

*The End of Satisfaction: Drama and Repentance in the Age of Shakespeare.*

Heather Hirschfeld.

Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2014. xii + 240 pp. \$55.

One mark of a good critical book is that it creates a minifield and brings together disparate scholarship into new connections. This characterizes Heather Hirschfeld's new book, which coalesces around the term "satisfaction." If the subject were only the satisfaction for sin discussed by theology, the result might be predictable. But Hirschfeld connects theological satisfaction with an unexpected context, the Rolling Stones' "I can't get no satisfaction," a playful connection that is, in fact, productive. The question of what constitutes traditional theological satisfaction is connected with the question of what constitutes other human satisfactions, and thus brings huge swaths of scholarship together, from Reformation theological debates to modern discussions of human happiness.

The issue of theological satisfaction is interesting in itself, though familiar, as the Protestant Reformation claimed that Catholic works of penance no longer satisfied. Protestants accentuated what orthodox Catholicism already knew, that human works were fragile means of reconciliation with God, and that their value depended on God's mercy. The Protestant decision to eliminate works, in response to their overemphasis by Catholics, brought in new problems, or new formulations of old problems: "So having degraded and eliminated satisfaction as something humans do, Reformers replaced it as something humans feel . . . *assurance*" (36). How did one know that one's faith or feeling of faith or assurance, rather than works, satisfied God? John Bunyan's *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* is a classic late exposition of this Puritan agon. The feeling of assurance in being justified is constantly haunted by its insufficiency.

In eliminating the Catholic sacrament of confession, the Protestants launched into a wide uncharted world where the only hope for satisfying God lay in faith. "Adew, to al Popish satisfactions," one clergyman proclaimed (16). But subjective faith became a bottomless pit in which any temporary sense of satisfaction was soon lost. Lost also was the old Catholic assurance that sacramental confession, with the assigned penance, was for the moment enough. With Protestant *sola fide*, enough was never enough.

Hirschfeld takes this radical shift in the religious universe and sees how it applies to literary works sharing that universe. Marlowe's Faustus can never achieve a settled salvation or achieved repentance; it always evades him. Revenge plays chronicle the impossibility of achieving enough revenge, because they are influenced by the age's theological perplexity about "enough." Othello's hope for enough marital joy with Desdemona is undermined by this new restlessness that always questions what is enough: "'enough' is no longer available in the realm of matrimonial love, where the sacred and secular (and specifically sexual) meanings of our term converge most intimately" (120). Vide the Rolling Stones. Iago is the fiendish Catholic confessor, or "more accurately . . . a Reformed dogmatist," turning this Protestant short circuit back onto Othello. The

debts owed in *The Merchant of Venice* can never be properly paid because enough always hemorrhages into not enough or too much, like the pound of flesh. Payment must be replaced by the quality of mercy (whether Shylock likes it or not). In such cases, Hirschfield shows that the problem of theological satisfaction seeps into the negotiation for human satisfaction, befuddles it, and makes it impossible to achieve.

Hirschfield's discussions, which I have overly simplified here (if I have properly understood them), is the result of the religious turn in historiography, with Debra Shuger here cited, as she often is, on religion "as the cultural matrix for explorations of virtually every topic" (10). The approach requires us to set a powerful story of jealousy or revenge in a religious Reformation context, a critical move common in our time but still perhaps problematic, if only because of the complexity. It is not immediately obvious that a marriage plot reflects penitential controversy, but Hirschfield's labors are persuasive. Hirschfield is content to point up the problems of Protestant penitentialism, but there is a glimmer of a certain nostalgia for a Catholic scheme where faith and works trundle together, achieving what can only approximate adequate satisfaction. (Indeed Beaumont and Fletcher's *Love's Pilgrimage* is made to illustrate this nostalgia.) When the Rolling Stones sing that they can't get no satisfaction, they reveal the seeping of Protestant theology into sex, where enough is never enough. That may be one reason.

DENNIS TAYLOR, *Boston College*