Notice of the Final Oral Examination
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
of

DAVID ANONBY

MA (University of British Columbia, 1998)
BA Hons. (Trinity Western University, 1996)

“Shakespeare and Soteriology: Crossing the Reformation Divide”

Department of English

Friday, November 20, 2020
12:00 P.M.
Conducted Remotely

Supervisory Committee:
Dr. Gary Kuchar, Department of English, University of Victoria (Supervisor)
Dr. Erin Kelly, Department of English, UVic (Member)
Dr. Samuel Wong, Department of English, UVic (Member)
Dr. Sara Beam, Department of History, UVic (Outside Member)

External Examiner:
Dr. Patricia Badir, Department of English Language and Literatures, University of British Columbia

Chair of Oral Examination:
Dr. Monica Prendergast, Department of Curriculum and Instruction, UVic

Dr. Stephen Evans, Acting Dean, Faculty of Graduate Studies
Abstract
My dissertation explores Shakespeare’s negotiation of Reformation controversy about theories of salvation. While twentieth century literary criticism tended to regard Shakespeare as a harbinger of secularism, the so-called “turn to religion” in early modern studies has given renewed attention to the religious elements in Shakespeare and his contemporaries. Yet in spite of the current popularity of early modern religion studies, there remains an aura of uncertainty regarding some of the doctrinal or liturgical specificities of the period. This historical gap is especially felt with respect to theories of salvation, or soteriology. Such ambiguity, however, calls for further inquiry into historical theology. As one of the “hot-button” issues of the Reformation, Salvation was fiercely contested in Shakespeare’s day, making it essential for scholarship to differentiate between conformist (Church of England), godly (puritan), and recusant (Catholic) strains of soteriology in Shakespearean plays. I explore how the language and concepts of faith, grace, charity, the sacraments, election, free will, justification, sanctification, and atonement find expression in Shakespeare’s plays. In doing so, I contribute to the recovery of a greater understanding of the relationship between early modern religion and Shakespearean drama. While I share Kastan’s reluctance to attribute particular religious convictions to Shakespeare (A Will to Believe 143), in some cases such critical guardedness has diverted attention from the religious topography of Shakespeare’s plays.

My first chapter explores the tension in The Merchant of Venice between Protestant notions of justification by faith and a Catholic insistence upon works of mercy. The infamous trial scene, in particular, deconstructs cherished Protestant ideology by refuting the efficacy of faith when it is divorced from ethical behaviour. The second chapter situates Hamlet in the stream of Lancelot Andrewes’s “avant-garde conformity” (to use Peter Lake’s coinage), thereby explaining why Claudius’s prayer in the definitive text of the second quarto has intimations of soteriological agency that are lacking in the first quarto. The third chapter argues that Hamlet undermines the ghost’s association of violence and religion, thus implicitly critiquing the proliferation of religious violence on both sides of the Reformation divide. The fourth chapter argues that Calvin’s theory of the vicarious atonement of Christ, expounded so eloquently by Isabella in Measure for Measure, meets substantial resistance, especially when the Duke and others attempt to apply the soteriological principle of substitution to the domains of sexuality and law. The ethical failures that result from an over-realized soteriology indicate that the play
corroborates Luther’s idea that a distinction must be maintained between the sacred and secular realms. The fifth chapter examines controversies in the English church about the (il)legitimacy of exorcising demons, a practice favoured by Jesuits but generally frowned upon by Calvinists. Shakespeare cleverly negotiates satirical source material by metaphorizing exorcisms in *King Lear* in a way that seems to acknowledge Calvinist scepticism, yet honour Jesuit compassion. Throughout this study, my hermeneutic is to read Shakespeare through the lens of contemporary theological controversy and to read contemporary theology through the lens of Shakespeare.