-qualified and less attemptable
than any the rarest of our ladies in France.

(*Cymbeline* 1.4.375–79)

The Frenchman's comment is important in that it reveals the fact that Posthumus is concerned about Inno-

gen's virtue. His great concern reveals what proves to be a deep insecurity, and as his history contests, this insecurity has the potential of drawing Posthumus into a violent rage. Posthumus reveals far too much enthusiasm about winning a ridiculous argument over the chastity of the women in his country. Worse yet, the bet falls onto his wife, and Posthumus allows Innogen to become the guinea pig in this horrifying test. While there seems no fit climate for this kind of exchange, the fact that Posthumus enters the wager for a second time is certain evidence of his moral depravity. His poor judgment is further highlighted by the Frenchman's ability to recognize the debate over female chastity as something "slight and trivial" (*Cymbeline* 1.4.361):

Frenchman: Sir, you o'er-rate my poor kindness: I was glad I
did atone my countryman and you; it had been pity
you should have been put together with so mortal a
purpose as then each bore, upon importance of so
slight and trivial a nature.

(*Cymbeline* 1.4.357–61)

Posthumus, still convinced of the nobility of the cause, corrects the Frenchman, claiming that the "quarrel was not altogether slight" (*Cymbeline* 1.4.366). It is on this cue that the cunning Iachimo seizes an opportunity to take advantage of Posthumus's poor moral vision. Shakespeare stages this scene in a way in which Posthumus cannot win, for in the end he commands Iachimo to exercise "free entertainment" with Innogen (*Cymbeline* 1.5.163). In spite of all this, John Alvis and others contend that Posthumus "represents the plight of the good man in a bad regime."¹³ Alvis further declares, "No reliable observer has anything to say against [Posthumus'] character."¹⁴ Whether or not his bride proves faithful, Posthumus must be recognized as the villain in this exchange by setting his wife up for a violent encounter with a stranger:

Iachimo: I will lay you ten thousand ducats to your ring that, commend me to the court where your lady is, with no more advantage than the opportunity of a second conference, and I will bring from thence that honour of hers which you imagine so reserved.

Posthumus: I will wage against your gold, gold to it. My ring I hold dear as my finger; 'tis part of it.

Iachimo: . . . If I bring you no sufficient testimony that I have enjoyed the dearest bodily part of your mistress, my ten thousand ducats are yours; so is your diamond too. If I come off and leave her in such honour as you have trust in, she your jewel, this your jewel, and my gold are yours, provided I have your commendation for my more free entertainment.

Posthumus: I embrace these conditions.

(Cymbeline 1.4.134–64)

Iachimo's encounter with Innogen is important in that it helps to expose more of Posthumus's depravity. Where Posthumus fails miserably, Innogen succeeds brilliantly. The exchange that most clearly displays

Innogen's moral fortitude begins with Iachimo's cunning scheme to stir up jealousy in her mind:

Iachimo: —to be partner'd

With tomboys hired with that self-exhibition

Which your own coffers yield! with diseased ventures

That play with all infirmities for gold

Which rottenness can lend nature! such boil'd stuff

As well might poison poison! Be revenged;

Or she that bore you was no queen, and you

Recoil from your great stock.

(*Cymbeline* 1.6.747–54)

Seeking to dismantle Innogen's high opinion of Posthumus, Iachimo begins by claiming that Posthumus is not depressed about his banishment. Instead, Iachimo claims that Posthumus is running about the town, investing in all kinds of "diseased ventures" and finding great pleasure in all kinds of disreputable places (*Cymbeline* 1.6.146). Innogen's response reveals a great sense of discernment, claiming that she must protect her heart from the things she hears:

Innogen: Revenged!

How should I be revenged? If this be true,—

As I have such a heart that both mine ears

Must not in haste abuse—if it be true,

How should I be revenged?

(*Cymbeline* 1.6.153–57)

The context within which she frames her question must lead the reader to assume that Innogen's tone is not desperate and that she is not actually seeking Iachimo's counsel. Innogen is shocked and appalled by Iachimo's suggestion of revenge, an interpretation that is supported by her swift dismissal of Iachimo in the very next exchange. While Innogen may not have been anticipating his sexual advance, she was determined to proceed slowly and thoughtfully, being careful not to allow the poisonous news to affect her heart and thereby keep her from seeing the truth:

Iachimo: Revenge it.

I dedicate myself to your sweet pleasure,
More noble than that runagate to your bed,
And will continue fast to your affection,
Still close as sure.

Innogen: What, ho, Pisanio!

Iachimo: Let me my service tender on your lips.

Innogen: Away! I do condemn mine ears that have
So long attended thee. If thou wert honourable,
Thou wouldst have told this tale for virtue, not
For such an end thou seek'st,—as base as strange.
Thou wrong'st a gentleman, who is as far
From thy report as thou from honour, and

Solicit'st here a lady that disdains

Thee and the devil alike. What ho, Pisanio!

(*Cymbeline* 1.6.160–81)

The moment she discerns that Iachimo is a villain, Innogen cries out for Pisanio. Her heart is unaffected by the news he has brought, and her deep faith in Posthumus is kept intact. Innogen clearly seeks to protect the faith she has built up in Posthumus, not allowing the poisonous gossip of a stranger to disrupt her trust. The juxtaposition of Innogen's character and Posthumus's character serves to expose her husband's weak moral vision.

Innogen's clear vision, illustrated by her ability to detect and deconstruct Iachimo's lies, provides an important contrast to Posthumus's blindness. The ease with which Posthumus is deceived by Iachimo is ridiculous, the foolishness all the more exposed by Philario's scolding. It only takes Iachimo a few moments to dismantle the weak trust Posthumus has in Innogen. After Iachimo describes the roof of Innogen's bedchamber, Posthumus cries out in a great distress, "This is her honour?" (*Cymbeline* 2.4.115). He is drawn into a rage of murderous proportions much like that of Othello. The Moor is drawn into tight bonds of jealousy, casting off his commitment to Desdemona and vowing for her blood when he hears that she has given Cassio his handkerchief. Othello cries, "O that the Slave had forty thousand lives: / One is too poore, too weake for my revenge."¹⁵ Like Othello, Posthumus is easily convinced of his beloved's dishonor when Iachimo reveals that he has procured Innogen's bracelet. It is this evidence and Iachimo's simple suggestions that reveal Posthumus's shallow faith in Innogen. Even with the guidance of Philario, who seeks to shake Posthumus from investing in Iachimo's tale too readily, Posthumus allows his heart to be "in haste" abused by the poisonous news (*Cymbeline* 1.6.155)¹⁶:

Philario: Have patience, sir,

And take your ring again; 'tis not yet won:
It may be probable she lost it; or
Who knows if one of her women, being corrupted,
Hath stol'n it from her?

(*Cymbeline* 2.4.143–47)

This exchange is constructed to reveal Posthumus's lack of patience, his inability to discern the probable, and his near-fatal gullibility. Later in the play, Posthumus's poor discernment will plague him once again when, like Othello, he receives a spotted handkerchief. Philario continues to warn Posthumus but is cut off before he can rally his friend's crumbling faith:

Philario: Sir, be patient:
This is not strong enough to be believed
Of one persuaded well of—

(*Cymbeline* 2.4.164–66)

As Philario tries to claim, and as is clearly revealed, Posthumus is not “persuaded well of” Innogen's love, nor is he equipped with the proper moral vision to navigate his way through this situation (*Cymbeline* 2.4.166). Thomas Betteridge notes that the importance of Philario's interjection in this scene is that it gives an additional opportunity for Posthumus to draw back from the brink of disaster. This kind of mind-clearing opportunity is not afforded to Othello, who is drawn into such a delirium that he loses consciousness under the influence of Iago's deceit. Posthumus, even after a strong and clear warning from Philario, does not “pull back from the brink,”¹⁷ as Betteridge writes, but he chooses a course in which he “accepts the commodification

of Innogen.”¹⁸ I disagree with Glenn Arbery, who suggests that Shakespeare stages Iachimo as a destroyer of faith, a villain for whom victory is not “actual enjoyment of Imogen, then, but this destruction of faith, which takes the form of physical revulsion and which leads to Posthumus’ design on Imogen’s life.”¹⁹ It seems to me, rather, that Shakespeare purposefully handicaps Iachimo’s villainous skill so as to place the focus of the blame on Posthumus. While the audience marvels at the masterful quality of Iago’s evil in *Othello*, in *Cymbeline* the audience must scoff at the fragility of Posthumus’s faith and discernment.²⁰ Lacking Iago’s malice and demonic manipulation, Iachimo is clearly playing a game with Posthumus. This simple game yields the same result as Iago’s masterful plotting, a comparison that Shakespeare makes more powerful by having both Othello and Posthumus vow to tear their wives to pieces.²¹

From Philario’s insistence that the “government of patience” does not rule over Posthumus’s mind to Pisanio’s recognition of a “strange infection” within Posthumus’s ear, a great gentleman is humiliated before his peers and servants (*Cymbeline* 2.4.192; 3.2.3). In the opening scene of act 5, we witness Posthumus’s humbling confession and the beginning of new vision. Upon receipt of a cloth that was meant to bear witness to Pisanio’s murder of Innogen, Posthumus’s pride is broken, and his confession reveals new insight and wisdom:

Posthumus: Yea, bloody cloth, I’ll keep thee, for I wish’d

Thou shouldst be colour’d thus. You married ones,

If each of you should take this course, how many

Must murder wives much better than themselves

For wrying but a little! O Pisanio!

Every good servant does not all commands:

No bond but to do just ones. Gods! if you

Should have ta’en vengeance on my faults, I never

Had lived to put on this: so had you saved
The noble Innogen to repent, and struck
Me, wretch more worth your vengeance.

(*Cymbeline* 5.1.1–11)

Although he is once again guilty of trusting weak evidence, it is clear that Posthumus has moved from a place of arrogant blindness to a place of greater moral clarity. While his discernment is still impoverished, in this passage it is evident that Posthumus recognizes the humble state of mankind, confessing that he is not fit to judge or to deal out such violent penalties for sin. It is my contention that Posthumus's movement from murderous jealousy to humble contrition is in fact the most miraculous action of the play. Even before he understands Innogen to be innocent of infidelity, Posthumus begins to see with a divine sense of clarity. Though he is not guilty of the sexual sin and infidelity he suspects of Innogen, his recognition of the culpability of all mankind is a recognition that Reformation theologians would claim could only be arrived at by a divine encounter. In *The Book of Homilies*, a volume of sermons officially sanctioned by both Edward VI and Elizabeth I, the editors describe the importance of the type of recognition that Posthumus experiences: "Let vs also knowledge the exceeding mercy of GOD towards vs, and confesse, that as of our selues commeth all euill and damnation: so likewise of him commeth all goodnesse and saluation, as GOD himselfe sayth by the Prophet Osee, O Israel, thy destruction commeth of thy selfe, but in me only is thy helpe and comfort" (Hos. 13:9).²² Posthumus follows his confession by stripping himself of the trappings of a gentleman and by taking on the form of a peasant:

Posthumus: That, Britain, I have kill'd thy mistress; peace!
I'll give no wound to thee. Therefore, good heavens,
Hear patiently my purpose: I'll disrobe me

Of these Italian weeds and suit myself
As does a Briton peasant: so I'll fight
Against the part I come with; so I'll die
For thee, O Innogen, even for whom my life
Is every breath a death; and thus, unknown,
Pitied nor hated, to the face of peril
Myself I'll dedicate.

(*Cymbeline* 5.1.20–29)

Posthumus vows to give his life for Innogen and sacrifice himself for the welfare of Britain. It is in this moment that Posthumus's faith in Innogen is restored and he is redeemed. Harold Goddard claims that it is here that Posthumus "discards his Italian weeds forever."²³ Finally abandoning his reckless view of women,²⁴ Posthumus sees himself as one who is neither pitied nor hated and whose life must be lived for another. Peter Platt calls this an "astonishing soliloquy,"²⁵ for before knowing that Innogen is innocent, Posthumus is "able to call her noble."²⁶ This scene is reminiscent of *King Lear*. It is at Lear's most humbling moment that his great kingly robes are torn from his body, and he cries out in anguish:

Lear: Thou must be patient. We came crying hither:

Thou knowst the first time that we smell the air

We wawl and cry. I will preach to thee: mark me.

Gloucester: Alack, alack the day!

Lear: When we are born we cry that we are come

To this great stage of fools.

(*Cymbeline* 4.6.174–79)

Posthumus and Lear share a common understanding of their place before men and before the gods. It is their common moral blindness that lands Posthumus and Lear in such humbling positions, and yet each is redeemed through the experience. Both are lowered from places of royalty and power, influence and prestige, to be faced with the humbling recognition of their own vulnerability.

After fighting on behalf of Britain, Posthumus turns himself in to the British forces. Thinking him a Roman, the soldiers throw Posthumus into prison and sentence him to death by hanging. While bound in prison, Posthumus has an experience with the divine. His humble prayer is followed and perhaps rewarded by a supernatural visitation that confirms his proper posture before God. Posthumus prays:

Posthumus: Is't enough I am sorry?
So children temporal fathers do appease;
Gods are more full of mercy. Must I repent?
I cannot do it better than in gyves,
Desired more than constrain'd: to satisfy,
If of my freedom 'tis the main part, take
No stricter render of me than my all.
I know you are more clement than vile men,
Who of their broken debtors take a third,
A sixth, a tenth, letting them thrive again
On their abatement: that's not my desire:
For Innogen's dear life take mine . . .

(*Cymbeline* 5.4.13–24)

Posthumus questions the nature of repentance and reveals a profound understanding of divine grace and mercy. His question, “Is’t enough I am sorry?” (*Cymbeline* 5.4.13), puts him in a place beside some of the most famous Reformation thinkers. It was the nature of grace and mercy that Luther sought to clarify, particularly the New Testament doctrine surrounding repentance that he found in Paul’s letter to the Romans. Paul writes with much passion, echoing some of the same concerns that Posthumus voices in this scene. Paul writes, “For what I am doing, I do not understand; for I am not practicing what I would like to do, but I am doing the very thing I hate . . . For the good that I want, I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not want . . . Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death?”²⁷ Paul explains that it is through the death of Christ and his own symbolic death to sin that he is saved. Posthumus’s insistence that his death will make things right strikes an interesting parallel with the words of Paul’s New Testament letter: “What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase? May it never be . . . all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into his death . . . therefore we have been buried with him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.”²⁸ Posthumus’s insistence that his death and what he calls the sacrifice of his freedom bears a strong resemblance to the insistence that Paul makes regarding the death of sinful men. Although Posthumus expresses the belief that he must make a literal sacrifice—a remnant of Roman Catholic works theology, perhaps—the sacrifice that is ultimately demanded of him is symbolic, much like the death described by Paul. Posthumus’s sacrifice is of a spiritual nature, one that he makes through an experience of redemptive humiliation. Posthumus is brought to a place of humility where he is able to recognize his great sin and shame. Though the importance of humility before God was emphasized by all the major Protestant Reformers, the sixteenth-century English Reformer William Perkins became famous for his own story of humiliation, in which he describes how God “initiated” the kind of conviction that “stripped away his pride.”²⁹ Following this Reformation model, Posthumus is humiliated and thereby recognizes that he deserves death

and damnation, and yet it is on recognition of this fact that he is redeemed. Posthumus is clearly emptied of pride, an act for which Jupiter takes full responsibility:

Jupiter: No more, you petty spirits of region low,
Offend our hearing! Hush! How dare you ghosts
Accuse the Thunderer, whose bolt, you know,
Sky-planted, batters all rebelling coasts.
. . . Be not with mortal accidents oppressed.
No care of yours it is; you know 'tis ours.
Whom best I love I cross, to make my gift,
The more delayed, delighted. Be content.

(*Cymbeline* 5.4.95–98, 101–4)

Jupiter's explanation is far too closely tied to a Reformation understanding of salvation to be ignored.³⁰ Taking full control of the salvation of men, Jupiter confesses to crossing men for the purpose of saving them. It was this shift of responsibility and control that the Reformers made much of. With the emphasis taken off of the works of men, the Reformers insisted that God alone could save. Because of the depravity of mankind, individuals were unable to save themselves or to navigate themselves toward the path of salvation. Therefore it was in God's power to save men and women, and as stated by Jupiter, the method always involved bringing men and women into a proper understanding of self, others, and the divine. This process required what the Reformers described as a redemptive humiliation, a moment when a man or woman was able to see their great need for a redeemer. Calvin describes redemption coming on a man or woman in this way:

Yet, when that light of divine providence has once shone upon a godly man, he is then relieved and set free not only from the extreme anxiety and fear that were pressing him before, but from every care. For as he justly dreads fortune, so he fearlessly dares commit himself to God. His solace, I say, is to know that his Heavenly Father so holds all things in his power, so rules by his authority and will, so governs by his wisdom, that nothing can befall except he determine it. Moreover, it comforts him to know that he has been received into God's safekeeping and entrusted to the care of his angels, and that neither water, nor fire, nor iron can harm him, except in so far as it pleases God as governor to give them occasion.³¹

Ironically, Posthumus seems to understand the nature of grace and mercy far better than his parents as they are portrayed in the dream. In this dream, Posthumus's family begs and pleads for Jupiter's mercy, not knowing that he crosses those he loves and therefore humiliates those he chooses to redeem. In *Acts and Monuments*, John Foxe describes what he believes to be the nature of God and divine correction. Foxe's description is compatible with the kind of god that Shakespeare stages in Jupiter. Foxe provides three examples of God's "scourging of his favorites to enable them to suffer so as to achieve wisdom."³² Posthumus dares not plead with Jupiter for mercy, for he is convinced that he deserves nothing but death. It is this posture, this clear view of self, that sets Posthumus up as an ideal Reformation saint. Finally "relieved and set free . . . from every care,"³³ as stated by Calvin, Posthumus bears the markings of one who has been redeemed.

The transformation we witness in Posthumus is clearly remarkable—something Shakespeare would certainly not have wanted his audience to miss. Jupiter's engagement with Posthumus's family in many ways serves to highlight Posthumus's newfound nobility and honor. While Posthumus's parents plead for his life, he offers his up. While Posthumus's parents seem nervous about the mercilessness of the divine, Posthumus confesses a great confidence in the mercy of God. The interaction with Jupiter, woven with Ref-

ormation theology, confirms Posthumus's clarity of vision and his restored connection with the divine. In an essay that confers great importance on the nature of Posthumus's sleep, Margaret Jones-Davies marks this exchange as one that "awakens Posthumus to faith."³⁴ While Ros King argues that Jupiter rejects the petitions of Posthumus's family because the god considers them "miserable worms who should not be disturbing his godhead,"³⁵ she misses a rich connection to Reformation theology in this passage. Richard Harp comes closer to the mark in his analysis of Boethius's philosophy within *Cymbeline*, writing that Shakespeare's Jupiter foretells "how suffering may lead to a good end."³⁶ While Harp locates the divine element, he and Ros King overlook the personal nature of Jupiter's rebuke. In what appears to be a strongly Reformational context, Jupiter offers Posthumus's family an assurance that he is in control and that they have nothing to fear. Shakespeare makes a sharp diversion from a traditional view of the gods, who are shown more often as uncaring and uninterested in the affairs of men. In this play, however, Shakespeare stages Jupiter as a compassionate deity, claiming to discipline those he loves. The nature of Jupiter's personality seems to be modeled after a Reformation reading of the Old and New Testaments.

In the Old Testament, we witness the scolding of Job. In the biblical story extensively employed by Luther to explain the nature of salvation and the process of redemption, God appears before Job in much the same way that Jupiter appears before Posthumus and his family. God answers Job's complaints out of a whirlwind and a violent storm, scolding him with these words:

Who is this that darkens counsel
By words without knowledge?
. . . Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth!
Tell Me, if you have understanding . . .
Have you ever in your life commanded the morning,
And caused the dawn to know its place . . .

Who has given to Me that I should repay him?

Whatever is under the whole heaven is Mine.

I will not keep silence concerning [My creation].³⁷

Luther writes extensively about Job and the humiliation he suffers: “The example of Job in his humiliation and affliction teaches the same. For in this wonderful manner the Lord treats His saint (Ps. 4:3), namely, when we think that it is all over with us, He embraces and kisses us as His dearest sons.”³⁸ There is violence in the words of Jupiter and the Christian God, yet both deities discipline their subjects with a promise of redemption. In perfect Reformation form, Jupiter demands that his subjects come to a place of proper perspective, understanding that he is great and glorious and that they are humble and low. In the passage in Job, we find a similar divine injunction, demanding proper respect from Job. God’s questioning of Job results in his humiliation, allowing him to understand his place in the universe more clearly.

In the New Testament, we find an injunction against anxiety, delivered by Jesus, that bears a strong resemblance to Jupiter’s injunction in *Cymbeline*. The tone Jesus takes in this passage is one that certainly humbled those whom he addressed: “And which of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life’s span? If then you cannot do even a very little thing, why do you worry about other matters? Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; but I tell you, not even Solomon in all his glory clothed himself like one of these . . . you men of little faith . . . do not keep worrying . . . your Father knows that you need these things . . . Do not be afraid, little flock.”³⁹ Martin Luther comments on the themes in this passage, his objective to cause men to acknowledge the power and presence of God in human affairs. His concern is focused on the correction of what he believed was a false understanding of God’s mercy and strength, a strength that Jupiter exclaims to those that clearly doubt him and fear disaster. Luther writes:

[God] demonstrated how he has laid up for us at all times a sufficient store of food and

clothing, even before we ask him for it. All we need to do is to work and avoid idleness; then we shall certainly be fed and clothed. But a pitiful unbelief refuses to admit this. The unbeliever sees, comprehends, and feels all the same that even if he worries himself to death over it, he can neither produce nor maintain a single grain of wheat in the field. He knows too that even though all his storehouses were full to overflowing, he could not make use of a single morsel or thread unless God sustains him in life and health and preserves to him his possessions. Yet this has no effect upon him.⁴⁰

As one who has been redeemed, Posthumus has the clarity of mind to understand the nature of the divine. He seems to understand, as Hamlet boldly confesses, that “there’s a divinity that shapes our ends.”⁴¹ Posthumus’s moral clarity is witnessed by the gaoler in act 5 when he claims, “Your death has eyes in’s head” (*Cymbeline* 5.4.177–78). In terms of moral and emotional vision, this exchange between Posthumus and the gaoler is of great importance:

Gaoler: You must either
be directed by some that take upon them to
know, or to take upon yourself that which I am
sure you do not know, or jump the after-inquiry
on your own peril . . .

(*Cymbeline* 5.4.183–86)

The gaoler recognizes the strength of vision in Posthumus, who confesses to know where his eternal destiny lies. Robin Moffet claims that Posthumus, after “reaching an ultimate point of destitution . . . finds his life worthless and desperate until he has offered it to the gods.”⁴² With Posthumus’s new spiritual vision, he bears

a great confidence about his eternal destiny. He responds in this way:

Posthumus: I tell thee, fellow, there are none
Want eyes to direct them the way I am going, but
Such as wink and will not use them.

(Cymbeline 5.4.189–91)

In this passage, Shakespeare employs “wink” in such a way as to describe those who close their eyes to danger and fearfully or ignorantly refuse to look on that which is dreadful and threatening. Posthumus claims to be able to look boldly at death, to see it and approach it with the confidence of the redeemed. The gaoler is clearly not accustomed to this kind of boldness, nor to what appears a peaceful resignation to the will of the gods:

Gaoler: What an infinite mock is this, that a man
should have the best use of eyes to see the way of blindness! I am sure hanging's the way of
winking.

(Cymbeline 5.4.192–94)

After Posthumus is released from prison, he is brought before the king. Posthumus humbles himself here, confessing that he is guilty of crimes against Innogen: “Ay me, most credulous fool, / Egregious murderer, thief” (*Cymbeline* 5.5.247–48). Posthumus admits that he deserves to be executed, declaring “Every villain / Be called Posthumus Leonatus” (*Cymbeline* 5.5.260–61).

Posthumus is humbled for his poor moral vision, and the events that bring him to his knees are the very events that lead to his ultimate redemption. This process is identified by Peggy Simonds as a key component

of Renaissance tragicomedy. She writes, "Tragicomedy dramatizes personal reform and a redeeming act of faith as part of a spiritual initiation rite . . . reform then becomes the primary motif of the tragicomedy . . . [before one is redeemed] one must die to the sensory world . . . In Christian terms, the old Adam must first die so that the new or redeemed Adam may be born."⁴³ While Simonds's argument is worth consideration as it deals with the death of pride and arrogance, she fails to recognize the strains of Martin Luther's theology in Shakespeare's text and the vital role humiliation plays in the redemption of Posthumus. Simonds borrows heavily from Arthur Kirsch's work in the area of Christian redemption, but each critic fails to make the key connections between the theology of the Protestant Reformation and Shakespeare's redemptive theme. Simonds joins J. P. Brockbank, Robin Moffet, Homer Swander, and Howard Felperin by arguing that in *Cymbeline* the world of the play "is undergoing a psychological and spiritual preparation for the birth of the Good Shepherd or Christ."⁴⁴ It would be more accurate to claim, however, that the play is a reenactment of the Reformation theory of redemption. Posthumus suffers through humiliating events, and through this pain, he receives new life and therefore new vision. As a man who displays great moral blindness at the beginning of the play, Posthumus is reduced to humble questioning and a healthy sense of dependence. It is the redemptive humiliation of Reformation theology that has bled into the fabric of Shakespeare's *Cymbeline*, thereby giving this tragicomedy greater historical and theological power.