

Introduction: 'Kiss the book'

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'Kiss the book', slurs Stefano, the shipwrecked butler, in Act 2, Scene 2 of *The Tempest*. Spectators see him sharing a swig of wine from his homemade bark bottle with the drunken savage, Caliban. The words that he travesties with the language of the tavern originate in the house of worship, where they refer to a loving connection between a reader and a text. 'The book', in English, signifies only one book, the Bible.

Since 1623 that pride of place has often been shared with one other book, the *Comedies, Histories and Tragedies of Mr. William Shakespeare*. People travelling westward in America usually carried both. In the 1840 journal of his expedition from the outpost of Detroit into the wilderness of Lake Superior, one explorer wrote that, on a typical sabbath day of rest, 'We read the Bible I dare say much more than we would have done had we been in Detroit. Shakespeare was duly honoured, as he is every day when we travel. When on the water, some one of the party usually reads his plays to the others.'¹ For other readers, the order of precedence is reversed. In an 1895 memoir about her father Karl, Eleanor Marx wrote, 'As to Shakespeare, he was the Bible of our house. . . . By the time I was six I knew scene upon scene . . . by heart.'² But, whatever the priority between them, in relation to all other books, Shakespeare and the Bible remain together unequalled.

The first edition of the King James translation of the Bible was published in London in 1611. It is unlikely that Shakespeare had a hand in this project, but not impossible.³ The first collected edition of

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Shakespeare's plays, the Folio, was published only twelve years later. Both are opulent volumes. The King James Bible originally sold for about £4 and the Folio for about £1, roughly equivalent to £800 and £200 (\$1,600 and \$400) in 1998. In the early 1990s, copies of the 1611 Bible and the 1623 Folio fetched £38,000 and £380,000 (\$65,000 and \$650,000) respectively.⁴ The Bible's Epistle Dedicatory to James raises him to godly status: 'Your very name is precious among [your people]: their eye doth behold You with comfort, and they bless You in their hearts, as that sanctified Person who, under God, is the immediate Author of their true happiness.'⁵ The dedicatory front matter in Shakespeare's Folio does no less:

But stay I see thee in the Hemisphere
Advanced and made a constellation there!
Shine forth thou star of poets and with rage
Or influence, chide or cheer the drooping stage;
Which, since thy flight from hence, hath mourned like night
And despairs day, but for thy volume's light.⁶

There are many more illuminating connections between what is inside these two volumes, but until now no critical book has been dedicated to their study.⁷ This conspicuous absence may be partly explained by an inherited Romantic view of Shakespeare as a supremely secular poet, the embodiment of 'the human and dramatic Imagination', in contrast to Spenser and Milton, who exemplify the 'enthusiastic [i.e. visionary] and meditative Imagination'.⁸ It may also have something to do with an aversion to 'Bible study' among academics, who associate it with sectarian preaching.

Wordsworth's distinction does not recognize that the Bible permeated Shakespeare's imagination as thoroughly as Spenser's or Milton's, though in different ways. This is demonstrated by Naseeb Shaheen's three-volume catalogue of biblical quotations, allusions, and echoes in the plays, as well as by the prominent biblical themes in *Measure for Measure* and *The Merchant of Venice*.⁹ As to Bible study, since 1980 an exciting new field of literary criticism of the Scriptures has attracted secular scholars such as Robert Alter, Harold Bloom, Northrop Frye, and Frank Kermode.¹⁰ These writers bring sophisticated techniques of reading literature to their study of the Bible, revealing some of its rich, subtle, and grand features. As Alter says,

'we are in fact better readers of biblical narrative because we are lucky enough to come after Flaubert and Joyce, Dante and Shakespeare'.¹¹

While a literary perspective enhances reading of the Bible, knowledge of the Bible informs any reading of literature. Nevertheless, as Frye observed, 'many manifestations of the Western literary tradition, because they are formulated in terms of biblical imagery, biblical plots, specific verses from the Bible, have become unintelligible to contemporary readers'.¹² Most students know more about the *Odyssey* and the *Aeneid* than about the Old and New Testaments. My own education provides an example. As a teenager I pored over the first three chapters of the Bible in Hebrew School, but I was exposed to no more than Genesis and the gospel of Matthew during a rigorous undergraduate and graduate course of study based on the Great Books. It was only after earning a Ph.D. and teaching Renaissance literature for several years that I became aware of the gap in my own education and tried to fill it by preparing an English class on the Bible as Literature. After doing so, I could make more sense of Spenser, Milton, and Blake; and I began to understand parts of Shakespeare that had long left me puzzled. So I decided to experiment with a course on Shakespeare and the Bible. It turned out that in ten weeks it was possible for students to read five plays and six books of the Bible—enough to find their way around both large volumes and to discover how each illuminates the other. That experiment led me to write this book.

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Any imagination being formed in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England would have been saturated with what was the most powerful cultural influence of its time. T. W. Baldwin states that young William absorbed the Bible through a grammar-school curriculum that included much scriptural reading, including some in Latin and Greek.¹³ Shaheen disputes this claim but observes that compulsory weekly attendance at church services during which lengthy passages were read aloud guaranteed that all citizens were thoroughly familiar with Scripture. Showing that most of the passages cited in the plays were not to those biblical books that were used in the liturgy or to the translation recited in church, but rather to the widely distributed

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Geneva Bible first published in 1560, he concludes that Shakespeare spent a good deal of time reading the Bible in private.¹⁴

The Reformation had encouraged individual reading of the Scriptures as essential to salvation, but, during the reign of the Catholic Queen Mary from 1553 to 1558, William Tyndale, the first Protestant translator of the Scriptures, was burned at the stake along with hundreds of copies of his recently printed work. Mary's Protestant successor, Queen Elizabeth, reintroduced Bible reading as both a religious and a political duty, 'kissing the book' herself in the course of a public ceremony at which she accepted a copy of the Bible from the allegorical figure of Truth and promised to read in it every day.¹⁵

Elizabeth's successor James sponsored the government project of a new translation not only to pursue his own devotional and scholarly interests, but also to support the heavy ideological structure of divine-right monarchy. He devoted considerable resources to expensive cultural productions of all sorts—triumphs, pageants, masques, holiday celebrations, executions, pardons, and religious rituals. He did so to display and memorialize himself, and to counteract resistance to policies he wished to promote—policies that drained money and power from other interest groups in the commonwealth. Along with other absolutist rulers and political theorists in early modern Europe, James cited the Bible to summon God's support for his claims of authority over the civil and personal lives of his subjects.

In the 'Argument' prefacing his own book, *Basilikon Doron*, James wrote: 'God gives not Kings the style of Gods in vain | For on his throne his Scepter do they sway.'¹⁶ His favourite biblical model was King Solomon, who extended the Israelite empire created by his father David, brought peace and prosperity, was himself a scholar and poet, and sponsored a vast programme of support for the arts and sciences. 'God hath given us a Solomon, and God above all things gave Solomon Wisdom; Wisdom brought him Peace, Peace brought him riches, riches gave him Glory', wrote Bishop Montague in his introduction to James's collected works.¹⁷ Francis Bacon dedicated *Novum Organum*, his programme for the reform of learning, to James as Solomon the Wise and called his Utopian University in New Atlantis 'Salomon's House'. Rubens depicted James as Solomon on the ceiling of his Banqueting House, a building designed by Inigo Jones as part of a grand scheme, never completed, to rival the same divine-right aspira-

tions of those who commissioned the Sistine Chapel in Rome, the Escorial in Madrid, and the Louvre in Paris, all of which supposedly followed the architectural plans for Solomon's Temple set forth in detail in the Bible's Book of Kings.

An essential part of this campaign by the baroque court to glorify the absolute state and 'metaphysicalize the person of the ruler' was played by theatre.¹⁸ James wrote that 'A king is as one set on a stage, whose smallest actions and gestures, all the people gazingly do behold.'¹⁹ His performance of this dramatic role in public spectacles displaying the ruler's ability to cure diseases with the magic touch of his hands was reluctant, but he relished the chance to appear on stage in masques in which he was simultaneously divine actor and spectator.

The Banqueting House was home for many such dramatic productions. The most prominent feature of this theatre was what was called the State—a raised platform with a canopy for the King and his most honoured guests . . . its position . . . made it possible for all the spectators to see the king while he talked or watched the play'.²⁰ It was also sited as the only perfect observation point for the play's many painted sets. Here the monarch occupied the same position as God in the Revelation of St John, sitting on the throne among his elders watching one pageant after another.

Another element of theatre that appealed to absolute rulers was dissimulation and disguise, the opposite of spectacular display. Claiming to imitate the biblical Christ who 'emptied out' or relinquished his essential divinity to appear among mortals, monarchs were to be regarded as divine beings costumed as human players moving among their subjects.²¹ But the humiliation of experiencing fallible mortality also reinforced the royal sense of their actual superiority, and it justified lying, spying, and other forms of manipulative behaviour secretly carried out on behalf of the welfare of the nation. A contemporary, Sir Anthony Weldon, wrote that James's private motto was 'Qui nescit dissimulare, nescit regnare' (He who does not know how to dissimulate does not know how to reign).²²

In addition to providing a source of political propaganda, during the Renaissance the Bible became an object of humanistic scholarship. Lorenzo Valla and Desiderius Erasmus unearthed, compared, edited, and published ancient biblical as well as classical manuscripts. Pico Della Mirandola and Marcello Ficino searched for a common source

for the writings of Homer, Plato, and Moses that would provide a key to universal symbolism. Niccolò Machiavelli read the Bible as history, in the same way that he read Livy and Tacitus, looking for information about the development of the Israelite state, about military strategy, and especially about the way founders and leaders used religion as a means to achieve political goals.

The Renaissance Bible was also appreciated as a great work of literature and an artistic inspiration for writers and painters. King James's favourite preacher, John Donne, rhapsodized on the beauty of God's style as an author: 'thou art a figurative, a metaphorical God . . . in whose words there is such a height of figures, such voyages, such peregrinations to fetch remote and precious metaphors . . . such curtains of allegories, such high heavens of hyperboles, so harmonious elocutions . . . as all profane authors seem of the seed of the serpent that creeps; thou art the dove that flies.'²³ His enthusiasm was shared by Sir Philip Sidney, whose impassioned 'Defence of Poetry' against puritan iconoclasts celebrates the literary accomplishments of 'David in his Psalms; Solomon in his Song of Songs, in his Ecclesiastes, and Proverbs, Moses and Deborah in their hymns; and the writer of Job'.²⁴ Michelangelo, Caravaggio, and Rubens pictured Old and New Testament subjects no differently from those in Greek mythology—with glorious, naked renderings of the human body, psychological realism, and dynamic energy informed by imaginative readings of their sources.

Such aesthetic appreciations of Scripture were as controversial during the Renaissance as when, in the book of Ezekiel, God threatened those who listened to his words only as poetry: 'And lo, thou art unto them, as a jesting song of one that hath a pleasant voice, and can sing well: for they hear thy words, but they do them not. When this cometh to pass (for lo it will come) then shall they know, that a Prophet hath been among them' (Ezek. 33: 32–3). The controversy still continues in debates over the acceptability of treating the Bible as an academic or artistic subject rather than Holy Writ.²⁵

A related controversy concerning the question of how Shakespeare himself regarded the Scriptures, whether he was reverent or irreverent, whether biblical references in his plays support, challenge, or satirize Christian doctrine, has dominated much previous discussion of Shakespeare and the Bible. Answers must remain tentative, since, as Alvin Kernan observed, 'Shakespeare took his politics, like his religion

and his philosophy, to his grave with him.²⁶ Given the dangers involved in maintaining any religious position during a period of sudden and violent shifts in what was considered orthodox, such reticence was only prudent.

One school of interpretation reads Shakespeare's biblical references as a didactic reinforcement of Christian doctrine that utilizes the media of drama and poetry to support theological points. Arthur Kinney states that '*The Comedy of Errors* intends, with one [biblical] reference following another, to direct us away from the farce of a world of men who are foolish in their pursuit of fortune and family when they forget about God and towards a sense of comedy such as that conceived by Dante.'²⁷ He argues that Shakespeare's stagecraft was derived from the popular liturgical drama he was exposed to in childhood—a form of theatre supported by ecclesiastical authority to engage people with scriptural stories in order to increase their allegiance to the Church. G. Wilson Knight states that 'the unique act of the Christ sacrifice can . . . be seen as central' to the tragedies and that Shakespeare's 'final plays celebrate the victory and glory, the resurrection and renewal, that in the Christian story and in its reflection in the Christian ritual succeed the sacrifice'.²⁸

Such orthodox approaches have been countered by strongly worded opposition. A. C. Bradley held that Christian theology is irrelevant to Shakespeare's writing and that any biblical references in the plays represent merely human behaviour and nothing about God or the supernatural.²⁹ Roland Mushat Frye wrote a book entitled *Shakespeare and Christian Doctrine* specifically to debunk the interpretations of those he dubbed 'the School of Knight', sarcastically punning on the name of a reputed conspiracy of Elizabethan atheists. He argued that 'Shakespeare's intent is essentially secular, in keeping with what sixteenth-century theologians would have expected from literature.'³⁰ Late twentieth-century critics surmise that Shakespeare, along with his contemporaries, was involved in an overall cultural movement that funnelled the energy of religious forms and expressions into various temporal replacements. Debra Shuger reports that 'in Foucault, Greenblatt and other contemporary thinkers one notes a growing interest in the passage of sacred forms and practices . . . into the social and literary structures of secular culture'. These 'mythic transformations' were possible, she observes, because, 'in Renaissance practice,

the Bible narratives retained a certain . . . flexibility . . . a sort of extra-dogmatic surplus of undetermined meaning—or meaning capable of being determined in various ways'.³¹

Shakespeare's texts themselves offer evidence for both sides in this controversy, sometimes with different interpretations of the same passage. In *The Winter's Tale*, Paulina says to onstage and offstage audiences, 'It is required | you do awake your faith' (5.3.94–5), just before the statue comes to life in one of the scenes Knight sees as enacting Christian 'resurrection and renewal'. The action takes place in a chapel and the moment has the solemnity of high mass, but the miracle that ensues is shown to be a staged illusion. Falstaff, 'that old white-bearded Satan' (*1 Henry IV*, 2.4.463), is constantly quoting Scripture in order to justify his own engagingly amoral behaviour and to mock any form of self-righteousness. But his antics become steadily less charming and he dies crying, 'God, God, God,' and babbling what may be a reference to Psalm 23 (*Henry V*, 2.2.9–20). And Shakespeare's worst villains delight in feigning reverence for Scripture, all the while letting the reader in on their treachery:

But then I sigh, and with a piece of scripture
Tell them that God bids us do good for evil;
And thus I clothe my naked villainy
With odd old ends, stol'n forth of Holy Writ,
And seem a saint when most I play the devil.
(Richard III, 1.3.332–6)

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The ambiguity of such allusions and the credibility of both orthodox and sceptical critics leads to the hypothesis that Shakespeare read the Bible with a very wide range of interpretative responses to its vast plenitude of meanings. A corollary premiss is that Shakespeare imitated scriptural models with the kind of variety found in later biblically inspired writers such as Milton, Dryden, Blake, Hopkins, Mann, Kafka, Faulkner, Kazantsakis, and Beckett.

No playwright could encounter, say, the stories of Ruth's midnight courtship of Boaz (Ruth 3) or Jesus' sojourn with the disciples in Emmaus (Luke 24: 13–53) without appreciating their dense dramatic textures. Such highly wrought passages are not rare in the Old and

New Testaments. As Alter says, 'There is evidence of ["the high fun of the act of literary communication"] in almost every line of biblical narrative . . . the lively inventiveness . . . repeatedly exceeds the needs of the message, though it often also deepens and complicates the message.' When that inventiveness and complexity are not obvious, 'Language . . . is fashioned to intimate perspectives the writer would rather not spell out and invites our complicitous delight in the ingenuity of the fashioning.' Demanding and rewarding such imaginative complicity from actor or reader are hallmarks of Shakespeare's style. In addition to a general spirit of literary free play, Shakespeare found subtle techniques of storytelling: varied transitions and contrasts between incidents, recurring motifs and correspondences between parallel incidents, and a carefully controlled variation between disclosing or obscuring characters' thoughts and motives, to name just a few.³²

Like Sidney, Shakespeare recognized the range of literary genres by which biblical books could be classified and the elaborate rules of composition and comprehension such genres imply: in Genesis, a combination of creation myth and prose fiction; in Exodus and the succeeding books of Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings, a cycle of national histories; in Job, a tragedy; in Ruth and Esther and the gospel narratives, tragicomic romance; and in Revelation, a masque.

What might be expected to exclude books of the Bible from being considered in the same category as other literary works is the Scripture's emphasis on God as its main character and author. Extrabiblical representations of God were forbidden by Jewish tradition and opposed by Wycliffite preachers. However, medieval miracle plays brought God on stage in three of his biblical roles: creator, saviour, and judge. The actors playing those roles trod a thin line between dramatic credibility and sacrilege, while the scripts referred to the 'character' both as 'Saviour' and as 'Figura' or metaphor, as a reminder that the representation was not to be taken literally.³³

Images of God were later excluded by censorship from the Elizabethan stage, but Shakespeare found several ways to refer to the divine. The word 'God', or, after censorship tightened in 1605, its euphemism 'Heaven', is constantly on the lips of the plays' princes, prelates, and proletarians, in imitation of speech patterns by which people invoke higher power in their daily transactions. God is more

real to Shakespeare's characters at moments of private prayer, but only as a projected auditor, never one who answers. Non-biblical gods, such as Juno, Hymen, and Apollo, appear as *dei ex machinis* in some of the comedies. As I will attempt to demonstrate, however, the God of the Bible is actually present in Shakespeare, only disguised as a man or woman.

Theologians postulate that the Judaeo-Christian God is omnipotent and omniscient. But such infinite attributes cannot be conveyed in human terms, so the Bible represents them metaphorically as a finite contrast between superhuman and merely human. God appears as a person who lives on a higher level, possessing power and knowledge that people lack. In his opening speech to Parliament in 1609, King James elaborated some of these metaphors:

Kings are justly called Gods, for that they exercise a manner or resemblance of Divine power upon earth. For if you will consider the attributes to God, you shall see how they agree in the person of a king. God hath power to create, or destroy, make or unmake at his pleasure, to give life, or send death, to judge all and to be judged not, accomptable to none, to raise low things and to make high things low at his pleasure, and to God are both soul and body due. And the like power have kings, they make and unmake their subjects, they have power of raising and casting down of life and of death. Judges over all their subjects, and all causes, and yet accomptable to none but God only. They have power to exalt low things and abase high things, and make of their subjects like men at the Chess, a pawn to take a Bishop or a knight, and to cry up, or down any of their subjects, as they do their money.³⁴

This is not just a megalomaniac fantasy of 'playing God', but the conventional wisdom of the period.

The Tempest's Prospero has more godlike attributes than any other Shakespearian character, reflecting that play's uniquely rich connections with the Bible. He is creator and destroyer, like the maker of Eden and the Flood; he is founder of a chosen line, like the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; he is the deviser of plagues and torments like the God of Exodus and Revelation, and like him the judge at the tribunal where all are brought for sentence. Shakespeare's King Henry V is a man of war and a national leader like the God in the rest of Exodus, and when he experiences fear and is disappointed by his followers, he becomes the sacrificial God of the New Testament. *Measure for Measure's* Duke Vincentio, whose name means 'the con-

queror', is God the judge, who exalts low things and abases the high and makes chess pieces of his subjects as the Bible's God does with Abraham and Job and Christ's disciples.

In the Bible, the relationship between God and people is depicted in terms of hierarchical human relationships: king and subject, parent and child, master and servant, teacher and student. Tensions in such relationships, observed from the viewpoint of the superior, are attributable to the stupidity, rebelliousness, and treachery of the inferior. Since direct instruction does not work, the superior uses a combination of concealment and revelation to teach the inferiors truths they resist. God overhears Adam and Eve in the garden and then interrogates them as if he had not. He tests Abraham and Jacob and Job with tricks and with cruel ordeals whose meaning and motive are hidden from them. He comes to save the world hidden in the person of a poor carpenter and allows himself to be crucified in order to convey a lesson to those who do not follow him and to those who do. Shakespeare's quasi-divine saviours frequently use such disguises. Henry V misleads his father, his bar-room buddies, his treacherous lords, his clergy, his French enemies, and his reluctant bride, before he finally shows his hand. Edgar deceives his father in *King Lear* with a fake exorcism and a false miracle to liberate him from suicidal pessimism. The Friar in *Much Ado About Nothing* rescues a near-tragic situation of misunderstanding with a pious fraud leading to the final moment of revelation.

Shakespeare's most vivid theological metaphors come from the world of the theatre, where the hierarchy of divine and human is richly suggested by relationships between author and character, author and actor, and actor and audience, especially in so far as they involve concealment and revelation. Playwrights have godlike control in casting and controlling actors who recite the lines written for them. But actors also have a divine superiority to the audience because they know the script and can predict what comes next and because they are creating rather than believing in an illusion. Such metaphysical relationships are often explored in Shakespeare's metatheatrical scenes when disguised figures such as Rosalind in *As You Like It* or the Lord in the Induction to *The Taming of the Shrew* establish a vantage point above and beyond that of other characters.

In the Bible, all human characters are created by the authorship of God, but he also watches and judges them as audience and critic. In

this sense, the theatregoer, like a member of Theseus' party watching 'Pyramus and Thisbe' in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, takes a godlike role in relation to the players, since he or she is the one being entertained, doing the judging, and eventually walking out of the playhouse into a larger life after the revels are ended and the 'insubstantial pageant' has 'melted into air, into thin air' (*Tempest*, 4.1.155, 150). An ancient proverb expressed this idea—*totus mundus agit histrionum*—everyone is an actor—and a questionable tradition holds that it was inscribed on the portal of the Globe Theatre. Shakespeare elaborated it in the famous speech beginning 'All the world's a stage, | And all the men and women merely players' (*As You Like It*, 2.7.139–66). A poem of Shakespeare's contemporary Sir Walter Raleigh makes this connection between theatrical and theological perspectives more explicit:

What is our life? a play of passion
 Our mirth the music of division
 Our mothers' wombs the 'tiring houses be,
 Where we are dressed for this short comedy,
 Heaven the judicious sharp spectator is,
 That sits and marks still who doth act amiss
 Our graves that hide us from the searching sun
 Are like drawn curtains when the play is done
 Thus march we playing to our latest rest
 Only we die in earnest, that's no jest.³⁵

To a theatre professional, the Bible's two-tiered reality of God and human provides a practical framework for telling stories.

Most interpretations of the Bible adopt God's point of view, but the text can be viewed through a contrary perspective from which inferior humans appear as victims and the superior deity looks like a tyrant. Outspoken readers from third-century Marcionites to the romantic William Blake to the contemporary Harold Bloom have found the Father God of the Bible to be more of a villain than a hero. Shakespeare's truly malevolent characters, such as Iago or Richard III, are clever theatrical liars who place themselves on a superhuman level over those they trick and control. Even Shakespeare's benevolent God-figures display the vices that go with superior power and knowledge: impatience, self-righteousness, anger, cruelty, jealousy, and pride. It is possible that Shakespeare sometimes regarded his own role of play-

wright and performer as godlike, his own book as potent and capacious as 'The Book'. He would then probably recognize the Bible God's unappealing traits as his own. Both piety and prudence might convince him to retreat from that role when it felt most alluring, to take off his magician's robe, and drown his book as soon as it was complete.

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Two inferences follow from the hypothesis that Shakespeare was influenced by the Bible and that he interpreted it freely. One is that understanding the plays' references requires a thorough familiarity with the Scriptures. A second is that these references generate what Bloom calls 'strong' readings—that is, they illuminate fresh and surprising meanings in the biblical text. A modern example of this twofold authorial process is provided by the writer Jane Smiley, whose novel, *A Thousand Acres*, is patterned upon the plot, characters, and themes of *King Lear* though set in modern-day Kansas.³⁶ The book is comprehensible and engaging to people who do not know Shakespeare's tragedy or its influence, but they are missing a great deal. Smiley's story departs from Shakespeare by filling in a past history of the family that involves the father's sexual abuse of two of his daughters, but that new addition suggests intriguing possibilities about the characters in the earlier play.

The twisting path among meanings that the Bible points to in Shakespeare and that Shakespeare points to in the Bible is marked by allusion. The allusion is the sign at which two meanings intersect, a point of reference where, in Robert Alter's words, an author 'activat[es] an earlier text as part of the new system of meaning and aesthetic value of his own text'.³⁷ In the alluding later text, the reference may take the form of a verbatim citation of the earlier evoked text. But it may also be a paraphrase or echo. In either alluding or evoked text, the link may apply only to a phrase or globally to the work's overall theme and structure. The alluding text may be consonant with the evoked text's original meanings or it may subvert them by distorting their form and changing its context.

For example, in *Measure for Measure*, Shakespeare's title alludes to a saying of Jesus reported in the gospel of Matthew: 'judge not that ye be not judged. For with what judgement ye judge, ye shall be judged: and

with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again' (Matt. 7: 1–2), hinting that the whole play is designed to prove this point and suggesting that its plot runs parallel to the plot of the gospel narrative. In the final moments of the play, the Duke himself alludes to the same passage: 'Like doth quit like, and measure still for measure . . . We do condemn thee to the very block | Where Claudio stooped to death' (*Measure*, 5.1.408, 411–12). However, he uses the reference to support a command that contradicts the saying of Jesus. Another look at the evoked text turns up a different passage in which Jesus specifically rebuts the sense of the saying employed by the Duke: 'Ye have heard that it hath been said, "An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth." But I say unto you, "Resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also"' (Matt. 5: 38–9). It turns out that the Duke was deliberately misleading the person he addressed with the biblical reference in order to goad her to act on a new-found inner desire to extend mercy to her enemy. The most significant allusion here is not the verbal echoing of the earlier text but a complex network of underlying parallels. The Duke, like the New Testament God, succeeds in governing his people by teaching them to go beyond the letter of the law that they think they have been told, a law that they have foundered upon, whether trying to break or to obey it.

As this example demonstrates, allusion works by hidden meanings, coded communication between author and reader. It requires the reader to be familiar with the absent evoked text and eager to participate in the active process of interpretation. As the Bible itself evolved over thirteen hundred years of accretion and deletion by its own authors and editors, it steadily accumulated more networks of allusion. And for this reason, as Alter observes, 'the Bible has always been the text par excellence to be interpreted, the object of endless homiletical and philological ingenuity, the occasion for codifying whole systems of hermeneutical principles'.³⁸

Two traditional principles of scriptural interpretation facilitate the study of Shakespeare and the Bible: typology and midrash. Typology is a method of noting similarities and correspondences between texts. On the basis of those similarities, one thing or event is claimed to stand for or represent another. The ancestor of literary criticism's 'source and analogue' study, typology was used by later biblical writers and commentators to point out how an early event or passage—the

type—prefigured and thereby explained and validated a later one—the antitype. They often noted, for example, that the story of the sacrifice of Isaac in Genesis 22 anticipates and stands for the story of God's sacrificing his only son, Jesus. Such typological commentaries referring backwards and forwards, especially between passages of the Old and New Testaments, fill the margins of English Bibles. An example of a typological relation between Shakespeare and the Bible is that between the underdog victory of the Israelite forces over Pharaoh's at the Red Sea recounted in Exodus and the underdog victory of the English forces against the French at the Battle of Agincourt recounted in *Henry V*.

If 'typology' names the Bible's influence on Shakespeare, Shakespeare's commentary on the Bible can be called midrash. 'The Midrash' is a third-century CE collection of rabbinical glosses on passages in the Hebrew Bible.³⁹ Generically, midrash refers to a technique of interpretation that expands and elaborates the biblical narrative. It derives from the verb 'to study' or 'to search out', and it signifies 'a way of delving more deeply than the literal meaning . . . an instrument for imparting contemporary relevance to biblical events'.⁴⁰ Midrash unfolds symbolic meanings latent in the scriptural texts with analytical techniques 'linking the various parts of the Bible together by the discovery of typological patterns, verbal echoes, and rhythms of repetition'.⁴¹ The Talmud refers to such analysis as 'a hammer which awakens the slumbering sparks in the rock', for it generates new stories, dense revisions of the original, and more symbolic expressions that warrant further explication.⁴²

For example, 'the first midrashic comment on the first word of the Bible . . . links that word *bereshit* ("in the beginning") with the word *reshit*. *Reshit* signifies Wisdom, which is personified in the speaker of Proverbs 8: 22, "God created me as the beginning of his way, the first of his works of old."⁴³ In classical Hebrew, 'Wisdom' is also synonymous with Torah, or the Scriptures. The midrash thus discovers the Bible itself within the Hebrew letters of its own beginning, the beginning of the world. The gospel of John begins with a similar midrash on Genesis in Greek: 'In the beginning was the Word . . .'. Jesus himself performs midrash when, in response to the disciple's question of why he speaks in parables, he explicates the parable he has just related with yet another parable: 'Hear ye therefore the parable of the sower.

Whensoever a man heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not, the evil one cometh, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart: and this is he which hath received the seed by the wayside' (Matt. 13: 18–19). Shakespeare's *King Lear* performs a mid-rashic elaboration of the book of Job. With plot, characters, and imagery that imitate the scriptural tragedy, the later author provides an explication and commentary on its thematic search for reconciliation between human and God, and a way of 'imparting contemporary relevance to biblical events'.

Midrash has been referred to as 'creative exegesis'.⁴⁴ It makes wordplay, storytelling, and interpretation come together to liberate pleasure, creativity, and knowledge. This is itself the topic of another midrash: 'In the continuation of the passage from Proverbs . . . Torah is pictured as a nursling (or nurse): "Then I was by him as a nursling; and I was daily his delight, playing always before him" (8: 30) . . . God takes his delight with the words of the Torah and men are invited to do the same.'⁴⁵ By writing new stories that elaborate and comment playfully on the Bible's, Shakespeare himself took up the invitation to 'kiss the book'.

5

Typology illuminates patterns of repetition and variation between earlier and later texts that illuminate both. Midrash illuminates an earlier text with elaborations that create a later text typologically related to it. The remainder of this book uses typology to scout out explicit links, as well as echoes, reverberations, and hidden correspondences to make sense out of parts of Shakespeare's plays and of the Bible where meaning seems opaque or indeterminate. It also uses midrash, combining wordplay, storytelling, and interpretation to blend typological readings of Shakespeare and the Bible into a composite narrative of its own, a tale with a beginning, middle, and end.

The narrative's architecture is patterned on both the big books it links together. Each of the six chapters following this introduction pairs one book of the Bible with a single Shakespeare play in a sequence that follows scriptural chronology from the beginning of time to its end. The first three deal with books of the Hebrew Bible

and the last three with books of the Christian Bible, mirroring the bilateral symmetry remarked upon by many interpreters. *The Tempest* is paired both with the Bible's opening book of Genesis and with its closing book of Revelation, partly because of its double position as the first play in the Folio and the last play Shakespeare wrote in its entirety, and also to highlight 'the typical midrashic predilection for multiple interpretations rather than for a single truth behind the text'.⁴⁶ Although only six out of forty-six biblical books and five out of thirty-six Shakespeare plays are fully treated, they make for a representative selection and a coherent sequence.⁴⁷ Biblical genres include creation myth, history, wisdom literature, gospel, epistle, and apocalypse. Shakespearian genres include romance, history, tragedy, and comedy.

All six of the succeeding chapters tell their biblical and Shakespearian stories in tandem, emphasizing the typological and midrashic interplay between them. In Chapters 2, 5, and 7, narrative parallels take precedence over thematic ones because in both *The Tempest* and *Measure for Measure* Shakespeare created protagonists consistently modelled upon the Bible's God. Chapters 3, 4, and 6 focus more on thematic parallels that come forward in the absence of a God-figure in the plays. Various critical approaches are brought to bear in every chapter, but each has a different emphasis. The narrative-centred chapters are more formalist, archetypal, and performance-oriented, the thematic ones more concerned with historical contexts of composition and reception.

Consistent with the five-act structure of Shakespeare's plays, each chapter is divided into five parts. In the chapters that follow, these five parts can be roughly correlated with five recurrent concerns: the place of book and play in the larger structure of Bible and Folio; generic elements they share; specific allusions that link them, especially those constructing an image of God; parallels of plot and theme; and significant differences between them.

In Wallace Stevens's poem, 'Peter Quince at the Clavier', a character from Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* muses upon the mutability and permanence of beauty by retelling the biblical story of Susanna and the Elders. During a discussion of that poem in *The Pleasures of Reading*, Robert Alter reflects upon the kind of 'global allusion' this book explores between Shakespeare and the Bible:

The most effective uses of global allusion . . . occur when the introduction of the evoked text is dictated not by arbitrary choice but by a sense on the part of the writer that there is something in the nature of things that requires the allusion . . . Milton recreates classical epic in *Paradise Lost* in part because he is persuaded of a typological relation of the classical to the biblical . . . Thus behind many global allusions is a perceived structure of history, an assumed grammar of the imagination that underwrites or even necessitates the wedding of the two texts.⁴⁸

I doubt that Shakespeare intended to marry his book to the Bible, as did Dante, Spenser, Milton, and Blake, but I do think he intended them to embrace.