IGNATIAN DISCERNMENT
AS SEEN IN
SHAKESPEAREAN TRAGEDY

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ABSTRACT

William Shakespeare is hailed as the greatest playwright of all time and is the most widely known author in all of English literature. Saint Ignatius Loyola was a sixteenth century soldier-turned-saint who founded the Society of Jesus, a Catholic religious order, also known as the Jesuits. This thesis examines two plays of William Shakespeare through the lens of the Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius Loyola to determine the influence that the Exercises may have had on Shakespeare. Concretely our question is, “Are there instances of Ignatian discernment in the plays of William Shakespeare?”

First, I present the story of St. Ignatius’s conversion and explain how he developed the Spiritual Exercises. Second, I trace the history of the early Jesuits in London and focus specifically on Jesuit saint and martyr Edmund Campion. Then I describe what historians tell us about William Shakespeare’s early life in Stratford-upon-Avon and the few years after he left school at the age of fifteen or sixteen. Finally, using The Tragedy of Macbeth and Julius Caesar as case studies, we look at characters in these two plays who use, I contend, the Ignatian process of discernment of spirits in making their decisions.
My research establishes that William Shakespeare was rooted in Catholicism early on through the families of both his mother and father. Furthermore, he had Catholic connections through his schoolmasters at the King’s New School in Stratford-upon-Avon, and it is quite possible that a young Shakespeare met Edmund Campion. Shakespeare was very likely himself a schoolmaster for the wealthy Catholic families in Lancashire from 1579-81 which coincides with the time that Campion was in the England countryside as a missionary from 1580-81.

The Ignatian process of the “discernment of spirits” is still used widely today among religious and lay people alike. It makes us aware of our feelings of desolation and consolation and guides us in our decision-making processes. The value of reflecting on discernment in Shakespeare’s plays is the graphic way in which they parallel the discernments and decisions we make in our own everyday lives.
DEDICATION

To Tess who has inspired and encouraged me in this endeavor and to those special Jesuits who have illuminated the Ignatian Way for me over the years.
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INTRODUCTION

William Shakespeare is the most widely known author in all of English literature. He is hailed as the greatest playwright of all time. Stephen Greenblatt says in his captivating biography of William Shakespeare, *Will in the World: How Shakespeare became Shakespeare*, “his works appeal to the learned and the unlettered, to urban sophisticates and provincial first-time theatergoers. He makes his audiences laugh and cry; …. He seems at one moment to have studied law, at another theology, at another ancient history…. “ 1 As Greenblatt explains in the Preface, the aim of his book is to discover who this person is who wrote the most important body of imaginative literature in English more than 400 years ago.

The aim of this thesis has a much narrower discovery in mind regarding William Shakespeare. The question I will address is whether or not William Shakespeare was influenced by the *Spiritual Exercises* of Saint Ignatius of Loyola. This possibility first occurred to me when I was reading *The Tragedy of Macbeth*. It seemed to me that *Macbeth* was struggling to decide what the right thing to do was—weighing his options, if you will. Macbeth knew that it was wrong to carry out the self-serving plot of his over-ambitious wife, which was to kill the King of Scotland. However, he eventually gave in to her dark desires. I could clearly visualize in my

mind the scene in which Macbeth stands outside the dining room where the King sits at supper. Macbeth moves out of the shadow of a marble column into the light as he tells himself that he cannot murder Duncan. Then Lady Macbeth pulls him into the darkness behind the column again and convinces him to carry out the murderous deed. The discernment of spirits in the *Spiritual Exercises* of Saint Ignatius crept into my mind at that moment. And that was the beginning of my search for the answer to my question: “Is it possible that William Shakespeare knew of Saint Ignatius and had heard about, read, or even practiced the *Spiritual Exercises* and the discernment of spirits?”

Ignatius of Loyola was born in 1491 in a Basque province of Spain. He was the youngest of thirteen children. It was in 1521, after suffering a leg wound in battle, that he underwent a spiritual conversion and went on to found the Society of Jesus in 1534 which was canonically established in 1540. Ignatius spent fifteen years forming and guiding the Society before he died in 1556. The Society of Jesus had grown so rapidly that by 1556 its members totaled 1,000 with houses in major Italian cities, Spain, Portugal, France, Germany, Brazil, Japan, and India. “The English mission of the Society of Jesus may be said to have had its formal beginning when Father Edmund

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3 Ibid., 239.
Campion and Father Robert Persons were sent from Rome on 18 April 1580.\(^4\) It is believed by some scholars that Edmund Campion is the direct link or connection that William Shakespeare had to the Jesuits.

William Shakespeare was born in Stratford-upon-Avon on April 23, 1564, and would have been about sixteen years old when the first Jesuits arrived in England. There are no extant records to prove that William Shakespeare attended the King’s New School in Stratford. However, his extensive knowledge of the Latin classics, as revealed in his plays, is a very strong indication that he did. Moreover, his father’s position as alderman and bailiff of Stratford would have assured him a place at the school.\(^5\) One of Shakespeare’s young instructors at the King’s New School, Simon Hunt, left Stratford in 1575 to attend the Catholic Seminary in Douai in northern France, and he eventually became a Jesuit. This is, perhaps, another link that Shakespeare had with the Jesuits.

When William Shakespeare was leaving school in 1579-80, it is thought that he might have been hired as a private tutor for the large Catholic household of Alexander Hoghton.\(^6\) More than likely this is where young Shakespeare would have encountered


Edmund Campion who was by now a forty-year-old Jesuit sent by the Jesuit general in Rome to open a mission in England. Greenblatt says in his book that “Campion’s visits were clandestine, to be sure, but they were not narrowly private affairs; they brought together dozens, even hundreds of believers, many of whom slept in nearby barns and outbuildings to hear Campion preach ….” 7 Assuming that William Shakespeare heard Edmund Campion preach or even that he heard others discussing the preaching and teachings they heard, it is quite possible that William Shakespeare would have learned about the theology of the Jesuits and their beloved *Spiritual Exercises*.

In two of William Shakespeare’s plays, *The Tragedy of Macbeth* and *Julius Caesar*, we will take a close look at a few of the characters and at the decisions and choices they make. We will see their struggles with good and evil, light and darkness, and consolation and desolation. Do we see hints of the discernment of spirits at work, or is it something else? Let’s be open, insightful, and perhaps enlightened together.

Chapter One is a brief biographical sketch of Saint Ignatius Loyola and traces the development of his *Spiritual Exercises* with an emphasis on the discernment of spirits. Chapter Two introduces Edmund Campion and the first Jesuits to enter England in the 1580s. The centerpiece of this thesis, Chapter Three, looks into Shakespeare’s early years and his possible encounters with Jesuits and Jesuit spirituality. In Chapter Four we will focus on *The Tragedy of Macbeth* and *Julius Caesar* to consider a link

7 Ibid., 108.
between Ignatian Spirituality and Shakespearean tragedy. Our concluding chapter, Chapter Five, will answer the “so what” question: “What does this mean for us today—what relevance could it possibly have for our lives today?” We will compare the impact of the Ignatian discernment process at the time of William Shakespeare with our own contemporary experience of the Spiritual Exercises.

Here is a timeline of relevant dates to keep in mind as we follow the lives of Ignatius Loyola, Edmund Campion, and William Shakespeare.

**Ignatius of Loyola**
- 1491: Born in Spain
- 1521: Wounded in battle
- 1522-23: *Spiritual Exercises* written at Manresa; revised over next twenty years
- 1532: In August and September Ignatius begs for alms in London
- 1534: Founding of the Society of Jesus
- 1540: Formal establishment of Society of Jesus
- 1548: *Spiritual Exercises* published in Rome
- 1556: July 31, Ignatius dies at the age of 65 years

**Edmund Campion**
- 1540: January 24, born in London
- 1564: Receives degree from Oxford
- 1569: Leaves London for Dublin
- 1573: Receives degree from seminary in Douai
- 1573: April, accepted for entrance into the Society of Jesus
- 1578: September 8, celebration of first Mass in Prague
- 1580: June 25, returns to London as a Jesuit missionary
- 1581: December 1, dies as a martyr at the age of 41 years

**William Shakespeare**
- 1564: April 23, born in Stratford-upon-Avon
- 1564: April 26, baptism at Church of the Holy Trinity
- ca. 1569-79: Student at the King’s New School in Stratford
- ca. 1579-81: Schoolmaster and player (actor) in Lancashire
1582 | November 28, marriage to Anne Hatheway  
1583 | May 26, first daughter, Susanna, born  
1585 | February 2, twins born: son, Hamnett, and daughter, Judith  
1596 | August 11, son, Hamnett, dies at age 11  
1599 | *Julius Caesar* written  
1606 | *The Tragedy of Macbeth* written  
1616 | April 23, dies at the age of 52
CHAPTER ONE

THE SPIRITUAL EXERCISES OF SAINT IGNATIUS
AND THE DISCERNMENT OF SPIRITS

John O’Malley says in his comprehensive book entitled *The First Jesuits* that scholars are now agreed that the essential elements of the *Spiritual Exercises* emerged and began to take form when Ignatius spent ten months in the small town of Manresa in Spain in 1522 to 1523.¹ At this point, Ignatius was about thirty-one years old, and he continued to revise the book over the next twenty years. Let us now roll back the tape to the early life of Ignatius and trace his path to Manresa.

Inigo Lopez de Loyola, (“Ignatius” from here on in this paper) was born in 1491 at Loyola Castle in a Basque province of northern Spain. He was the youngest of thirteen children. At about the age of fifteen he was sent to serve as a page to Juan Velazquez, the treasurer of the kingdom of Castile. As a member of the Velazquez household, he was frequently at court, and he developed a taste for all it presented, especially the ladies. He was much addicted to gambling, very contentious, and not above engaging in swordplay on occasion. In fact, in a dispute between the Loyolas and another family, Ignatius and his brother plus some relatives ambushed at night some clerics who were members of the other family. Ignatius had to flee the town. The case against Ignatius dragged on for weeks, but was eventually dropped.

In our contemporary jargon, we might say that he was both a macho man and a lady’s man. The opening sentences of his autobiography say it this way: “Up to his twenty-sixth year he was a man given to worldly vanities, and having a vain and overpowering desire to gain renown. He found special delight in the exercise of arms.”\(^2\) In other words, up to almost thirty years of age, Ignatius was driven by ambition and vanity.

At the age of thirty, in May of 1521, he led a small band of soldiers in defending the fortress of the town of Pamplona against the French, who claimed the territory as their own against Spain. The Spaniards were terribly outnumbered, but Ignatius convinced them to fight on for the honor of Spain. During the battle a cannon ball struck Ignatius, wounding one leg and breaking the other. He was carried back to Loyola Castle to recuperate. His leg was set but did not heal, so it was necessary to break it again and reset it, all without anesthesia. Unfortunately, this was not a successful procedure. All of his life he walked with a limp because one leg was shorter than the other.

During the long weeks of his recuperation, he was extremely bored and he asked if there were any books in the castle that he could read. He was obviously

thinking of books of chivalry and romance, but it was reported to him after a search that there were only two “story books” in the castle: one about the life of Christ and another about the lives of the saints. He let them sit unread for quite a while, and then out of utter boredom, he picked them up. The more he read, the more engaged he became with the stories of Jesus and the saints. He was even touched with admiration. Should they be his role-models in life now that his military career was ended, he wondered? He began to think and dream about that possibility.

But there was an alternate dream that kept cropping up—a day-dream which really fascinated him and held his attention for three or four hours at a time. It was a dream about impressing a noble lady with his gallant knightly behavior under her gaze and in her service. He dreamt about taking a trip to the country where she was living, of the verses he would write, the promises he would make to her, and of the deeds of gallantry he would perform on her behalf. And this lady was of no ordinary rank. She was neither countess, nor duchess, but of a nobility much higher than any of these. He would dream endlessly about her—and his exploits for her—in fascination. And then he would come crashing back to reality.

He spent his time vacillating between these two daydreams: imitating Christ and the saints by living out their values through a mission of loving service to others and impressing his imaginary lady-love by his self-promoting exploits under her gaze. And eventually he became conscious of how he was
feeling as he was engaged in these daydreams. He felt great joy, but he noticed, on reflection, that after his daydreams of gallantry under the gaze of the fair lady, he felt empty, restless, and ashamed of himself, while after his daydreams of imitating Christ and the saints in loving service of others—even at the threat of death—he felt a rightness, a fittingness, a persuasive assurance and confidence of being on the right track—on life’s right track and mission.

Over the course of time, he came to name the first feeling “desolation,” and the second feeling “consolation.” Desolation means being alone—as on a desolate island out at sea—since you have isolated yourself by your ego-centricity. Consolation is a feeling of companionship with others, since “con” is from the Latin “cum” which is our English “with.” We feel consoled when we are consciously with others, in companionship and in service. And since, as we have seen, we humans are essentially social beings, we are behaving as our true selves when we are with, for, and unto others. O’Malley says in his book that, “this process by which he [Ignatius] arrived at his decision became a distinctive feature of the way he would continue to govern himself and became a paradigm of what he would teach others.”

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As soon as Ignatius’s physical strength was restored, he left Loyola castle, unbeknownst to his family, and went to a Benedictine monastery in Montserrat which was the first stop on his pilgrimage to Jerusalem. He made a vigil before the famous Black Madonna statue and laid down his sword and dagger. He dressed in a long tunic made of rough cloth, put on sandals, and carried a pilgrim’s staff. Here he made a general confession which signified the closing of the door on his past. From Montserrat he traveled to the small town of Manresa where he remained for almost a year from 1522 to 1523. At Manresa Ignatius experienced a deep desolation which was counter to the consolation he experienced during his convalescence at Loyola Castle. He had a strict regimen of prayer, fasting, and self-flagellation that were extreme even in the sixteenth century. He discovered a copy of *The Imitation of Christ* and meditated on the life of Christ. Eventually he experienced a deep consolation here at Manresa through visions that he was convinced were sent to him by God. Aware that the consolation he felt came through God’s loving grace, he started making notes to share his experiences with others. This was the beginning of his little book called simply *Spiritual Exercises*.

The *Spiritual Exercises* were published in Rome in practically their final form in 1548.\(^4\) It is not a narrative of the life of Jesus or a record of Ignatius’s

\(^4\) Ibid., 4.
experiences. It is, as its title implies, a set of exercises through which a person, often during a formal religious retreat, can replicate Ignatius’s prayers and meditations and thus achieve an intimate relationship with Christ. But the history of the *Spiritual Exercises* began when Ignatius started reading that story book about Jesus—his life and mission. So it is not surprising that reading, mulling, and praying over the life and mission of Jesus as recorded in the four Gospels is the very core of the *Spiritual Exercises*. All of the other meditations and exercises in Ignatius’s book aim to help us better understand Jesus and His mission so that we can discern and decide whether and, if so, how we might collaborate with Jesus in his mission. There have been many translations of the original Latin text of the *Spiritual Exercises* over the years. For this paper, I am using a translation by Louis J. Puhl, S.J., which is considered a very accurate English translation, published in 1951. For citations from the *Exercises*, I use numbers in brackets in the text and in the footnotes which refer to the standard paragraph numbering of the *Spiritual Exercises*.

It is not surprising that Ignatius, the former soldier, describes Jesus’s mission in military language. One key meditation is The Call of an Earthly King [91] and other is The Two Standards [136]. In The Call of an Earthly King, Christ is the King who summons his subjects and tells them he means to overthrow the enemies of his Father. Then he invites them to join him in this enterprise—“…to work with me day by day, and watch with me by night, etc., that as he has had a share in the toil with me,
afterwards, he may share in the victory with me.”⁵ After meditating on this invitation, the person doing the *Exercises*, the retreatant, is invited to pray that they may offer themselves generously for the King’s work, resisting thereby any selfish or worldly concerns. This, Ignatius says, is the worthy response of a noble knight. The Two Standards meditation describes two military groups, each marching under the standard or banner of their leader. One leader is Jesus and the other is Satan. The life-philosophy on Satan’s banner is “to tempt them to covet riches (as Satan himself is accustomed to do in most cases) that they may the more easily attain the empty honors of this world, and then come to overweening pride.”⁶ On Jesus’s banner we read “three steps: the first, poverty as opposed to riches; the second, insults or contempts as opposed to the honor of this world; the third, humility as opposed to pride.”⁷ We are invited to ponder, discern, and decide with which of these two leaders we want to serve. We conclude this meditation by praying for God’s support to carry out the decision we have made.

Another key meditation—on the Incarnation [101-109]—explains the purpose and goal of Jesus’s life and mission. It invites us to see the Holy Trinity looking down on the chaos and sinfulness in our world beginning with the sin of Adam and Eve. And

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⁶ Ibid., [142].

⁷ Ibid., [146].
then we hear them discussing, discerning, and deciding what they might do to remedy our situation. Astonishingly, they decide that one of them will become a human being in order to join and help us humans. Finally, we are invited to visualize the angel Gabriel appearing to a young woman named Mary and inviting her to become the mother of Jesus. We know Mary’s response, “Here am I the servant of the Lord; let it be done unto me according to your word.” Mary is our model in responding affirmatively to the Lord’s desires of us. I remember a retreat director who described it this way: to know God’s will and to do God’s will—not counting the cost.

There are two key book-ends to the *Spiritual Exercises*. The opening book-end is called The First Principle and Foundation [23] and the closing book-end is The Contemplation to Attain Love [230-237]. The first book-end is persuasively reasonable. The closing book-end is passionately attractive. Let’s look briefly at each of them. The First Principle and Foundation is a Mission Statement—a mission statement of human life itself. It answers the proverbial question, “what is our purpose here on earth?” How are we humans designed to work and thereby to become our best possible selves? Jesuit Dean Brackley’s translation of the opening sentences of the First Principle and Foundation says it beautifully, “Human beings are created to love God with their whole heart and soul, principally by loving and serving one another. In this way they participate in God's plan to bring all creation to completion and so arrive

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at their own ultimate fulfillment (eternal life).” 9 In other words, our “ultimate fulfillment” is attained by loving and serving God and one another. Jesuit theologian and philosopher Bernard Lonergan’s says the same thing, “We humans achieve authenticity through self-transcendence.”10 And he goes on to say that we “transcend ourselves” by reaching out lovingly to others.

The First Principle and Foundation then goes on to say:

The other things on the face of the earth are created for man to help him in attaining the end for which he is created….Therefore, we must make ourselves indifferent to all created things, as far as we are allowed free choice and are not under any prohibition….our one desire and choice should be what is more conducive to the end for which we are created. 11

That is basic logic and it also makes good practical sense: choose and use the appropriate means to achieve your end or goal. But Ignatius realizes from his own previous life experience how easily we humans prefer immediate gratification to genuine progress. So he says, maintain a spirit of detachment from these possible means to your end, so that you can, with freedom and after careful evaluation and

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discernment, decide which are indeed the more profitable means to your end in life, here and now. In other words, don’t put the cart before the horse. Use your head!

Ignatius also tells us, use your heart. He says that principally in the closing book end of the *Spiritual Exercises* called The Contemplation to Attain Love [230-237]. The grace we desire and ask for in this meditation is “an intimate knowledge of the many blessings received [from God], that filled with gratitude for all, I may in all things love and serve the Divine Majesty.”\(^\text{12}\) Ignatius opens with two reminders: love is shown more in deeds than in words and it consists in mutual sharing. Then Ignatius suggests that we consider four types of gifts that God gives us: first, the gift of creation, of life, and of redemption and the special gifts God has given me; second, the very presence of God dwelling within all creation and within me; third, the fact that God is laboring in all things, in humans and in nature, giving them existence and motion; and fourth, the fact that all the goodness in each created being is a gift radiating from God, like light and warmth from the sun. As we ponder and pray over these many gifts, we are aroused to great gratitude to God and, in appreciation, offer the gift of ourselves to God. We reciprocate God’s love by offering ourselves in love to God. Our relationship is one of mutual sharing.

\(^\text{12}\) Ibid., [233].
Ignatius gives us a prayer for making our grateful self-offering to God. It is worth quoting in full because of the way it catches up the spirit not only of this meditation, but of Ignatian spirituality as a whole.

*Take, Lord, and receive all my liberty my memory, my understanding, and my entire will, all that I have and possess. Thou hast given all to me. To Thee, O Lord, I return it. Dispose of it wholly according to Thy will. Give me Thy love and Thy grace, for this is sufficient for me.*

We can see that in the course of doing the *Exercises* we are making a series of decisions, as, for instance, to love and serve God and neighbor, to hear and follow the call of the King, to know, love, and serve Christ on his mission. And, at the very beginning of the *Exercises*, Ignatius had told us that their whole purpose and aim is to enable us to make good decisions. “[The *Exercises*] have as their purpose the conquest of self and the regulation of one’s life in such a way that no decision is made under the influence of any inordinate attachment.”

Sometimes “inordinate attachment” is translated as “disordered affection.” The *Exercises* are meant to give us the freedom to hear, to discern, to decide, and to do what God and Christ are calling us to do—here and now.

“To know God’s will and to do God’s will—not counting the cost!” That’s what Ignatian discernment helps us to do. That’s what Ignatius was doing at Loyola Castle when he was alternately reading the life-story of Jesus and then romanticizing about a

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13 Ibid., [234].

14 Ibid., [21].
fair damsel—and then discerning the spirits (divine and demonic) that were calling out for his affirmation and embrace. In the course of his subsequent lifetime, Ignatius described for others what discernment is, how to do it, and how to test it for accuracy. In the *Exercises* there are Rules for the Discernment of Spirits [313-336].

The touchstone for discerning accurately is whether the proposed course of action fills us with consolation or desolation. And to make an accurate diagnosis takes familiarity with our feelings, experience interpreting their meaning and message, and freedom and courage to decide what seems good, better, and/or best in the Lord. In the Discernment of Spirits of the *Spiritual Exercises*, Ignatius gives us some very practical descriptions of consolation and desolation.

Then it is characteristic of the evil spirit to harass with anxiety, to afflict with sadness, to raise obstacles backed by fallacious reasonings that disturb the soul. Thus he seeks to prevent the soul from advancing.

It is characteristic of the good spirit, however, to give courage and strength, consolations, tears, inspirations, and peace. This he does by making all easy, by removing all obstacles so that the soul goes forward in doing good.

I call it consolation when an interior movement is aroused in the soul, by which it is inflamed with love of its Creator and Lord, and as a consequence, can love no creature on the face of the earth for its own sake, but only in the Creator of them all. It is likewise consolation when one sheds tears that move to the love of God, whether it be because of sorrow for sins, or because of the sufferings of Christ our Lord, or for any other reason that is immediately directed to the praise and service of God. Finally, I call consolation every increase of faith, hope, and love, and all
interior joy that invites and attracts to what is heavenly and to the salvation of one's soul by filling it with peace and quiet in Christ our Lord.  

Sometimes we can think of this in terms of conscience. We know what our conscience feels like when it is upset and in an uproar about something we are witnessing or have experienced. Conscience comes alive as feelings of delight and joy, or repugnance and resistance; all depending upon what it is that is provoking the feeling. It immediately tells us in our affections what is in sync or what is out of sync, what is on key or what is out of key, what arouses good vibes or has started us feeling bad vibes, what is true, what is false, what is in good order and what is in disorder, what is functional and what is dysfunctional.

To be a good discerner, we have to be continually striving to educate ourselves about ourselves and to form sensitive vibes, good feelings, healthy values, a true perspective on what is good and what is dysfunctional. It is in order to deepen and educate and form ourselves as good discerners that we take ourselves to prayer, particularly to meditation on Jesus in the Scriptures, and it is there that we discover, building up within ourselves, the mind and the heart of Christ. And it is for that reason that we don’t want to do anything or behave in any way that would diminish the sensitivity and the sensibility of our feelings and our desires and thereby hinder us from being good discerners of what is good or better, what is bad or worse. This is important because it is out of our spontaneous feelings that we oftentimes are going to

\[\text{15 Ibid., [315-316].}\]
make crucial decisions in our lives. In the *Spiritual Exercises* Ignatius lays out three ways in which we can do a discernment and make good decisions. His explanation can be found in Introduction to Making a Choice of a Way of Life [169-182]. What follows is a summary of those sections, not a citation.

Before describing the three ways of making good decisions, Ignatius recalls once again, our life’s mission statement, namely, the First Principle and Foundation with which the *Spiritual Exercises* begin. It reminds us that in making any decision we ought to have clearly in mind the purpose for which we have been created, namely, to love and praise God our Lord and to serve our human brothers and sisters. Accordingly, whatever I decide ought to be chosen as an aid toward that end. Then, he lays out three ways of making good decisions. The First Way of making a decision happens when God our Lord so moves and attracts the will that a sincere and good person, without doubting or being able to doubt, chooses and does what was proposed. This is what St. Peter and St. Matthew did when they followed Christ’s call to them, “Follow me!” They dropped everything and followed immediately. The Second Way happens when a good person is drawn to reach understanding and make a decision in light of their experience of “consolation” and “desolation” —that is, peace and joy or deep disturbance—at the prospect of choosing one or another option. From the experience of feelings of consolations and desolations, one can discern God’s will and
decide accordingly. The Third Way is to list over time the advantages and disadvantages of option A and option B for praising God and serving one’s neighbor. When the two lists are complete, the person carefully considers, ponders, and weighs the alternate advantages and disadvantages and allows their mind and heart to be drawn toward the choice that is more favorably commended. In all three ways, the decision is subsequently held up to God for testing and confirmation. And a prayer of gratitude is offered.

Then, Ignatius tells us to ask ourselves some very practical questions about our disposition in doing a discernment and making a decision. A one sentence summary of each would be: (1) Would this have been my advice to a fellow human being? (2) On my death bed would I be pleased to have made this decision this way? (3) Would I have wanted to have decided this way as I stand before my Lord and Saviour on judgment day?16

O’Malley says, that “the Rules for Discernment, however, unmistakably indicate that Ignatius thought God and the Devil were active in the whole process. Perhaps just as important, they reveal how seriously feelings like sadness, confusion, happiness, and serenity are to be taken.”17 When we get to chapter 4 on *The Tragedy of Macbeth* and *Julius Caesar*, it is the feelings of sadness, confusion, happiness, and

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16 Ibid., [185-187].

serenity that we will be paying close attention to as we see the characters make crucial
discernments and decisions. But now that we have a grasp on the *Spiritual Exercises* of
Saint Ignatius and the discernment of spirits, let us trace the arrival of Jesuits in
England and the life of Edmund Campion, S.J.
Ignatius of Loyola left Spain at the end of 1527, and on February 2, 1528, he arrived in Paris where he stayed for seven years until April 1535. However, he made short journeys to Belgium during this period to beg for his living. A Spanish friar suggested that Ignatius travel to Flanders for up to two months each year to beg for funds to pay for his studies during the remainder of the year. Ignatius notes in his autobiography that during one of his begging tours in Flanders he also visited London. This London sojourn took place in August and September of 1531. He returned to Paris with more alms—thanks to donations from Spanish merchants in London—than in other years.

This London visit takes place prior to the founding of the Society of Jesus in 1534 and its formal establishment in 1540. Nevertheless, I think it is important to note that Ignatius himself did visit London. It seems quite possible that someone would have remembered seeing Ignatius as a beggar but there is no record of this visit other than in his autobiography. One can only imagine that Ignatius looked like John the Baptist as he begged for alms. To learn later that this same man went on to found the Society of Jesus would have seemed remarkable and memorable.

The formal beginning of the English mission of the Society of Jesus was in 1580 when three Jesuits arrived in England. They were Fathers Robert Persons and
Edmund Campion accompanied by Brother Ralph Emerson. All three entered the country in disguise due to the severe repression of Catholics. Henry VIII had broken ties with the Roman Catholic Church in the 1530s, but relations were resumed under Queen Mary. But then in the 1570s Queen Elizabeth once again severed the relationship of the English Church to Roman Catholicism. So, in 1570, Pope Pius V issued a “Bull of Excommunication” against Queen Elizabeth. The document was nailed to the door of the Bishop of London’s house by John Felton in May 1570.¹ Felton, a well-to-do Catholic, was tortured, convicted of treason, and finally executed.

The Pope also issued an order to all the Queen’s Catholic subjects “that they presume not to obey her, or her monitions, mandates, and laws or else they too would be excommunicated.” This led to Catholics in England being regarded with intense suspicion by their contemporaries.² Evelyn Waugh states in his biography of Edmund Campion that Campion’s “contemporaries and the vast majority of subsequent historians regarded the Pope’s action as ill-judged.”³ He goes on to say that it was “the bloody ruin of English Catholicism.”⁴ At the time of Queen Elizabeth’s excommunication William Shakespeare would have been six years old and by the time that Edward Campion entered England Shakespeare would have been sixteen. Edmund

⁴ Ibid., 44.
Campion was forty years old when he arrived back in England as a Jesuit but disguised as a jewelry merchant.

Let us roll back the clock to the beginning of Campion’s life to better understand the man who became a Jesuit in witness to his profound faith and love of Catholicism and the Society of Jesus. Edmund Campion was born on January 25, 1540, in London to Catholic parents who later turned Protestant. His father was a bookseller so one can only imagine that young Campion had been around books from a very early age. When he was ten years old, Edmund began his formal education at the “Bluecoat School.” He was an excellent student, and when he was fifteen, he was given a scholarship to the newly founded St. John’s College, Oxford. He earned a great reputation as an orator and had a great following of students who called themselves “Campionites.” Waugh says that these young men “crowded to his lectures, imitated his habits of speech, his mannerisms and his clothes.”\(^5\) When Queen Elizabeth visited Oxford on September 3, 1566, it was the twenty-six year old Campion who delivered the welcoming speech in Latin. He made such a strong impression on the Queen and Lords Cecil and Leicester that they tried to recruit him into royal service.

Campion received his degree from Oxford in 1564 and that is probably the year that he took the Oath of Supremacy which acknowledged the Queen’s sovereignty in matters of religion. He was a deacon in the Established Church by 1568, but the taking

\(^5\) Ibid., 10.
of orders in a church about which he was doubtful was very troubling to him. Joseph Tylenda says in his short biography of Campion that “in pursuing his studies toward priestly ordination, he read the writings of the Church Fathers and through his reading became convinced that the Catholic Church had the true faith.”

Campion set out for Dublin sometime after August 1569, since he was unable to live in England as a Catholic. Evelyn Waugh says in his book on Campion that Lord Cecil remarked about Campion’s departure this way: “It is a great pity to see so notable a man leave his country, for indeed he is one of the diamonds of England.” Campion remained in Ireland for almost two years but eventually left there because of a growing anti-Catholic feeling. After a brief stop in England, he went on to the seminary in Douai in northern France which trained priests for England. He devoted himself to his studies and earned his degree in January 1573. Very soon after this he left for Rome with the goal of becoming a Jesuit. He was accepted for entrance into the Society of Jesus in April 1573. Since there was not an English Province for the Jesuits, he was assigned to the Austrian Province and subsequently went to Prague and Brno for his novitiate. Campion expected to spend the rest of his life in Prague where he


7 Waugh, Edmund Campion, 61.
pronounced his Jesuit vows, taught, and was ordained. He said his first Mass on September 8, 1578.⁸

Joseph Tylenda points out in his biography of Campion that “he wrote and directed plays for his students and was acknowledged as the foremost orator in Prague.”⁹ Waugh reports that “in 1577 a tragedy of his, on the subject of Saul, was produced with great splendor at the expense of the municipality before Elizabeth, the widow of Charles IX of France; it played for six hours, and was repeated the next day at the request of the Emperor.”¹⁰

Of Campion’s time in Prague, Waugh goes on to say that:

…he was leading the old life he loved, living in a celibate community, maturing and polishing his scholarship, instructing, expounding, disputing as he had done before, more tenderly, perhaps, and more thoroughly, without a trace of vanity and emulation but to all appearances much the same man as he had been in Oxford and Dublin. The precise discipline of the Ignatian Exercises had served only to confirm him in the habit of life he had originally chosen.¹¹

This is the man, the priest, who was on his way back to England, and eventual martyrdom, guided by his faith.

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⁸ Ibid., 71.
¹⁰ Waugh, Edmund Campion, 75.
¹¹ Ibid., 76.
By 1579, Pope Gregory XIII wanted to send some Jesuits to England, so the Jesuit General in Rome decided to open a mission in England. Father Edmund Campion was the first priest to be assigned to it. Jesuit Father Robert Persons was to join him along with Brother Ralph Emerson. In April of 1580 all three left Rome and made their way to England, stopping off at Saint Omer in Flanders to join other missionaries, which included four elderly Marian priests, three younger priests, a bishop, and two laymen, all on their way to England.¹² “Father General stressed that the objects of the mission were ‘to advance in the faith and in our Catholic religion all who were found to be Catholics in England; and secondly to bring back to it whoever may have strayed from it either through ignorance or at the instigation of others’.”¹³

Before the missionaries even arrived in England, however, spies for Queen Elizabeth heard the news of their plans, and authorities at the English ports of entry were notified of the priests’ arrival. Therefore, the priests separated at the French coast. Father Persons left for England in mid-June and Father Campion and Brother Emerson left on June 24, 1580.

After having been away from England for eight years, Father Campion, disguised as a jewelry merchant with Brother Emerson disguised as his servant, arrived

¹² Ibid., 88.

on June 25, 1580, and went directly to London. When Campion arrived in London, Persons was away in the country, but he had left word for Campion to await his return. Campion met with most of the chief Catholics and Catholic sympathizers in London during the week or ten days until Persons returned. A conference was then convened known as the Synod of Southwick which met “to define the aims of the mission to the existing clergy and to discuss various topics of importance with the leading Catholics.”14 The intent was to be clear that the missionaries had no political motives.

In London Campion wrote what came to be known as “Campion’s Brag,” a manifesto of his mission:

In it he declared that his coming to England had a religious and not a political purpose. The statement was intended to be used, in the event of his capture, to offset the government’s expected claim that he was on a purely political mission. So powerful was this manifesto that, unbeknownst to him, it was widely distributed to help encourage Catholics to remain firm in their faith. 15

Waugh says:

The result, both for good and ill, was a vast augmentation of Campion’s fame. This, obscured now by his long absence abroad, had, even in the old days before his exile, been local and limited; he was known at Universities and at Court, among scholars, men of affairs and men of

14 Waugh, Edmund Campion, 117.

fashion, but it is improbable that his name had even reached the market town and remote manners, where it now became fabulous.¹⁶

It is very possible that William Shakespeare or his family or some of his Catholic neighbors might have had a copy of the “Brag.” Both sides of the religious spectrum in England now saw Campion as a leader and spokesperson of the new mission. To the Catholics he brought hope that they could resume the religious practices lost to them, to the Protestants it meant conspiracy. “Campion and Persons found themselves traveling in a world tremulous with expectation.”¹⁷

From London Campion and Persons split up and traveled from town to town in the countryside. They and their hosts were very careful to leave no record of their visits. The Jesuits sent anonymous letters to their superiors to report their progress. Campion went to Berkshire, Oxfordshire, Lancashire, and Yorkshire, visiting Catholic homes or households that employed Catholics staying only one or two nights. The houses where they stayed were equipped with secret cupboards where Mass vestments and altar items were stored. In addition, there were secret hiding places where the priests could be concealed in case of a sudden raid. Campion would usually arrive in the day, hear confessions and preach, celebrate Mass the next morning distributing


¹⁷ Ibid., 131.
communion, and then be on his way. Waugh says of Campion’s journey that “he traveled in fair comfort, mounted and equipped as befitted a gentleman of moderate means. He was attended by his servant, and more often than not by one or more of the younger members of the household where he had last stayed, but it was his habit for most of the way to ride in silence and some little distance from his companions, praying and meditating.” He was constantly on the move and probably visited fifty or more homes during this three month period.

After three months Persons and Campion reunited in London briefly. Then Campion went to Lanchashire where he preached almost daily. Tylenda says that Campion’s sermons were remembered fifty years later by those who had heard them. At this time he was also writing the Ten Reasons in Latin (Decem Rationes) which expounded on ten reasons why he challenged the most learned Protestants to discuss religion with him. This work was eventually printed secretly and four hundred copies were left on the benches of the university Church at Oxford on June 27, 1581.

Just three weeks later Campion was taken from a home at Lyford where he had preached and celebrated Mass. After three searches of the house in twelve hours, Campion and two other priests were found hidden in their secret compartment. They

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19 Waugh, Edmund Campion, 132.
were taken to the Tower in London with a paper stuck in Campion’s hat that read, “Campion, the seditious Jesuit.” Three days later he was interviewed by the Earls of Bedford and Leicester and reportedly by the Queen herself who tried to bribe him into apostasy. But the attempt failed, and he was brutally tortured while confronted by Protestant dignitaries. Campion would not give in to their charges of plotting to come to England to raise a rebellion. Ultimately, a jury brought a guilty verdict against him, and he was sentenced to a brutal death. Campion’s final words to the Court were: “…in condemning us you condemn all your own ancestors….To be condemned with these old lights—not of England only, but of the world—by their degenerate descendants is both gladness and glory to us. God lives. Posterity will live. Their judgement is not so liable to corruption as that of those who now sentence us to death.” 20 And so on a dismal, rainy, and muddy day, December 1, 1581, Campion was executed along with two other priests. It was a barbaric execution, and from the scaffold Campion prayed publicly for Elizabeth: “your queen and my queen, unto whom I wish a long reign with all prosperity.” 21

From Campion’s return to London as a Jesuit missionary on June 25, 1580, until his martyrdom on December 1, 1581, seventeen months had passed. During this time he touched the lives of many Catholics who lived in fear of the monarchy but


21 Ibid.
continued to practice their faith secretly. Campion was a priest revered and loved by many. Was perhaps young William Shakespeare among those whose lives he impacted through his profound faith, keen intellect, and charismatic demeanor? The next chapter will look into Shakespeare’s early life in Stratford-upon-Avon and the years after he left the New School in Stratford.
Next year, 2014, will mark the 450th anniversary of the birth of William Shakespeare. During these four and a half centuries thousands of books and articles have been written about Shakespeare and his plays and sonnets. We have heard from biographers, literary critics, historians, and theologians among others. These authors have looked at the life and work of William Shakespeare from every angle. Many of these scholars have made it their life’s work to examine closely one facet of the life or artistry of Shakespeare who is considered the greatest writer in the English language.

It seems daunting and even presumptuous for a novice like me to attempt to add anything to the vast body of research and scholarship that is available at this point in history. Nevertheless, I am determined to follow through on a question that arose in my mind as I was studying *The Tragedy of Macbeth*. The question is, “Was Macbeth possibly going through the Ignatian process of the ‘discernment of spirits’ when he was weighing the options for his future?” Was such discernment also being practiced by several of the characters in *Julius Caesar*? Had William Shakespeare ever heard about or come to know of St. Ignatius Loyola, his *Spiritual Exercises*, and his discernment of spirits?

As I began my research, I was intrigued to learn of Shakespeare’s Catholic roots. Furthermore, it was very interesting to discover that the young William
Shakespeare might possibly have met Jesuit Father Edmund Campion or heard him preach when Campion was in England in 1580 on his mission—just prior to his martyrdom.

Let us travel back in time to the first days in the life of William Shakespeare and trace his journey. Bill Bryson tells us in the preface to his biography of Shakespeare that “for somebody who has been dead for nearly 400 years, William Shakespeare remains awfully active. Hardly a month goes by, it seems, that there isn’t some fairly momentous claim or discovery relating to his life or work.”¹ My condensed biography will weave together facts from my sources who have each made unique discoveries about William Shakespeare, the playwright, poet, and actor who was born in the market town of Stratford-upon-Avon. There is much that we know about his life, but there is much that remains hidden and, therefore, open to interpretation.

To begin, we don’t know the exact date of William Shakespeare’s birth, but we do know the exact date of his christening. His baptism was recorded in the register of the Church of the Holy Trinity, in Stratford, on Wednesday, April 26, 1564. Bill Bryson says that:

> Much ingenuity has been expended on deducing from one or two certainties and some slender probabilities of the date on which he came into the world. By tradition, it is agreed to be 23 April, St George’s Day. This is the national day of England, and coincidentally also the

date on which Shakespeare died fifty-two years later, giving it a certain irresistible symmetry, but the only actual fact we have concerning his birth is that he was baptized on 26 April. The convention of the time—a consequence of the high rates of mortality—was to baptize children swiftly, no later than the first Sunday or holy day following the birth, unless there was a compelling reason to delay. If Shakespeare was born on 23 April—a Sunday in 1564—then the obvious choice for christening would have been two days later on St. Mark’s Day, 25 April. However, some people thought St. Mark’s Day was unlucky and so, it is argued—perhaps just a touch hopefully—that the christening was postponed an additional day, to 26 April.²

I use this as an example of how scholars can establish with some degree of certainty various facts about the life of Shakespeare even though written documentation is not available.

We do know that Shakespeare was born in Stratford-upon-Avon and in his father’s large and substantial home on Henley Street. William was the eldest son and third surviving child of John Shakespeare, a glover and “whittawer” —a dresser of white leather—and a man who attained some prominence in town affairs. Shakespeare’s mother, Mary, was the youngest daughter of a wealthy farmer, Robert Arden of Wilmcote, which was about three miles northwest of Stratford. John and Mary had eight children, but the first two daughters, Joan and Margaret, died in infancy. Only one of the Shakespeare’s other five children, a second “Joan,” who married William Hart, a Stratford hatter, survived her famous brother by about thirty years. All the others pre-deceased William, including the youngest, Edmund (1580-

² Ibid., 43.
1607), a “player” (actor) who was buried in the London church of St. Saviour’s in Southwark.

John Shakespeare had several years of prosperity in Stratford. From 1565 through 1576 he served as a town alderman, its high bailiff or mayor, a justice of the peace, and then again as an alderman. A period of adversity followed where he had financial difficulties. He had to sell or mortgage property and he stopped going to town council meetings. Early in 1577, John Shakespeare left the town council quite abruptly. Peter Ackroyd says that “many reasons have been adduced for his decision, ranging from ill-health and a possible stroke to drunkenness.”3 Ackroyd goes on to say that:

A far more likely cause has been found in his espousal of the old religion. The year before his withdrawal a grand ecclesiastical commission was established by the Privy Council to investigate the religious affairs of the nation. Among its ordinances was one established to inquire into “all singular, heretical, erroneous and offensive opinions,” and “to order, correct, reform and punish any persons willfully and obstinately absenting themselves from church and service.” (Quoted in R. Savage (ed.): Minutes and Accounts of the Corporation of Stratford upon Avon, 1553-1620, Volume Two, page xlvii). The members of the borough council were no doubt asked to expedite these matters, perhaps even to draw up lists of recusants who “obviously” refused to attend church service. To whom else could the commissioners turn? And so John Shakespeare, recusant, absented himself.4


4 Ibid., 68.
Later that year the Bishop of Worcester arrived in Stratford on a religious visitation to hunt out heretics and most likely requested the help of the town council. Fortunately, John Shakespeare had left nine months earlier. Ackroyd points out that:

John Shakespeare’s position was all the more precarious because through marriage he had become part of the Arden affinity; in this period the Catholic Edward Arden was engaged in full feud with the Protestant Earl of Leicester, who had charge of the county and who sent sectarian preachers to Stratford. Any member of the Arden family, however removed, could become an object of suspicion. So the world of religious politics conspired against Shakespeare’s father and obliged him to withdraw from public life. His colleagues were reluctant to see his departure, but they understood his reasons. This can be no more than a guess, but it does at least make sense of his subsequent behavior.⁵

Ackroyd says that Stratford contained a very large Catholic constituency of which the Shakespeare’s were a part, but this does not imply that William Shakespeare professed that faith. However, he must have been quite familiar with Catholics:

On any conservative reckoning it is possible to identify some thirty Catholic families within the town, and of course the available records are by their nature inconclusive. There would have been many more papists, who concealed their private belief from the local authorities. They became, in the language of the day, “church papists” whose attendance at the Protestant churches masked their true faith. It has been speculated that the majority of churchgoers in Stratford were of this sort.⁶

Bill Bryson has two interesting paragraphs in his biography of Shakespeare that provide additional insight into the religion of the Shakespeare family:

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid., 39.
A century and a half after John Shakespeare’s death, workmen rooting around in the rafters of the Shakespeare family home on Henley Street in Stratford found a written testament – a ‘Last Will of the Soul’, as it was called—declaring John’s adherence to the Catholic faith. It was a formal declaration of a type known to have been smuggled into England by Edmund Campion.

Scholars have debated ever since whether the document itself was genuine, whether John Shakespeare’s signature upon it was genuine, and what any of this might or might not imply about the religious beliefs of William Shakespeare. The first two of these questions are likely to remain unresolvable, as the document was lost sometime after its discovery, and the third could never be other than a matter of conjecture anyway.  

Bryson obviously feels that William Shakespeare’s roots in Catholicism can be reasonably traced back to his parents.

Although there are no surviving records to prove it, it is presumed that William Shakespeare attended the King’s New School in Stratford. This English grammar school was established to educate young men primarily in Latin grammar and literature. John Shakespeare’s positions as an alderman and bailiff in Stratford and William’s knowledge of the Latin classics suggest that he attended the school. Students usually began their studies at the age of four or five in the attached “petty school,” where they learned to read and write in English and they studied catechism from the Book of Common Prayer. After two years in petty school, students entered the

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grammar school where they began the serious study of Latin grammar and Latin texts that would occupy the remainder of their school days.\textsuperscript{8}

Greenblatt describes a rigorous schedule for the students:

In the summer the school day began at 6 A.M.; in the winter, as a concession to the darkness and the cold, at 7. At 11 came recess for lunch—Will presumably ran home, only three hundred yards or so away—and then instruction began again, continuing until 5:30 or 6. Six days a week; twelve months a year.…And the instruction was not gentle: rote memorization, relentless drills, endless repetition, daily analysis of texts, elaborate exercises in imitation and rhetorical variation, all backed up by the threat of violence.\textsuperscript{9}

A.L. Rowse says, “the plain fact is that Shakespeare had a fabulous aural memory—nothing like it in the whole of literature: he heard a phrase at school, like Quintilian’s \textit{universis…largitur}; it comes out years later as ‘largess universal’. It is not a common cliché, but an association; it is the word, the phrase, that transfixed him.”\textsuperscript{10}

Greenblatt makes a parallel observation:

Though Shakespeare seems to have recycled every word he ever encountered, every person he ever met, every experience he ever had—it is difficult otherwise to explain the enormous richness of his work—he contrived at the same time to hide himself from view, to ward off vulnerability, to forswear intimacy.\textsuperscript{11}


Ackroyd says that in Shakespeare’s dramas we see the unmistakable impressions he had drawn as young boy growing up in the house on Henley Street. It was a noisy house where a conversation in one part of the house could be heard in another part and sounds of household tasks carried throughout the wooden structure:

There are images of stopped ovens and smoking lamps, of washing and scouring, of dusting and sweeping; there are many references to the preparation of food, to boiling and mincing and stewing and frying; there are allusions to badly prepared cakes and unsieved flour, to a rabbit being turned upon a spit and a pasty being “pinched.” There are many references to what was considered to be women’s work within the home, to knitting and to needlework. But there are also images of carpentering, of hooping and of joinery; these were the activities of the yard or of the outhouses at the back of John Shakespeare’s property. No other Elizabethan dramatist employs so many domestic allusions. Shakespeare maintained a unique connection with this past.  

Ackroyd also goes on to describe the instances in Shakespeare’s plays where he mentions the trade of his father as a glover or whittawar. This is yet another example of how he recycles so much of what he learned in his youth:

He knows the varieties of leather, from dog-skin to deer-skin, and lists the assortment of items that his father sold, from shoes of neat’s leather to bridles of sheep’s leather and the bags of sow-skin carried by tinkers. “Is not Parchment made of sheepe-skinnes?” Hamlet’s question is answered by Horatio with a further refinement: “I, my lord, and of Calues-skinnes to” (3082-83). Gloves, particularly those made of

12 Ackroyd, Shakespeare: The Biography, 33.
cheveril or kid-skin, are praised by Shakespeare for their softness; there are references to a “soft chiuerell conscience” (*All Is True*, 996) and “a wit of cheuerell, that stretches from an ynch narrow, to an ell broad” (*Romeo and Juliet*, 1139-40). Shakespeare describes gloves continually, whether worn in the hat or thrown down as a pledge. In *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, Mistress Quickly remarks upon “a great round Beard, like a Glouer’s pairing knife.” This is the language of close observation.13

During his years at the New School, Shakespeare had four school masters, all of whom had degrees from Oxford and by the standards of the day were well educated men. The first of these was Walter Roche. Though he resigned his post the year that Shakespeare joined the school, Roche remained in Stratford for the rest of his life. In 1571 Simon Hunt succeeded Roche and was schoolmaster for the first four years of Shakespeare’s education. Ackroyd says that although much of Shakespeare’s schooling was undertaken by an assistant, Simon Hunt remained a powerful presence in William’s young life. Ackroyd goes on to say that it is significant that Hunt:

reverted to his old Catholic faith; he left Stratford in order to train at the seminary in Douai as a Jesuit priest and missionary to England. Whether his sympathies had any material effect upon the young boy is another matter; but it would surely have compounded the family’s own piety and bolstered what seems to have been the Catholic environment of his growing up.14

Shakespeare’s next schoolmaster was Thomas Jenkins who had previously taught at the Warwick grammar school. Ackroyd describes an interesting connection

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13 Ibid., 22

between Jesuit missionary Edmund Campion and Thomas Jenkins. He says that Jenkins was:

A Londoner and a son of a “poor man” and “old servant” of Sir Thomas White; he had been a student of Latin and Greek at St. John’s College, Oxford, which had been established by the very same Sir Thomas White. White was a Roman Catholic, and St. John’s College was known to be sympathetic to Catholic undergraduates. Edmund Campion, Catholic saint and martyr, was attached to St. John’s College, and taught Thomas Jenkins there. Jenkins can therefore be considered to be indulgent, at the very least, to the Catholic cause. He can also be considered an expert classicist, and it was he who first introduced Shakespeare to the work of Ovid. He was in every sense a dedicated teacher…."15

Jenkins was succeeded by John Cottom in 1579 who remained until 1581 or 1582. Thomas Cottom, John’s younger brother, was a Jesuit priest and missionary who resided with Simon Hunt at the Jesuit seminary in Douai. Robert Debdale, a fellow student of Shakespeare and the son of a Catholic farmer from Shottery, joined Hunt and Cottom in Douai. Ackroyd says:

The associations with Shakespeare are close, therefore, and almost pressing. Thomas Cottom returned to England with a letter from Robert Debdale to his father. Both Thomas Cottom and Robert Debdale were later arrested, for their proselytizing activities in England, and executed. From illusions in plays it is clear that Shakespeare followed the career of his erstwhile schoolfellow with some interest. He was, you might say, one of the fraternity.16

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15 Ibid., 64.

16 Ibid.
Shakespeare: the ‘lost years’ by E.A.J. Honigmann gives us a good insight into what Shakespeare might have been doing when he left grammar school at the age of fifteen or sixteen in 1579-80. There is a record of his license to marry Anne Hatheway in November of 1582. In addition, there are records of the baptism of his children, Susanna on May 26, 1583, and the twins Hamnet and Judith on February 2, 1585. However, it is the years between grammar school and his marriage, roughly 1579 to late 1582, that most concern us.

Honigmann weaves the interconnecting threads between the prominent Catholic families in the area and a young William Shakespeare who traditionally is thought to have left Stratford to take up a career as a schoolmaster in Lancashire. He establishes that the William Shakeshaft, named in the will of Alexander Hoghton, is most probably William Shakespeare. Honigmann details the discovery he made when checking through the information available on young Shakespeare’s four schoolmasters:

I was startled to learn that John Cottom was a native of Lancashire who returned c.1582 to Tarnacre, where his family owned property, and lived there until his death in 1616. For Tarnacre, I found, is only ten miles from Lea, where the Hoghtons lived at this very time. Why had no one spotted this coincidence?….John Cottom, it turns out, was the brother of the priest Thomas Cottom, who was captured by authorities in June 1580, was arraigned on 14 November 1581, along with Jesuit Edmund Campion, and executed as a traitor on 13 May 1582.17

Honigmann says that he continued to search for further facts about John Cottom in the public archives, and he did discover various connections between the Hoghton and Cottom families. Finally, he says, it dawned on him “that one of the many legatees under Alexander Hoghton’s will, whose name appears as ‘John Cotham’ may well be the teacher from Stratford. The ‘schoolmaster theory’, [i.e., about Shakespeare] it seems, leads straight back to Alexander Hoghton.”

Peter Ackroyd describes the connections between the Hoghtons and young Shakespeare very clearly:

There is a long tradition in the Hoghton family that Shakespeare served them in some capacity. This in itself is by no means conclusive, but it is bolstered by other evidence. In the immediate vicinity of the Hoghtons of Lea Hall, near Preston, lived the Cottom family; the Hoghtons and the Cottoms, both Catholic, were thoroughly intimate. One of the members of that family, John Cottom, has already entered this history as Shakespeare’s schoolmaster in Stratford. Cottom is mentioned in Alexander Hoghton’s will as his “servant.” It seems to be more than coincidence. What would be more natural than that Cottom should recommend his most brilliant pupil, also a Catholic, to be schoolmaster to the Hoghton children? Alexander Hoghton was named by an apostate priest as one of the Lancastrian gentry who kept ‘recusants as schoolmasters’.

Upon Hoghton’s death in August of 1581 it is believed that Shakespeare moved on to teach in the home of Sir Thomas Hesketh, another wealthy Catholic gentleman in nearby Rufford. After a brief service with the Heskeths he might have been

18 Ibid., 6.

19 Ackroyd, Shakespeare: The Biography, 79.
commended—as Hoghton had requested—to someone else. The likeliest candidate is neighbor, Henry Stanley, the fourth Earl of Derby, who was very interested in drama. With his son, Lord Strange, they employed an ambitious group of players that included Will Kempe, Thomas Pope, John Heminges, Augustine Phillips, and George Bryan—all of whom formed the core of the London company of the Lord Chamberlain’s Men with which Shakespeare would later be associated.20 Greenblatt goes on to say:

Will’s life, if he actually sojourned in the north, would have been a peculiar compound of theatricality and danger. On the one hand, a life of open, exuberant display, where for the first time Will’s talents—his personal charm, his musical skills, his power of improvisation, his capacity to play a role, and perhaps even his gifts as a writer—were blossoming in performances beyond the orbit of his family and friends. His performances would not have been exactly public, but neither were they after dinner entertainments. The Heskeths were immensely wealthy, while the Hoghtons and, still more, the Stanleys were feudal magnates.21

These households entertained large groups of guests in banquet halls that could easily serve as small theaters. These are the settings, I would imagine, in which Will’s love of plays and theater grew and developed. Another interesting fact that Honigman points out in Houghton’s will supports this theory as well:

Houghton’s will, dated 3 August 1581, and proved 12 September 1581, bequeathed his stock of play clothes and all his musical instruments to his brother Thomas, or, if he did not choose to keep players, to Sir Thomas Hesketh, and added ‘And I most heartily require the said Sir

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21 Ibid.
Thomas to be friendly unto Fulk Gyllome and William Shakeshafte now dwelling with me and either to take them unto his service or else to help them to some good master, as my trust is he will”.22

So in addition to being employed as a schoolmaster it seems likely that William Shakespeare was a player (actor) in 1581.

Greenblatt further proposes that “on the other hand, Will would have lived a life of secrets, where even the lowliest servant knew things.”23 They would be privy to information about secret locked cabinets that contained the chalice, books, vestments, and other objects used by the missionary priests to celebrate Mass. The servants would be aware of mysterious strangers bearing ominous rumors of Mary Queen of Scots, or of Spanish armies and mutterings of conspiracy that could bring disaster upon the families of Lancashire. Greenblatt observes that:

The moment that Will is likely to have sojourned there is precisely the moment that the Jesuit Campion headed in the same direction, seeking the relative security afforded by the most stubbornly Catholics of the queen’s subjects. Lancashire in the view of the queen’s Privy Council, was “the very sink of popery, where more unlawful acts are committed and more unlawful persons held secret than in any other part of the realm.” On August 4, 1581, the day after Alexander Hoghton commended Shakeshafte to his friend Sir Thomas Hesketh, the Privy Council ordered a search for Campion’s paper “at the house of one Richard Hoghton”—Alexander’s cousin—“in Lancashire.” And later that year, at a time when Will may have been in his service, Hesketh was thrown into prison for failing to suppress recusancy in his

22 Honigman, Shakespeare: the ‘lost years,’ 3.

household. The atmosphere at the entertainments in which Will would have performed was compounded by festivity and paranoia.24

It was the mission, led by Edmund Campion and Robert Persons, that had aroused the piety of Catholics in England and, on the other hand, alarmed the government. Greenblatt says:

Not only had the pope effectively sanctioned the assassination of the queen, but an expeditionary force led by a Catholic Englishman, Nicholas Sander, had recently landed in Ireland in an attempt to spark an uprising against the Protestant colonists. The attempt had failed miserably: after unconditionally surrendering on November 10, 1580, some six hundred Spanish and Italian troops and their Irish allies, including several women and priests, were all massacred by English soldiers led by Walter Ralegh. The cold blooded ferocity of the English response was presumably meant to chill any future invasion plans, but no one could doubt the determination of the pope and his allies to topple the Elizabethan regime and reclaim the realm. Even those English Catholics who were steadfastly loyal to Elizabeth—and there were many—must have felt some stirring of hope that the slow, relentless strangulation of their faith might somehow be reversed by the missionary piety and heroic determination of the Jesuits.25

During this time, Catholics throughout the country were secretly reading a document called “Campion’s Brag” in which the Jesuit explained that his mission was to preach the gospel and not to meddle in politics. Greenblatt surmises that it was quite possible that when young Will was either with the Heskeths or the Hoghtons he

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24 Ibid., 106.

25 Ibid.
himself might have seen the brilliant and hunted missionary.\textsuperscript{26} Greenblatt describes Campion’s visits this way:

Campion’s visits were clandestine, to be sure, but they were not narrowly private affairs; they brought together dozens, even hundreds of believers, many of whom slept in nearby barns and outbuildings to hear Campion preach in the early morning and to receive communion from his hands. The priest—who would have changed out of his servant’s clothes into clerical vestments—would sit up half the night hearing confessions, trying to resolve moral dilemmas, dispensing advice. Was one of those with whom he exchanged whispered words the young man from Stratford-upon-Avon?\textsuperscript{27}

Greenblatt goes on to imagine an encounter between the charismatic forty-year-old Jesuit and the sixteen-year-old novice tutor, poet, and actor. I, too, can imagine that they would find a kindred spirit in one another. As we read in the previous chapter, when Campion was teaching at Oxford, he had a great following of students who called themselves the “Campionites.” They imitated his mannerisms, his habits of speech, and even his clothes. This was the kind of charismatic Jesuit that a young Shakespeare would have been drawn to as well. Although Campion was a quarter of a century older than Will, they had many things in common. Greenblatt describes Campion as:

\ldots someone who came from a comparably modest family; who attracted attention to himself by his eloquence, intelligence, and quickness; who loved books yet at the same time was drawn to life in the world. His was a learned but not an original mind; rather he was brilliant at giving

\textsuperscript{26} Ibid., 108.

\textsuperscript{27} Ibid.
traditional ideas a new life through the clarity and grace of his language and the moving power of presence. Witty, imaginative, and brilliantly adept at improvisation, he managed to combine meditative seriousness with a strong theatrical streak. 

Then Greenblatt suggests that if the young Shakespeare ever knelt down before Campion, “he would have been looking at a distorted image of himself.” I agree with this observation and can only imagine that Campion would have been equally captivated by and interested in Shakespeare and all of his gifts. Campion would have seen something of himself in the gifted young lad.

Whether Shakespeare actually met him or only heard about him through his Catholic connections, Campion seems to have made a reasonable impression on young Will and references to the Jesuit Saint and Martyr can be found in Shakespeare’s Twelfth Night. C. Richard Desper points out these references in an article he wrote for the Elizabethan Review:

The allusions to Campion are found in a single scene – Act four, Scene two in which Feste the Clown disguises himself as “Sir Topas the Curate” to harangue the unfortunate Malvolio, who has been shut up in a cellar as a lunatic as the result of pranks engineered by Feste, Sir Toby Belch and Maria. In the following speech by Feste to Maria and Sir Toby, the Campion allusions are highlighted in boldface.

Clown: Bonos dies, Sir Toby: for, as the old hermit of Prague, that never saw pen and ink, very wittily said to a niece of King Gorboduc, “That that is is”; so I being master Parson, am master Parson; for, what is “that” but “that”; and “is” but “is”?

28 Ibid., 109.
29 Ibid.
In this speech of less than 50 words, which appears to resemble nothing but clownish nonsense, there are no less than five phrases which refer directly to Edmund Campion and his 1580-81 mission to England.30

Let me summarize Desper’s explanations of the references to Campion. “The old hermit of Prague” refers to Campion’s last assignment before his mission to England. In Prague Campion lived as a holy man who sought solitude like a hermit. Or one could think of his time in Prague as an exile from England. “Never saw pen and ink” refers to a time when Campion was being questioned by a Master Fulke on September 24, 1581, and he was denied his request to have ink and paper to write answers to the English government’s questions and to prepare his own defense. The “Niece of Gorboduc” line refers to Queen Elizabeth; Gorboduc was a mythical king of England and the subject of an early Elizabethan play. “That that is is” phrase is taken as a “religious affirmation, just as Campion’s mission to England was a religious affirmation.” “Master Parson” is a reference to Robert Persons who was the Jesuit who traveled from Rome to France and eventually to England with Campion. Desper says that in order to recognize the allusions to Campion one would have needed specific background information on Campion. Therefore, Desper thinks that “the allusions were intended for posterity, and were written into the text in the hope that the play would someday appear in print.”31 Referring to the religious attitudes in *Twelfth Night*,


31 Ibid.
Desper believes that “the entire drama is steeped in sympathy toward the Catholic faith.”

Now that we have established Shakespeare’s Catholic roots and his connections with Jesuits and specifically with Edmund Campion, the next chapter will examine a few of the characters from *The Tragedy of Macbeth* and *Julius Caesar* to see if Shakespeare portrays their decision making as an Ignatian discernment of spirits.

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32 Ibid.
CHAPTER FOUR

MACBETH AND JULIUS CAESAR: DISCERNING AND DECIDING

In this chapter I would like to establish the high plausibility that William Shakespeare presents and describes the decision-making processes in Macbeth and Julius Caesar as exercises in discernment—and very likely in Ignatian discernment. The plausibility is grounded in the influence that Edmund Campion had on the English Catholic community which, as we have seen, influenced William Shakespeare and of which he might have been a member. We will establish that plausibility, first, by recalling the fact that William Shakespeare might well have read the text of St. Ignatius’s Spiritual Exercises, second, by summarizing the story line of Macbeth and Julius Caesar, and, finally, by “stepping back” and recognizing how these stories are instances of discernment of spirits, leading to decisions.

First, William Shakespeare might well have read the text of St. Ignatius’ Spiritual Exercises. As I mentioned in Chapter One of this thesis, the Spiritual Exercises were published in Rome in practically their final form in 1548. And in his book, The First Jesuits, Father John O’Malley, S.J., says that copies of the Spiritual Exercises could be easily obtained and were “by definition an instrument directed to all serious Christians, not only members of the Society.”¹ It would seem quite likely then that copies of the Exercises would have made their way to Catholics in England by the

time Edmund Campion arrived there in 1580. Therefore, it is possible, even probable, that William Shakespeare would have read a copy of the *Exercises* and heard Edmund Campion, his teachers at the New School, or others talk about the *Exercises*.

In the *Spiritual Exercises* [175-178] Ignatius lays out three ways in which we can make a correct choice about our way of life. It is on the second way that we will focus in this chapter. It is a decision made “when much light and understanding are derived through the experience of desolation and consolation and discernment of diverse spirits.” In other words, in the “second way” a good person is drawn to reach understanding and make a decision in light of their experience of “consolation” (tranquility, love, peace and joy) and/or “desolation” (deep disturbance, darkness, turmoil and restlessness) at the prospect of choosing one or another option. From our attentiveness to our feelings of consolation and desolation, we can discern God’s will and decide accordingly. It is called the “discernment of spirits”—the Holy Spirit or the evil spirit.

Father John O’Malley describes discernment of spirits this way:

Underlying the “Discernment of Spirits” is a basic assumption that a battle for the heart is being waged by forces of good and evil—by God and the Devil, who is “the enemy of human nature.” The heart registers the battle in its experience of consolation and desolation, and one’s task is to discern in any given situation the origins of the movements the heart feels by trying to see where those movements are leading. The purpose of the *Exercises* and the precondition for their

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successful outcome at every stage is to find oneself under the inspiration of God, the “good spirit.” 3

As we examine the Shakespearean texts we will see, as O’Malley names it, “a battle for the heart” being waged by the forces of good and evil. Now, I will give a synopsis of Macbeth and then view key moments in the play as clear instances of discernment leading to decision. Then I will do the same for Julius Caesar.

The Tragedy of Macbeth. The play opens with three witches who hail Macbeth with a triple prophecy. The first is that he is “Thane of Glamis” (which he is), then “Thane of Cawdor” (which he will become), and finally as “king hereafter.” Banquo, a fellow general with Macbeth, is told that he “shall get kings, though thou be none.” Very soon Macbeth hears the news that King Duncan has named him “Thane of Cawdor,” but he is puzzled as to how he will become king. Macbeth briefly thinks about killing the king in order to fulfill the third prophecy, but he soon abandons this idea. Then Lady Macbeth, his overambitious wife, intervenes and convinces Macbeth that he must murder Duncan in order to fulfill the prophecy of becoming king.

Macbeth carries out the murderous deed. He then goes on to have Banquo murdered, as well as the wife and son of Macduff. Subsequently, Lady Macbeth dies, possibly by suicide, and Macbeth is killed by Macduff. Macbeth is directly responsible for at least six deaths in his quest to become and remain king. Instead of waiting to see if the third

prophecy would be fulfilled, as the first two had been, Macbeth felt impelled to take matters into his own hands and that was the beginning of his tragic downfall.

There is an interesting historical precedent for the story line of *Macbeth*, and Shakespeare might well have had it in mind. In the Folger Shakespeare Library version of *Macbeth* the editors tell us that “in 1603, at about the middle of Shakespeare’s career as a playwright, a new monarch ascended the throne of England. He was James VI of Scotland, who then also became James I of England. Immediately, Shakespeare’s London was alive with an interest in things Scottish.”⁴ They say that Shakespeare most likely looked to Raphael Holinshed’s history of Scotland for material to write a tragedy. In eleventh century Scottish history Shakespeare would have found “a spectacle of violence—the slaughter of whole armies and of innocent families, the assassination of kings, the ambush of nobles by murderers, the brutal execution of rebels. He also came upon stories of witches and wizards providing advice to traitors.”⁵ Although it may have been Shakespeare’s intent to write a play that appealed to the new Scottish monarch in London, what he created is a play that has fascinated readers and audiences who care little about Scottish history. The editors of the Folger Library version of *Macbeth* go on to say:

> In its depiction of a man who murders his king and kinsman in order to gain the crown, only to lose all that humans seem to need in order to be


⁵ Ibid., xiii.
happy—sleep, nourishment, friends, love—Macbeth teases us with huge questions. Why do people do evil knowing that it is evil? Does Macbeth represent someone who murders because fate tempts him? Because his wife pushes him into it? Because he is overly ambitious? Having killed Duncan, why does Macbeth fall apart, unable to sleep, seeing ghosts, putting spies in everyone’s home, killing his friends and innocent women and children? Why does the success of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth—prophesied by the witches, promising the couple power and riches and “peace to all their nights and days to come”—turn so quickly to ashes, destroying the Macbeths’ relationship, their world, and finally, both of them?”  

We will look for the answers to these questions by analyzing lines of the text to see if we can discover the Ignatian process of discernment at work. In the case of Macbeth, we will see that the evil spirits, or the feelings of desolation, won out over the good spirits and the feelings of consolation.

In Act 1, scene 3, the three witches have greeted Macbeth as “Thane of Glamis” (which he is), “Thane of Cawdor” which he soon becomes, and then “king hereafter.” In an aside he is contemplating what has occurred and says:

Two truths are told
As happy prologues to the swelling act
Of the imperial theme. 

But then he goes on to describe his feeling of unease or desolation as he thinks about possibly killing King Duncan in order to fulfill the last prophecy.

This supernatural soliciting
Cannot be ill, cannot be good. If ill,
Why hath it given me earnest of success
Commencing in a truth? I am Thane of Cawdor.
If good, why do I yield to that suggestion
Whose horrid image doth unfix my hair
And make my seated heart knock at my ribs
Against the use of nature? Present fears
Are less than horrible imaginings.
My thought, whose murder yet is but fantastical,
Shakes so my single state of man
That function is smothered in surmise,
And nothing is but what is not.⁸

Macbeth is contemplating the “supernatural soliciting” or the temptation offered by the
witches for him to become king. The idea of what it would take for him to become
king makes his hair stand on end and makes his heart pound. The thought of murder
makes him fearful and deeply disturbs him—it puts him in desolation.

At the end of the next act, when King Duncan declares his son Malcolm to be
the heir to the royal throne and names him The Prince of Cumberland, Macbeth again
contemplates the act that it will take for he himself to become king:

The Prince of Cumberland! That is a step
On which I must fall down or else o’erleap
For in my way it lies. Stars, hide your fires;
Let not light see my black and deep desires.

⁸ Macbeth 1. 3.143-155.
The eye wink at the hand, yet let that be
Which the eye fears, when it is done, to see.\(^9\)

Here Macbeth is trying to convince himself that he can become king only by killing Duncan, but he recognizes the darkness of his desires and wants to keep them hidden.

In Act 1, Scene 7, Macbeth again contemplates the reasons why he should not kill King Duncan. Duncan and his attendants have arrived at the home of the Macbeths, and they are all having supper. Macbeth leaves the dining chamber and in the hallway outside begins his reasoning or discernment:

He’s here in double trust:
First, as I am his kinsman and his subject,
Strong both against the deed; then, as his host,
Who should against his murderer shut the door,
Not bear the knife myself. Besides, this Duncan
Hath born his faculties so meek, hath been
So clear in his great office, that his virtues
Will plead like angels, trumpet-tongued, against
The deep damnation of his taking off;
And pity, like a naked newborn babe
Striding the blast, or heaven’s cherubim horsed
Upon the sightless couriers of the air,
Shall blow the horrid deed in every eye,
That tears shall drown the wind. I have no spur
To prick the sides of my intent but only
Vaulting ambition, which o’erleaps itself
And falls on th’ other—\(^{10}\)

In these lines Macbeth continues to struggle with his thoughts about killing Duncan and realizes that his “vaulting ambition” could be his downfall; his turmoil goes on.

\(^9\) Macbeth 1.4.55-60.

\(^{10}\) Macbeth 1.7.12-28.
Lady Macbeth leaves the dining chamber as well and asks her husband why he has left their guests. Macbeth’s response is to tell her quite emphatically that they will not carry out their plan to murder Duncan, and he seems resolute:

We will proceed no further in this business;
He hath honored me of late, and I have bought
Golden opinions from all sorts of people,
Which would be worn now in their newest gloss,
Not cast aside so soon.11

Although Macbeth seems to have found peace and consolation in what he already has, Lady Macbeth mocks her husband’s reasoning, and she uses some of the harshest and most evil words in literature to manipulate Macbeth into committing the murderous deed. She says that if she had so promised him, she could even murder her own child for him! Her exact words show how completely she has been engulfed by evil:

I have given suck, and know
How tender 'tis to love the babe that milks me:
I would, while it was smiling in my face,
Have pluck'd my nipple from his boneless gums,
And dash'd the brains out, had I so sworn as you
Have done to this. 12

Earlier she had called upon the supernatural spirits to fill her with cruelty:

Come, you spirits
That tend in mortal thoughts, unsex me here,
And fill me, from the crown to the toe, top-full
Of direct cruelty!13

11 Macbeth 1.7.34-38.
12 Macbeth 1.7.62-67.
13 Macbeth 1.5.41-44.
This is the “cruel” Lady Macbeth who berates and emasculates her husband in order to manipulate him to her evil ways. We also recall that when Lady Macbeth was reading the letter from her husband describing the three salutations from the witches, she said that his nature “is too full o’ th’ milk of human kindness”\(^{14}\) to do what must be done to fulfill the third prophecy from the witches, namely, to be the king. She fears that he lacks the ruthlessness to become king, and she is determined to transform his nature.

Writhing from the pain of her remarks, Macbeth responds to her first tirade by pleading with her, saying, “Prithee Peace…”, \(^{15}\) or “pray thee peace” or “peace be with you.” Her pleadings arouse desolation and fear in him. His “peace-making” response launches her into her “killing” remarks to him. Her argument is that, since Macbeth had said earlier that he would murder the King, he should carry through with the act—just as she would kill her own child, if she had made such a promise to him. This is the turning point of the play. Macbeth caves in to his wife’s self-centered, evil, and murderous plan. We now see a man completely broken and in complete desolation.

This is the “tragedy” of Macbeth. We witness a man who had been admired and respected by others—someone we too can really admire—surrender himself to evil. And he is led there by someone he truly loves. Could this happen to me?—to you? That is the haunting question which the tragic play presents. I believe that we have

\(^{14}\) Macbeth 1.5.16.

\(^{15}\) Macbeth 1.7.50.
witnessed in Macbeth’s struggle between the forces of good and the forces of evil, a
discernment of spirits. And he discerned and decided for the evil spirit—under the
guise of good! Then he sinks into desolation and acts on the desolation and does not
seek the consolation he seemed to know could still be possible. Macbeth is never again
throughout the play at peace: after the murder of the king he knows only desolation.

*Julius Caesar.* Now let us move on to Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar* where we
will discover various characters discerning between good and evil. In *Julius Caesar,* I
believe that we will see characters facing what David Lonsdale, in his book *Eyes to
See, Ears to Hear,* describes as “choices between two options or values both of which
appear to be morally good.”

In the introduction to the Folger Shakespeare Library edition of *Julius Caesar,*
the editors say that “many people in the Renaissance were passionately interested in
the story of Caesar’s death at the hands of his friends and fellow politicians. There was
much debate about who were the villains and who were the heroes.”

Dante, the
fourteenth century Italian poet, depicts Brutus and Cassius as the conspirators who
killed Caesar and thus deserved to suffer eternally in hell. However, according to a
contemporary of Shakespeare, Sir Philip Sidney, it was Julius Caesar who was a threat

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to Rome, and Brutus was the senator whose sole desire was to save Rome. William Shakespeare’s interpretation of this story only serves to keep the debate alive: who are the good guys and who are the bad guys?

Shakespeare opens his play on the streets of Rome with the people celebrating the triumphant return of Julius Caesar. However, a powerful faction is forming that fears the growing popularity of Caesar in Republican Rome. As Caesar is walking through the streets of Rome with his supporters, a soothsayer emerges from the throng to tell him to beware the ides of March—this will be a dangerous day for him. Brutus and Cassius are then left alone and the conspiracy against Caesar begins. They are joined by others and the murder is planned for the next day, which is March 15, the ides of March. Portia, the wife of Brutus, observes his desolate spirit and tries to find out what is troubling him. Caesar’s wife, Calphurnia, tries to prevent her husband from going to the Capitol on March 15 because she believes the words of the soothsayer. Caesar eventually yields to her request and plans to stay home. However, Caesar’s mind is swayed by Decius Brutus, and he proceeds to the Capitol and is assassinated.

Upon hearing of the assassination of Caesar, a crowd forms and Brutus addresses them saying that the preservation of the Roman Republic was the reason for killing Caesar.

If there be any in this assembly, any dear friend of Caesar’s, to him I say that Brutus’ love to Caesar was no less than his. If then that friend demand why Brutus rose against Caesar; this is my answer: not that I loved Caesar less, but that I loved Rome more. Had you rather Caesar were living, and die all slaves, than that Caesar were dead, to
live all freemen? As Caesar loved me, I weep for him. As he was fortunate I rejoice at it. As he was valiant, I honor him. But, as he was ambitious, I slew him.\textsuperscript{18}

Brutus permits Mark Antony to speak to the crowd, and Anthony uses this as an opportunity to incite the people against the conspirators. Things deteriorate quickly from there, and a battle ensues between the conspirators and the people. Brutus and Cassius quarrel but they resolve their differences. Portia commits suicide. Cassius, believing he has lost the battle, orders a servant to stab him, and Brutus falls on his own sword. Mark Antony survives and mourns for Brutus calling him the “noblest Roman of them all.”

Let us observe the discernments of the key individuals that led to the decisions in this unfolding tragedy. Brutus, who was favored by Caesar, all too willingly agrees to conspire against Caesar at the urging of Cassius, but in his words there is revealed a deep feeling of desolation:

\begin{quote}
Since Cassius first did whet me against Caesar,
I have not slept.
Between the acting of a dreadful thing
And the first motion, all the interim is
Like a phantasma or a hideous dream.
The genius and the moral instruments
Are then in council, and the state of man,
Like to a little kingdom, suffers then
The nature of an insurrection.\textsuperscript{19}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{18} Julius Caesar 3.2.19-28.

\textsuperscript{19} Julius Caesar 2.1.64-72.
Brutus cannot sleep. When he does sleep, he has nightmares. He is suffering and in turmoil over the idea of killing Caesar, his friend.

Brutus’ wife, Portia, can see that he is in a state of desolation, and raises her concerns with him when she finds him outside early one morning:

You’ve ungently, Brutus,
Stole from my bed. And yesternight at supper
You suddenly arose and walked about,
Musing and sighing, with your arms across,
And when I asked you what the matter was,
You stared upon me with ungentle looks.
I urged you further; then you scratched your head
And too impatiently stamped with your foot.
Yet I insisted; yet you answered not,
But with an angry wafture of your hand
Gave sign for me to leave you. So I did,
Fearing to strengthen that impatience
Which seemed too much enkindled, and withal
Hoping it was but an effect of humor,
Which sometime hath his hour with every man.
It will not let you eat nor talk nor sleep,
And could it work so much upon your shape
As it hath much prevailed on your condition,
I should not know you Brutus. Dear my lord,
Make me acquainted with your cause of grief.  

Portia gives a detailed description of Brutus as he struggles with his feelings whether or not to kill Caesar. It is a clear picture of an individual in desolation: he is restless, disconnected, deeply disturbed, and in grief. Brutus does not want to confront his

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20 *Julius Caesar* 2.1.257-275.
“cause of grief” or share it with Portia as she requests. So he proceeds to the Capitol with the other conspirators and one-by-one they stab Caesar to death and then wash their hands in his blood. They had convinced themselves that this heinous act was all for the greater good of the Roman Republic. But this was not true and this reality comes to light for each of them as they meet their own deaths.

Stephan Greenblatt says that the soliloquies of Brutus show “unmistakable marks of actual thinking.”\(^21\) He explains that the words of Brutus:

> seem to flow immediately from the still inchoate to-ing and fro-ing of his wavering mind, as he grapples with a set of momentous questions: How should he respond to Mark Antony’s wish to crown the over ambitious Caesar? How can he balance his own personal friendship with Caesar against what he construes to be the general good? How might Caesar, who has thus far served that general good, change his nature and turn dangerous if he is crowned?\(^22\)

What Greenblatt is describing and what Brutus is doing is weighing back and forth, really discerning the spirits, about what is the best action to take. By the middle of the play the assassination of Julius Caesar takes place and then the remainder of the play acts out the fatal consequences for several of the characters involved.

I believe that in the Shakespearean texts cited in this chapter we do see Macbeth and Julius Caesar undertaking a discernment of spirits. They may initially discern the right action and feel a sense of consolation or peace. Then something happens, and they are convinced to take the dark road of desolation, and they go with


\(^{22}\) Ibid., 301-302.
the evil spirits. Most of us can relate to this process even when we are not consciously going through the formal Ignatian process of the discernment of spirits. And that is exactly what I think Shakespeare is portraying in the illustrative texts cited above. He doesn’t have his characters use the language of the *Spiritual Exercises* about discerning and deciding for the “greater glory of God,” but I think that he was familiar with the process that Ignatius described in his little book published in 1548. There is such a back and forth movement between good and evil in his characters that I believe Shakespeare was remembering and reimagining what he learned from the text of the *Spiritual Exercises*. Because he was familiar with the *Spiritual Exercises*, the desolation his characters feel as they struggle to discern a course of action became for Shakespeare a sign of their erroneous choices.

Shakespeare very effectively uses characters like the three witches and Lady Macbeth in *Macbeth* and the soothsayer and Portia in *Julius Caesar* to represent the voices whispering to us from within us, within our subconscious if you will, voices which we can either choose to heed or ignore as we do our own “discernment of spirits.” In our next and final chapter, we will discern what all this means for us today.
CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION: IGNATIUS AND SHAKESPEARE IN OUR MODERN WORLD

It is characteristic of the good spirit, however, to give courage and strength, consolation, tears, inspirations, and peace. This He does by making all easy, by removing all obstacles so that the soul goes forward in doing good.

—Spiritual Exercises, The Rules for Discernment [313]

Now that we have looked at the lives of St. Ignatius Loyola and William Shakespeare and explored the possibility that their lives intersected through Edmund Campion, we will look at our modern times and see how these two important figures from the sixteenth century still influence us today. First, a brief recap of who they are, and then examples of their continued presence to us today.

Saint Ignatius Loyola was a sixteenth century soldier-turned-saint who developed a retreat called the Spiritual Exercises and subsequently founded a Catholic religious order called the Society of Jesus, also known as the Jesuits. This religious order has flourished and grown over the past five centuries with communities in almost every country in the world working, along with dedicated lay colleagues, in parishes, schools, refugee camps, retreat houses, and research and social centers. The Spiritual Exercises outlines a process called “discernment of spirits” which aims to discover God present and laboring in history, so that one can collaborate with the laboring Lord. The practice of discernment has spread widely among religious and lay people alike.

The Spiritual Exercises is, as its title implies, a set of exercises through which a
person, often in a formal religious retreat, can replicate Ignatius’s own experience of meditation, prayer, and reflection, and thus personally experience an intimate relationship with Christ.

William Shakespeare is the most widely known author in all of English literature. Furthermore, he is hailed as the greatest playwright of all time who more than 400 years ago wrote the most important body of imaginative literature in English. His tragedies are profound explorations of the human spirit. The nearly forty plays he wrote during his lifetime have been translated into many languages and performed all over the world. In addition, he wrote more than one hundred and fifty sonnets.

These two towering figures share something unique, I believe. William Shakespeare reveals us to ourselves through his character development and his story lines. He shows us in-depth, through his plays, what makes people tick, what makes us happy and what makes us sad, which in turn shows us how we operate at the deepest levels of humanity. When we are not doing what we should be doing, the result is desolation and tragedy. Saint Ignatius does the same thing for us through his Spiritual Exercises. The Exercises show us what happens when a person is drawn to reach an understanding and make a good decision in light of his or her experience of consolation or desolation—namely, peace and joy or deep disturbance—at the prospect of choosing one or another option. From the experience of feelings of consolations and desolations, we can discern the right thing to do. Shakespeare, I believe was applying
what he knew of Ignatian spirituality to his tragic plays like *Macbeth* and *Julius Caesar*. When Macbeth and Brutus contemplate violating the moral order, Shakespeare shows them experiencing the desolation Ignatius described in the *Exercises*.

Now let us take a look at Jesuit spirituality as we experience it in our lives today. First, I will describe two personal experiences that I have had directly with Ignatian spirituality and that have also touched the lives of many others. Then we will look at two authors who bring Ignatian spirituality to countless readers in very unique ways.

The first personal experience that I want to share is as a parishioner of Holy Trinity Church, a Jesuit parish in Washington, D.C. Each Sunday I can count on taking home a least one gem of an idea from the homily preached. Then, during the week, I can mull over it, ponder it, and oftentimes apply it directly to my busy life. These gems, or pearls of wisdom, generally come right out of the teachings of Ignatius.

Here is brief example from a homily preached on the first Sunday of Lent by the pastor, Mark Horak, S.J. The readings for this first Sunday of Lent talk about the three traditional penitential practices of Lent of which are prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. Jesuit Father Horak put an Ignatian spin on these practices. Therefore, prayer becomes: *Finding God in all things*. God wants to be in relationship with us, so we look for God’s communication to us in the world. We don’t go off alone in prayer to find and join God. *Fasting*. As opposed to giving up something for Lent, we might
understand fasting as practicing indifference or non-attachment. It doesn’t mean that we don’t care about things but that we withhold our judgment about things until we discover whether and how they lead us to God. We embrace things that lead us to God and we reject the things that hinder our relationship with God. Almsgiving traditionally means sharing our material resources. More broadly, it means taking care of one another—loving our brothers and sisters. It also means showing consideration for the person next to you by a smile and a kind greeting. Even when we are not in direct contact with the poor we can be generous of spirit with those we do encounter in our lives each day.¹

I marvel at how often the words I have heard in these Sunday homilies affected me personally and also my actions during the week. Then I imagine the hundreds of others in the church with me at that Mass and then multiply that number by the eight or so Masses offered each weekend at Holy Trinity, and I see Ignatian spirituality radiating out from all of us into our daily work-a-day lives like a pebble thrown into a pond that creates ripples of water moving outward. What we take in radiates out to others whether we are conscious of it or not. Hopefully, we are sending out messages of joy, peace, freedom, and love right out of the Ignatian spirituality we have heard and strive to live.

¹ Mark Horak, S.J., homily preached on the first Sunday of Lent, Holy Trinity Church (Washington, D.C., February 17, 2013).
My second example is from the years I worked alongside the Jesuits at the Woodstock Theological Center at Georgetown University. I interviewed James L. Connor, S.J., director of Woodstock from 1987 through 2002, about the founding of the center and its program. The following is a summary of our conversation.

"Woodstock" is the name of a small town just outside of Baltimore where in 1869 the Jesuits built a seminary in which generations of Jesuits were educated to the priesthood for well over a hundred years. Then, in light of the new perspective and directions of the Second Vatican Council which met from 1962 to 1965, the Jesuits realized that they could no longer educate future priests in rural isolation, so in 1969 the decision was made to move Woodstock to New York, near Union Theological Seminary and Columbia University. In time it became increasingly clear that the American Jesuits did not need to maintain five major seminaries in the United States, so after much study, consultation, and anguish, Woodstock was one of the schools closed. What to do? Georgetown University generously volunteered to house the Woodstock Library—one of the best theological libraries in the United States, in the ground floor of its new Lauinger Library. Shortly thereafter, the Jesuit Provincials decided to start a center for theological reflection in Washington and the honored name of "Woodstock" would be applied to this center which therefore became “The Woodstock Theological Center.”
The chief inspiration for Woodstock's rebirth as a theological reflection center was the then General Superior of the Jesuit order, Father Pedro Arrupe, S.J. At an international meeting of Jesuits in 1978, Father Arrupe had placed the work of theological reflection at the top of the apostolic priorities of the worldwide Society of Jesus. He urged the establishment of centers in various parts of the world which would explore contemporary human problems in the light of Christian faith. This mission was strengthened a few years later when the 32nd General Congregation, an international "summit" of Jesuit provincials and elected delegates, declared the mission of the Society today to be "the service of faith, of which the promotion of justice is an absolute requirement."

James L. Connor, S.J., whom I came to know when he was pastor of Holy Trinity Church from 1981 to 1987, was appointed director of the Woodstock Theological Center in 1987 where he served until 2002. His own personal “faith-justice” concern was for the influence of business in and on society, so he initiated a number of seminars, studies, and conferences on “the relevance of religious faith for business practice.” From these seminars—which were generally four weekend meetings in the course of a year with about twenty-five people from many locations throughout the United States—“consensus statements” were developed and consequentially published by the Georgetown University Press. Some of these books were entitled: The Ethics of Lobbying: Organized Interests, Political Power, and the
Though most of the participants in these “consensus groups” probably did not realize it, Father Connor was directing them through a process of Ignatian discernment. There was no direct reference to the Spiritual Exercises or discernment of spirits, but they were reaching agreement through a “consensus” which was the fruit and issue of a discernment of spirits process. And this illustrates what I believe Shakespeare was doing in his plays. In his plays he had characters doing the Ignatian process of discernment of spirits without using that language or even being aware that they were “discerning spirits.”

Finally, I want to give some examples of the use of Ignatian spirituality in some current and popular books. The first is Jesuit Father James Martin’s book entitled The Jesuit Guide to (Almost) Everything: A Spirituality for Real Life. On the dust jacket of Martin’s book Ron Hansen, author of Mariette in Ecstasy and Exiles, sums up Martin’s book perfectly: “Funny, inspiring, practical and wise. The spiritual genius of St. Ignatius Loyola is made accessible and useful, allowing even the most skeptical

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readers to appreciate Jesuit ways to incorporate practices that are guaranteed to improve their lives.” Martin says in this practical and insightful book on Ignatian spirituality that we should be interested in knowing about St. Ignatius Loyola “because his way of life has helped millions of people discover joy, peace, and freedom and, not incidentally, experience God in their daily lives.”

He goes on to explain that “the way of Ignatius is about finding freedom: the freedom to become the person you’re meant to be, to love and to accept love, to make good decisions, and to experience the beauty of creation and the mystery of God’s love.”

Martin surmises that the people who are reading his book are interested in “making good choices, finding meaning in your work, enjoying healthy relationships, and being happy in life” and perhaps mildly interested in religious questions. However, he notes that one does not need to believe in God in order to find the insights of Ignatius beneficial. Over the years, I have heard other Jesuits say this as well, so I point this out for those who may not have religious beliefs or are in a state of uncertainty regarding their religion. The Ignatian process of discernment can still be useful and applied to life experiences. When we are trying to make the hard decisions in our life, Martin points out that:


4 Ibid.

5 Ibid., 22.
Discernment has a practical end. It is not simply a way to try to find God’s will; nor is it a way just to move closer to God in prayer. Discernment helps us to decide what is the best way to act. It isn’t simply about relationship with God alone; it is about living out your faith in the real world. Ignatius was a results-oriented mystic.6

Martin’s book is filled with personal, touching, and humorous examples from his own life with thoughts and feelings that spring from desolation or consolation. His experiences and his explanation of the process of discernment of spirits help us to illuminate our own way.

Chris Lowney’s book, Heroic Leadership: Best Practices from a 450-year-old Company that Changed the World, illuminates the pathway for those in business leadership positions today. Lowney tells us right off, “After living seven years as a Jesuit seminarian, practicing vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience to the Jesuit general in Rome, I morphed into a corporate man.”7 He refers to the Spiritual Exercises as a lifelong development tool and says that “no company values itself so profoundly as the Jesuits. It is the foundation of their leadership model. Rather than cycle through self-awareness approaches haphazardly, the company developed and promoted one universal tool for all Jesuits: the Spiritual Exercises.”8 In his book Lowney shows how the leadership principles which have guided the Jesuits, namely

6 Ibid., 309.


8 Ibid., 113.
self-awareness, ingenuity, love, and heroism, can be adapted and adopted by corporate leaders and organizations of the twenty-first century. These examples show how Ignatian spirituality is remarkably relevant for us today—over 450 years after they were put down on paper by Ignatius.

Now we shall move on to William Shakespeare and specifically his play *Julius Caesar* and describe the impact that it still has on audiences today. There is general agreement that *Julius Caesar* was the first of Shakespeare’s plays to take the stage at the new Globe Theatre in 1599. Because many people during the Renaissance were very interested in the story of Caesar’s death in 44 B.C.E. at the hands of his friends and fellow politicians, Shakespeare wrote his play about that key event in Roman history.

In the summer of 2002 I had the good fortune of seeing the Royal Shakespeare Company’s production of *Julius Caesar* at the Royal Shakespeare Theater in Stratford-upon-Avon. Gregory Doran, Artistic Director Designate, set his production in modern Africa. He was motivated to do so when he learned that the text which greatly inspired Nelson Mandela and other political prisoners on Robben Island from the 1960s to 1991 was neither the Bible nor the Koran. It was Shakespeare. In his article entitled “Hidden Agencies” and published in the program of the production, Richard Dowden says, “Prisoners later recalled that Shakespeare’s understanding of human courage, suffering
and sacrifice reassured them that they were part of a universal drama.” Nelson Mandela marked the following passage in *Julius Caesar* and dated it 16 December 1977, the anniversary of the terrible battle of Blood River when the Afrikaners defeated the Zulus in 1838.

Cowards die many times before their deaths;  
The valiant never taste of death but once.  

It was absolutely remarkable to see and hear Shakespeare’s play about such a key event in Roman history performed in a modern African setting. But it works beautifully and makes perfect sense because the play’s basic message transcends time or place. It describes a fundamental and perennial human experience in the way it meshes the expressions of power and rhetoric, deed and word. Sam Leith puts it this way in his article, “Rhetorically Speaking,” which is also in the program for this production: “*Julius Caesar* is a play whose central event may be the spilling of blood—but whose great turning points are to do with the word rather than the sword. This is a play concerned with power—what confers it, and what takes it away. The instrument of that power is rhetoric.”

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10 *Julius Caesar* 2.2.34-35.

So this play about the politics of power works ideally in an African setting.

Gregory Doran remarked in an interview with Serena Davies in *The Telegraph*:

Then you look at African history over the past 50 years, and there have been many candidates for casting *Julius Caesar*: Idi Amin, Bokassa, Mobutu, indeed Mugabe. The sequence frequently is of leaders coming to power on a wave of popularity, pulling power to themselves in a one-party state, feeling that they have to seize control. Then that being followed by a military coup which is followed by a much worse dictator and then, possibly, civil war. That’s *Julius Caesar* you’re describing.  

Even though the play was imagined to take place in modern Africa, everything about Designer Michael Vale’s set and costumes for the production echoed a Roman locale. For example, many great public events in Africa take place in a football stadium, so the crumbling stone-stepped stadium he presented looked like a Roman amphitheatre or the Coliseum. Behind the stadium we saw the back of a huge statue of Caesar, which at a critical moment, came crashing down. It was a simple setting really, but it was the perfect backdrop for the drama to unfold. The African ceremonial dress of brown cloth slung over a shoulder and wrapped around looked just like Roman togas. Also, the shiny, prominent wrist watches worn by the key players hinted at a modern setting. The initially celebratory and later ominous music of the appropriately named Vibes of March directed by Akintayo Akinbode provided the ideal musical score to compliment, but never interfere with, the action on stage.

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This is just one example of a more modern adaptation of one of Shakespeare’s greatest tragedies. It shows how the words of Shakespeare can take on new and poignant meanings for people in different countries, cultures, and situations.

Both Ignatius Loyola and William Shakespeare, and if you agree with my theory, one through the other, continue to bring insights and revelations to us about our own lives and the world around us. Our lives are an ongoing process spiritually, intellectually, and personally and to have Ignatius and Shakespeare guide us through our discernments makes our lives richer and more meaningful.

Since I opened this chapter with the words of Ignatius, I shall close it with some of my favorite lines from *Julius Caesar*:

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How many ages hence
Shall this our lofty scene be acted over
In states unborn and accents yet unknown!

—3.1.123-126
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BIBLIOGRAPHY


