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**Narcissistic Diplomacy Versus the Scripture: Understanding Conflict in  
Robert Bolts' *A Man For All Seasons***

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**Abstract**

*Human existence is rooted in conflict, and monotheistic religions have historically played dual roles in promoting both conflict and peace. Scriptural verses have often been referenced, interpreted, appropriated and manipulated to fuel violence or justify it. A recent example can be seen in the Israeli Prime Minister's invocation of scripture to rationalize Israel's consequent attacks on Gaza, demonstrating a blatant appropriation of biblical and scriptural context to bypass or breach customary expectations to satisfy a vengeful appetite. Claiming that in Robert Bolts' *A Man for all Seasons* (1960) an attempt to disassociate from an over reliance on the Church and its doctrines, while simultaneously drawing on its teachings to achieve that, instigates narcistic attitudes. This contradiction results in the creation of opposing camps, each striving to pass as more righteous or dismiss the authenticity of the other, ultimately resulting in conflict. This paper investigates the tension and conflict that arise as a result of scriptural referencing and interpretation, influencing State decision making and international relations. Given that much of decision making about the State relies heavily on the doctrines of the Church, personal interest is prioritized over national interest in the midst of contradictory biblical verses. With an application of theoretical tools from the New Historicist approach, the analysis is geared towards exploring the role of scripture in preventing or facilitating tractions in human and international relations. The paper reveals the following findings: 1) Both the contradictory nature of scripture, along with its usage intensifies conflict. 2) Narcissistic diplomacy undermines unity and 3) the scripture retains potential as a reconciliatory force, though its misuse often outweighs its capacity to foster unity.*

**Key Words:** Conflict, Narcissistic Diplomacy, New Historicism, Religion

**1 Introduction**

It is often challenging, if not impossible to clearly distinguish between leadership and narcissism. The responsibilities and powers associated with leadership can be sometimes overwhelming and overbearing. Acton (1887) famously commented on this noting that power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely, suggesting that a person's sense of morality has the

tendency to diminish as their power increases. This observation is particularly relevant for leaders whose positions are secured by succession such as King Henry VIII. Scholars have argued, and history confirms that King Henry VIII was an unexpected king; his elder brother Arthur was the one prepared for the throne. Arthur's sudden death led to Henry's ascension, prompting Bolt to refer to him in his preface as a "colourful accident" (1887, p.x).

This historical detail, informs the actions of the play and it will not be an overstatement to say the play is a representation of history and the text more or less attests to the fact that these events, these collisions, did indeed happen. As a Christian State in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century, England heavily relied on the church and its doctrines. Forming allegiances with other nations was of uttermost importance exemplified by the marriage between Arthur and Spanish Princess Catherine. Bolt articulates the States' reliance on religion by stating: "Religion and Economy are abstractions which describe the way we live. Because men work, we may speak of an economy not the other way round. Because men worship, we may speak of a religion not the other way round and when an economy collides with a religion, it is living men who collide and nothing else (they collide with one another and within themselves) (1887, p.x).

Following Arthur's death, the Spanish Royal House sought to mend the alliance by marrying the young widow to Henry. However, Christian law prohibited a man from marrying his brother's widow. At the request of both England and Spain, the Pope, as the head of the church at the time, granted a dispensation to bypass this law. When Henry ascended to the throne, Catherine became his queen, and their marriage was initially successful until Henry sought a divorce. Among his various reasons, the primary justification was that Catherine had not been able to provide him with a male heir. (1887, p.xiii)

This moment set the tone for a rift and conflict in the play: between England and Spain, the King and the Church and the King and Thomas More. At the centre of this rift lies the contradiction of two biblical verses (Leviticus 20: 21, Deuteronomy 25: 5), intertwined with both personal and national interests. Henry clings to the former as justification for seeking another dispensation, interpreting his childlessness as divine punishment in line with Deuteronomy. The actions that follow in the play details his manipulation, interpretation of these verses and those in his administration to achieve this dispensation. With

this the King undermines the authority of the Pope, regarding him as merely a Bishop of Rome, establishes the Anglican Church of England.

The analysis in this paper is important as it outlines the significance of the historicity of the text and the tractions that exist in the play. The play, in its entirety, deepens our understanding of England's religious and political history. It shows how the text shapes the evolution of the Anglican Church and Christianity in England, from the sixteenth century to the present. At the same time it reveals the intricate connections between the English monarchy and religion and the profound impact of scripture or religion on diplomacy, international relations and individual conscience. The scripture often emerges as last-minute resort in negotiations, conscientisation and even violence. This theme is highlighted not only in the play itself but also in ongoing crises such as that in Israel, as well as many other historical and contemporary instances.

This paper investigates the threefold dimensions of conflict in *A Man for all Seasons*, given that conflict breathes from three sources which intersect with one another: personal ambition which is manifested through challenging the authority of the church and the scripture, political considerations which are achieved by forming alliances of marriage, and lastly a confrontation of moral principles outlined by the bible and the Church. It therefore argues that the conflicting nature of the biblical verses becomes leverage for narcissism and conflict to operate, forming the basis for diplomatic negotiations and renegotiations, as the Scripture presents itself as a moral and ethical guideline that influences the characters decisions and actions in the play.

## **2 Conceptualization and Theorization**

Narcissism, described as a self-centred personality style, characterised with an excessive preoccupation with one's self, needs often at the expense of others, is a term which originates from a character in Greek mythology Narcissus who was cursed by the Gods and made to fall in love with his own reflection in a pool of water. In ancient Greek, the concept was understood as Hubris, meaning exaggerate pride or self-confidence. Freud (1914) traces the term as a direction of an individual's libidinal energy rather towards themselves which he describes as a Primary Narcissism which develops in infancy. Freud argues that this libido that has been withdrawn from external world of people and things is directed to the ego and this give rise to attitudes which may be called narcissism. Freudian

understanding of the concept is important, yet not applicable to the analysis in this paper. Waelder (1925) conceptualized this term as a personality trait and defines them as individuals who are condescending, feel superior to others, are preoccupied with admiration and exhibit a lack of empathy. Typical characteristics exhibited by a narcissist, include: selfish and self-absorbed, manipulative, inflexible, lack empathy, judgemental, blames and shames others, gaslight others etc. Narcissist most often do not operate on their own, they sometimes recruit people who assist them carry out task. These people or person(s) are/is known as “flying Monkey”. The term flying monkey, was coined from a movie “the Wizard of OZ in which the wicked witch dispatches the monkey to fly and do her biddings. It is described as a narcissist enabler and they aid the narcissist either because they are themselves narcissistic or seek some form of gratification. The bond between the narcissist and flying monkey is one of unwavering loyalty. The analysis here pinpoint Cromwell who identifies as ‘The King’s Ears’ (Bolt, 1960, Act 1, p. 21) in the play as the King’s flying monkey

Diplomacy, is defined by *Meriam Webster Dictionary* as “the art and practice of conducting negotiations between nations or a skill in handling affairs without arousing hostility”. Researchers identify diplomacy as a field of expertise and Abdulahmanli (2021, p.1) explains the main purpose of diplomacy is to preserve peace by preventing conflict. Narcissistic diplomacy in this paper, refers to a self-centred and manipulative way of engaging with others, an approach to international relations or political manoeuvring, characterised by a focus on self-interest. In the play, the King and England to an extent, embodies this concept as they manipulate situations and people to serve their interest.

In approaching this study, the analysis is guided by some of the principles of New Historicism a theory which insist that literature must be understood within the cultural, political, and ideological conditions of its production. The tenets applied in this work are guided by the views of Stephen Greenblatt in *Renaissance and Self-fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (1980), Michel Foucault in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1975), Louis Montrose in *The Purpose of Playing: Shakespeare and cultural politics of Elizabethan Theatre* (1996) and the views of Catherine Gallagher *Practicing New Historicism* (2000). One of the central tenets is that literature is a product of historical and cultural context. Texts are not autonomous creations but are shaped by the political, religious and social conditions of their time. Another principle is that

power and ideology is imbedded in texts. Literature reflects and reinforces structures of power, showing how authority is contested and maintained. New historicism also stresses the interplay between literature and non-literary texts. The concept of self-fashioning is equally central in this analysis. Individuals construct identity through cultural codes and power relations, often as a performance of authority. Finally, Catherine Gallagher's and Greenblatt's view in *Practicing New Historicism* (2000) which highlights the intersection of literature with economic and administrative discourse will be applicable in the work

By considering the historical context of the play, through an application of New Historicism we highlight the political and religious turmoil of early 16th-century England as the text serves as a microcosm of the larger power struggles and ideological tensions of the period. Bolt's portrayal of More's principled stance against Henry's encroachment on religious authority reflects broader debates about the limits of royal power and the autonomy of individuals in resisting unjust authority. Also, this approach illuminates the cultural norms and values of the Renaissance era. The play examines the complex intersections of religion, politics, and morality, shedding light on the competing loyalties and ethical dilemmas faced by individuals navigating conflicting demands of conscience and loyalty. And lastly it encourages interdisciplinary analysis, drawing connections between literary texts and other historical documents. By contextualizing *A Man for All Seasons* (1960) within the broader landscape of Renaissance England, we can gain a better understanding of the play's themes, characters, and conflicts and also situate the text within a web of social and cultural influences that shape its meaning and importance.

### **3 A Diplomatic Narcissist: King Henry VIII**

This section, examines the actions and character of King Henry and how they build conflict in the play. As already established, much of the events in the text are a representation of British history and as it appears at the time there is no civil law backing the monarchy, what appears to be are religious laws, in other words, there is no clear cut between religious and civil laws as far as the issues of the monarchy are concerned. This promotes an over reliance on the Church. Henry's desire for another dispensation to marry Ann Bolyne is denied, even England acting independently petitioned the Pope for an annulment of the marriage. This rejection triggers Henry's narcissism and he begins to strategize.

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His strategies involve getting Thomas More, a well-respected Chancellor to agree to the invalidity of the marriage or consequently relinquish the Pope of his power.

King Henry VIII begins his manipulations by undermining the authority of the Pope. This appears to him a clever move; if the divorce cannot proceed because the Pope denies it, then questioning the Popes' powers as a Pope over a Kings' will seems reasonable - especially when scripture forbid such marriages.. Henry is tempted to believe the Pope wants to keep him in sin by his rejection. What is worthy of note here is the fact that Henry discovers they had already been voices that suggested the Pope was not more than an ordinary Bishop, the Bishop of Rome. This makes everything clear and possible for him as Bolt has admitted in his preface that:

If the Pope was not a Pope at all but a mere Bishop amongst Bishops then his special powers as Pope did not exist. In particular of course he had no powers to dispense with God's ruling as revealed in Leviticus 18 but equally important, he had no power to appoint other Bishops and here an ancient quarrel began. (Bolt, 1960, p. xi)

The King admits to More that:

Thomas, Thomas, does a man need a Pope to tell him when he has sinned? It was a sin, Thomas, I admit it: I repent. God has punished me; I have no son ...son after son she bore me, Thomas, all dead at birth, or dead within the month; I never saw the hand of God so clear in anything... I have a daughter she's a good child... but I have no son (Flares up) it is my bounden duty to put away the queen and all the Popes back at St Peter shall not come between me and my duty! How is it that you cannot see? Everyone else does. (Bolt, 1960, Act, p. 132)

Henry here positions himself as the sole authority of right and wrong, placing his own judgement above that of an established religious authority. By questioning the necessity of the Pope to determine sin he downgrades the authority and significance of the Pope and the Catholic Church in matters of religious doctrine. This act of downgrading serves to elevate the King's own power, authority and sense of importance positioning him as the ultimate authority on matters of sin or morality. This manipulation of religious authority, allows him to justify his actions and asserts his personal superiority over the Pope. Wier (2002) submits that Henry (real life Henry) showed rage attacks,

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including narcissistic range and temper tantrums and had impulsive control problems. Furthermore, his admission that his actions were sinful but his defiance of the Pope's authority in declaring those actions sinful demonstrates a manipulation of religious principles for personal gain. This is also a clear denunciation of the alliance between England and Spain and a denunciation of the very foundation of the church. The text through this instance dramatizes the ideological struggles over sovereignty and morality. This is evident of the power structures and ideologies that are embedded in texts as argued by Foucault. Henry's manipulation of religious authority and downgrading of the Pope demonstrates this.

He continues in this downgrading tactic by criticising his flying monkeys, those in his administration and subjects. He acknowledges More's good quality, this is a typical narcissistic behaviour because they usually target empaths or people of high moral standing since they lack any and because they see them as easy targets to exploit, manipulate and control. He states:

Because you are honest. What more to the purpose, you're known to be honest...there are those like Norfolk who follow me because I wear the crown. And there are those like Master Cromwell who follow me because they are Jackals with sharp teeth and I am their lion, and there is a mass that follows me because it follows anything that moves- and there's you. (Bolt, 1960, p. 132)

Henry here acknowledges More's honesty and integrity. As a narcissist, he views these traits as weaknesses to be exploited. He also acknowledges it as a way to appeal to his sense of honour, he flatters and praises More to gain his trust and loyalty which will enable him exploit and betray him. He also plays the card of down casting himself, as he visits More given that his flying monkey is not forth coming with the task, he visits More to personally influence and convince him himself. On entering More's house, he begins by saying; "I am a fool what else but a fool to live in court in a licentious mob-when I have friends with regards... no courtship, no ceremony, Thomas be seated. You are my friend are you not? And thank God I have a friend for my chancellor" (1960, p.30). The King is conscious that establishing a connection between himself and More will make it difficult for the latter to oppose him or deny his request. However More does not bend and he leaves angry and disappointed.

King Henry's lack of accountability for his actions, as well as his manipulative tendencies in seeking to influence the behavior and decisions of others to align with his own wishes is effectively captured in his discussion with More. He expresses traits that are characteristic of narcissistic behavior, as these individuals prioritize their own needs and desires above all else and seek to control and influence others to achieve their objectives. He laments to More over his refusal as he says "Thomas, why do you hold against me the desire of my heart, the very wick of my heart"(1960, p.31). By framing his personal desires as the "very wick of (his) heart," he presents them as an essential aspect of himself that others should not question or hold him accountable for. This attitude implies that he believes his actions are justified and should be unquestioningly accepted by others, regardless of their consequences or ethical implications. In this statement, King Henry attempts to manipulate Thomas by appealing to his personal relationship and suggesting that Thomas is somehow at fault for questioning the King's desires. King Henry attempts to guilt trip or pressure Thomas into complying with his wishes without questioning them. This manipulative tactic serves to shift responsibility away from the King and onto Thomas, portraying Thomas as the one in the wrong for not unquestioningly supporting the King.

King Henry equally exhibits a sense of narcissistic self-gratification and importance, evident in his utterances especially in his encounter with More's daughter, Margaret. The King After expressing dissatisfaction that Margaret's Latin is better than his as explained in the stage direction (*her Latin is better than his; he is not all together not pleased*) ( Bolt, 1960, p.28) Margaret then remarks that she cannot dance, giving the King an opening to boast about his dancing skills. He explains: "I dance superlatively... I am something of a scholar too, did you know" (Bolt, 1960, pp.28-29). This statement reflects a sense of grandiosity and superiority, indicating that he believes he is better than others in this aspect. It equally emphasizes the need for validation. By mentioning that he is "something of a scholar too," he seeks to bolster his own self-image and importance. This displays a desire for validation and recognition of his talents and intellect, reinforcing his sense of self-importance. The tone of the statement suggests a need for admiration and praise from others and a lack of humility. Instead of downplaying his abilities or achievements, he openly boasts about them. Even his comparison to Norfolk's legs to those of a wrestler, contrasting with his own dancer's legs, is followed by a boast that he could throw Norfolk off.

This he does to push those around him to shame and self-doubt which will result in low self-esteem and consequent retreat to a passive position or the need to seek his validation. Norfolk retreats to this position when the King asks if he should demonstrate throwing him off. The stage direction indicates that *Norfolk* alarmed for his dignity refuses. (Bolt, 1960, p. 28)

This constant boasting, forces More to admit "you have many accomplishments, your grace," (1960, p. 29)". This compliment reflects a sense of admiration or flattery towards King Henry VIII, suggesting that he possesses many talents, skills, or qualities that are esteemed and valued. This can be seen as a form of validation and praise, which is commonly associated with the concept of narcissistic love, where one seeks affirmation and admiration from others to boost their self-esteem and self-worth. Additionally, the emphasis on "many accomplishments" suggests that King Henry VIII is seen as highly successful and talented in various aspects of his life. This focus on achievement and excellence can further feed into his ego and sense of superiority, reinforcing the admiration and adoration he receives from others. This excessive admiration and validation can be seen as aspects of narcissistic love, where the object of affection is idealized and worshipped for their perceived qualities and achievements. The concept of self-fashioning coined by Greenblatt is central in analyzing Henry's boasting and self-gratification stating "I dance superlatively ... I am something of a scholar too". Henry fashions himself to project grandeur and legitimacy. This performance of identity is not trivial but a deliberate cultural act that reinforces authority.

When the King fails to convince More to do his biddings by himself, he mounts pressure on his enablers to make them attainable. First Cromwell acknowledges their assistance to the King as he asserts "our job as administrators is to make it as convenient as we can" (Bolt, 1960, p.44) Cromwell's assertion underscores his role as a flying monkey in the King's narcissistic dynamic. By enclosing their responsibilities as administrators in terms of making things convenient for the King, Cromwell prioritizes the facilitation of King Henry VIII's desires over any ethical or moral considerations. This attitude reflects a willingness to support and enable the King's behavior, even if it may be harmful or destructive to others involved. As a flying monkey, Cromwell acts as a loyal servant to the narcissistic king, carrying out his wishes and ensuring that his desires are met, regardless of the consequences. This

dynamic of enabling and supporting the King's narcissistic tendencies serves to maintain Cromwell's position of power and influence within the royal court, as he aligns himself with the King's needs and desires, Cromwell even describes himself as the Kings' ears.

Also, his enablers try to recruit and manipulate others to join the course and tell More in his immediate response to the King's wishes that "The King particularly wishes for you to be active in this matter," (Bolt, 1960, p.60). Cromwell demonstrates his readiness to carry out the King's desires and prioritize his needs above all else. This response stresses Cromwell's role as a loyal servant who is willing to act on the King's behalf, even if it means engaging in potentially harmful or unethical actions. Cromwell's willingness to comply with the King's wishes without question or hesitation reflects his role as a flying monkey in the narcissistic dynamic between him and King Henry VIII. As a flying monkey, Cromwell acts as an enabler and facilitator of the King's narcissistic tendencies, ensuring that his desires are met and his needs are prioritized above all others. By emphasizing the King's specific desire for More to be involved in the matter at hand, Cromwell reinforces his position as a loyal follower who is dedicated to carrying out the King's wishes.

Furthermore, Cromwell's immediate compliance with the King's request suggests a lack of independent thought or moral consideration on his part. As a flying monkey, Cromwell is focused on pleasing the King and maintaining his favor, rather than critically evaluating the potential consequences of his actions. This interplay of blind loyalty and obedience to his wishes further solidifies Cromwell's role as a flying monkey in the narcissistic relationship between him and King Henry VIII.

Again in support of the King's demand, he state that "if he wants to change his woman, he will," Cromwell acknowledges and accepts the King's propensity for seeking new romantic relationships based on his own whims and desires. His manipulation of language in this instance by trying to convince Rich to join in his plot against More as he says:

It is much more a matter of convenience. Administrative convenience. The normal aim of administration is to keep steady the factor of convenience- and sir Thomas would agree. Now normally when a man wants to change his woman, you let him if it's convenient and prevent him if it's not-

normally indeed it's of so little importance that you leave it to the priest.

But the constant factor is this element of convenience. (Bolt, 1960, p. 43)

Cromwell makes an analysis of administration which is false, if administration operate on convenience, it cannot be for the benefit of one person which is the King in this case but for the greater benefit of the country, Henry's divorce is convenient for him but will cause a strain in England's relationship with Spain and also the Church and the Pope, but he does not take this in to consideration as he is bent on doing whatever it takes to assist the King. According to Gallagher, literature intersects with economic and administrative discourses. Literature is therefore tied to systems of governance, economics and bureaucracy. Cromwell's rhetoric of "administrative convenience" reflects how bureaucratic language masks the consolidation of royal power. Such language demonstrates how governance itself becomes a discourse that serves ideology, reinforces the King's narcissistic will.

Another Narcistic trait which can be attributed to the King and his enablers is gaslighting and lies telling. Wolsey is framed or accused of treason for which charges are never explained. The Common Man expresses his doubt on the accusation as he announces his death "whether we follow tradition in ascribing Wolsey's death to a broken heart, or accept professor Lacombe's less feeling diagnosis of pulmonary pneumonia, its effective cause was the King's displeasure. He died at Leicester on 29 November 1530 while on his way to the Tower under charges of High Treason" (Bolt, 1960, p. 20). The books More edits for the King and also a cup he received and later gift Rich as he realizes it was a bribe, is used to frame him for charges of corruption and treason by Wolsey and Rich. This is the last resort when they fail to convince More to sign the dispatch. Closely related to Montrose's idea of the textuality of history and the historicity of the texts, it becomes evident that history itself is textual, shaped by narrative and ideology. The framing of Wolsey and More for treason shows how historical narrative is manipulated to consolidate royal power, underscoring that history is not an objective record but a discourse shaped by authority.

As discussed in the above paragraphs, King Henry VIII manifest narcissistic attributes which give a sense of meaning to the actions and his character in the play, the different tactics he employs in negotiation, only serve to help him archive his goals and inspire conflict in the text.

#### **4 The Scripture: A Nexus for Conflict**

This section examines the tension arising from conflicting interpretations of religious teachings and how they contribute to the dramatic conflict and dilemmas portrayed in the play. It argues that the ambiguities in the bible verses under study, serve as catalyst for questioning established authority, challenging traditional values, international relations and navigating loyalty and integrity in the face of adversity.

In Bolt's *A man for all Seasons* (1960) the conflicting biblical verses of Leviticus 20:21 and Deuteronomy 25:5 play a significant role in enabling conflict, particularly regarding the issue of marriage and divorce. The interpretation and appropriation of these verses by the characters, reflect the tension between religious law, personal conscience and political power that drive the central conflict in the play. The verses concerned, which are the core of conflict, manipulation and the creation of alliances in the play are independently ambiguous and when compared are contradictory. Their conflicting nature, creates a moral dilemma for characters in the play. Deuteronomy 25:5 states:

If brothers are living together and one of them dies without a son, his widow must not marry outside the family. Her husband's brother shall take her and marry her and fulfil the duties of a brother-in-law to her. The first son she bears shall carry on the name of dead brother so that his name will not be blotted out from Israel" (NIV Bible, 2011, Deut.25:5)

This verse addresses the practice of Levirate marriage where a brother is obliged to marry his brother's widow and constitutes the premise on which King Henry VIII marries Catherine, his brother's wife. England and Spain, push for this after the death of Arthur, as a strategy to continue diplomatic ties between the two States. Bolt's remarks in the preface that: "To be a Christian was to be a Churchman and there was only one church (though plagued with heresies) and the Pope was the head. At the request of Christian Spain and England the Pope dispensed with the Christian law forbidding a man to marry his brother's widow. (1960, p.vii). Bolt explains this history that introduces us to the issues in the play and the fractions and controversies that were already apparent in the church. This moment illustrates Foucault's ideas of "Power and knowledge". The Popes' dispensation is not neutral but a coerced act which reveals how political authority is entangled with political alliances. The text shows how scripture

becomes a tool of diplomacy reinforcing the views that literature and non-literary texts are parallel discourses shaping meaning.

Deuteronomy does not state what the supposed duties of a brother-in-law are and whether they are limited to just physical duties such as caring for and supporting a brother's widow or it includes sexual activities. It also does not indicate who should impregnate her. In some African tradition, if a man dies, his widow stays in the family and can have children with other men (not brother(s)-in law. These children become the children of her deceased husband and bear his name. Deuteronomy does not state if this is the case but is rather vague and ambiguous. This vagueness, leaves it open to interpretation(s). The King once again exploits this vagueness of scripture to self-fashion himself as a divinely justified ruler reinforcing his authority.

While Leviticus 20:21 states "if a man marries his brother's wife, it is an act of impurity; he has dishonoured his brother. They will be childless." (NIV Bible, 2011, Lev. 20:21) Leviticus in its own ambiguity, while against such marriage, does not specify if this happens in the case where the man is dead or alive, there is the possibility of interpreting the verse as a situation in which a brother snatches his brother's wife and marries her which might be what the verse is against. The punishment of childlessness in the verse is not explicitly limited to a male offspring yet, King Henry as the play reveals, was not entirely without children; rather his sons die in infancy while he had a surviving daughter. This ambiguity reflects Renaissance principles as it is not certain whether to be childless was to not have children at all or lacking a male heir. For Henry, it is clearly the latter, and he manipulates this interpretation to serve his dynastic ambition. supported by statesmen who prioritize the continuation of the Tudors lineage and the securing of a legitimate heir, Henry uses this reasoning not only to justify his annulment but also to legitimize his relationship with Anne Bolyne. He argues that his wife Catherine had grown increasingly plain and intensely religious (attribute which were expected of a queen and a Christian) ( Bolt, 1960, p.xiii). When More confronts him on what Deuteronomy says in favour of his marriage to Catherine as he laments the punishment that has befallen him for forfeiting the law, he argues that Deuteronomy is ambiguous "*(triumphant)* Deuteronomy is ambiguous" (Bolt, 1960, p. 31). New historicism stresses the interplay between literature and non-literary texts. The references to other texts such Leviticus, Dictoronomy, papal dispensation and treason charges parallel

discusses that shape meaning. They equally show how biblical and legal discourses intersect with dramatic representation, reinforcing the idea that literature cannot be separated from the cultural texts surrounding it.

The ambiguity of these verses, makes it challenging to decipher which of these laws is more authentic or superior to the other. In exploiting these ambiguities, it is obvious that England and Spain are conscious that Leviticus is more authentic, yet the dispensation is requested, placing the Pope's authority and integrity in to question as he dispenses of a law he did not implement. It is confusing whether he serves the monarchy or the Church. His failure in his role as a religious leader makes apparent the power and control the state had over the church. The ambiguities in scripture here are not simply theological puzzles but discursive sites where power, ideology, and identity are contested, reminding us that texts are inseparable from their cultural and political contexts. History becomes textual here as the Pope's authority is narrated and contested through competing interpretations, showing how historical "truth" is constructed through power.

These circumstances and tactical interpretation of Leviticus by England and the King, necessitate for a nullification of the marriage. England and Spain's disagreement on this and England's claims it had been null is balanced by Spain's insistent it was not (Bolt, 1960, p.viii). This puts to question the terms of the alliance, the alliance as a whole. This disagreement highlights how different entities understand and interpret the vagueness of these verses and also how deceptive and desperate nations can be in forming affiliations and in disaffiliating. When it favoured their interest, they had a similar understanding of the scripture but when it did not, their meanings changed. This enables a strained relationship between England and Spain, More and the King, the Church and the State.

The conflict in the play has significant implication and impact on the characters and the English society. This conflict leads to the creation of the Anglican Church, the act of supremacy by the king which fundamentally alters the religious landscape in England. Prior to this the Catholic Church and the Pope supposedly held supreme authority over matters of faith and morality. The establishment of the Anglican Church effectively transfers this authority to the monarch, giving King Henry VIII the power to determine religious doctrines and laws. This consolidation of power in the hands of Henry and his successors

enables him assert his authority over both the religious and secular realm, solidifying his position as an absolute monarch and reshaping his identity as both the King and religious ruler. This concentration of power, enables him enact swift reforms such as the suppression of Monasteries, convent, Priors, Friaries and the suppression of opposition to his rule. The Anglican Church becomes a tool for political control and manipulation used by the King to advance his agenda and secure his legacy

The creation of the Anglican Church also exacerbates social divisions within English society. The reformation and the establishment of the new church leads to conflict between those who embrace the changes and those who oppose them. Supporters of the Anglican Church such as Cromwell, seek to enforce conformity and loyalty to the King's religious authority leading to persecution and suppression of dissent. The social upheavals caused by the creation of the Church are highlighted through the diverging loyalties and beliefs of the various characters. More for instance is confronted with a moral dilemma. As a devout catholic who remains loyal to the Pope, More finds himself in direct conflict with the new religious authority. His unwavering commitment to his principles and conscience poses a challenge to the legitimacy of the Anglican Church and the actions of the King. This also creates consequent tension between England and Spain, as it affects future relationship between King Henry and King Charles Philip and Elizabeth. Chapuys, the Spanish ambassador expresses the concern of King Charles concerning Henry's divorce of his aunts:

Sir Thomas I will be plain with you... plain, that is, so far as the diplomatic decencies permit it (loudly) my master King Charles the King of Spain ... My master Charles the King of Spain feels himself concern in anything concerning his blood relation! He would feel himself insulted by any insult offered to his father's sister. I refer of course to Queen Catherine (regards More keenly) the King of Spain would feel himself insulted to any insult offered to Queen Catherine. (Bolt, 1960, p.15)

England and King Henry indeed insult King Charles and Spain by forfeiting their agreement, waning their ties and breaking off from a common interest (Catholicism) which they shared.

As a consequence, the reformation comes with the death of important figures in English history. The execution of Thomas More and Wolsey, who are

accused of treason and this was a part of Henry's larger campaign to consolidate his power, centralize authority. Their execution highlights the broader issue of power during the time of King Henry in England. The death of More and Wolsey fuelled religious tension and deepened division within the English society, inspired many Catholics who resisted the protestant reforms and this led to further repression of Catholicism and the establishment of the church of England as the state church. Literatures' role as a product of historical and cultural context becomes evident through the conflict that ensue in the text serving as a reflection of the broader Tudor struggle between monarchy and church authority.

The discussion in this section has been to highlight the ambiguous and conflicting nature of these biblical verses and the way they enable tractions in relationships and inform English religious and political history, given that it enacted a lot of personal and social dilemmas resulting in killings and a formation of the Anglican Church in the play. As understood in the analysis, religion occupies a central position in human existence, but we cannot rely on religion or religious laws alone in diplomacy, negotiations or the resolution of conflict. We must be able to consult international laws, state or country-based laws to create a balance. Diplomacy is equally an essential skill in today's society which is rigged by conflict in all domains but not the kind of diplomacy exhibited in the text by both England and the King. The text speaks to us do better.

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