The Word against the Word: Shakespeare and Scripture
Seminar Leader: John Parker

ABSTRACTS

David K. Anderson,
"My Brother as He Slept": Shakespeare, Scripture and Resistance

My essay will discuss how Shakespeare understands the relationship between scripture and political resistance by examining a specific Biblical allusion in *As You Like It*. There is, of course, a longstanding critical argument over the political ethos of Shakespeare's comedies: does the sojourn in the carnivalesque green world regenerate the existing social order or challenge it? Light can be shed on the question of Shakespeare's pastoral politics by considering the scriptural dimension of the exile theme.

Briefly, the exile of Duke Senior and the lovers to Arden is analogous to the exile of David in 1 Samuel. I want to look at a number of parallels between David—driven to hiding by the wicked Saul despite his loyal service—and Orlando, fleeing from his elder brother's persecution. But the essay will focus on a specific allusion made when Orlando risks his life by saving the sleeping Oliver from a lion. This echoes David's refusal to harm the sleeping Saul even though self-preservation and the fact that he has been promised the throne by God might seem to legitimate such a killing.

The parallel between the two scenes is compelling because of their political subtexts. David's refusal to harm the anointed king seems inherently conservative. The same can be said for Orlando, who never questions his elder brother's right to their father's inheritance, but simply pleads to be treated as a brother, an attitude that implicitly reinforces the rights of the elder Duke Senior over the usurping Frederick. However, both texts have a more nuanced response to issues of legitimacy. David and Orlando's refusal to use (or allow) violence stands itself as a rebuke of the forces which oppress them and validates their own claims. The analogue says a great deal about Shakespeare's subtle radicalism and the complex political function of scripture in this era of perpetual interpretive conflict.

Bibliography

I'm just now plunging into this paper so it's tough to say what secondary source's I'll make the most use of. I will probably discuss Phebe Jensen's *Religion and Revelry in Shakespeare's Festive World* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2008), and Michael D. Bristol's *Carnival and Theatre* (New York: Methuen, 1985). I may say some things about Eric Mallin's *Goodless Shakespeare* (New York: Continuum, 2007).

Andrew Barnaby
"More than cool reason": Bottom's Dream and Shakespeare's Defense of Poetry

Theseus' gentle mockery of the Athenian lovers' "story of the night" famously equates the "shaping fantasies" of the play's triumvirate of imagination, those lunatics, lovers, and poets who in their various ways "apprehend more than cool reason ever comprehends." In arguing that the lovers' agreement about what happened ("their minds transfigured so together") gives to their telling a "great constancy," Hippolyta's countercheck is itself founded on a kind of reason: her ability to weigh the evidence, to defer to the consistency and thus plausibility, howsoever "strange and admirable" the tale. And, of course, Shakespeare suggests that the ruler of the city of philosophy—the Duke of *Athens*—must cede pride of place to his eminently reasonable wife since she is, after all, correct: the evidence of our senses (having just seen the preceding four acts) testifies to the tale's essential truth. Is it possible then that lovers and poets (at least dramatic poets) are on the side of reason, their truths rational and not imaginative or delusional? Or does their "compactness" with the lunatic yet render their claims to reason suspect?

This paper will argue that, even before Hippolyta's lines, Shakespeare has proleptically defended the imagination against Theseus' slurs but has done so in such a way as to undermine Hippolyta's rational appeals as well. For, in the voice of Bottom—who is himself comically channeling St. Paul's Letter to the Corinthians—Shakespeare has already challenged reason (pointedly, as Paul will put it, that "wisdom of this world" particularly possessed and wielded by the "princes of this world") as the vehicle by which truth can be known. But rather than understanding true wisdom as a Pauline apocalypse (that "wisdom of God" embraced through faith), Shakespeare's celebration of imagination in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* borrows from only to go beyond (or perhaps assimilate) Paul's religious claims and does so to assert a religion of the imagination.

Bibliography:

Louis Montrose: "The Purpose of Playing" and *The Purpose of Playing* (the original article and the subsequent book are intriguingly different)

Margreta de Grazia
King Lear in the Time Before Merlin

Of all Shakespeare's plays, *King Lear* is set farthest back in historical time, eight centuries before the great historical marker of Western history: the coming of Christ. The play's historical remoteness is obscured by its abundant anachronisms -- steeples, knights, weathercocks, spectacles, godsons, monopolies, codpieces – all suggesting that the time in which the play is set is contemporary with the time of its first audience. But at one point, smack in the middle of the Folio text (with about 1700 lines on either side), the play goes out of its way to insist upon its distance from the time of its performance.

With the cataclysmic storm still raging, as Lear is being led to shelter in a nearby hovel, the Fool remains behind to deliver an apocalyptic prophecy: "I'll speak a prophecy ere I go" (TLN1734). No sooner has the Fool spoken the prophecy, however, than he remarks on its prematurity. "This prophecy shall Merlin make,/ For I do live before his time" (TLN1748). With this jaunty and jolting observation, the Fool drives his time back and away from that of the audience. Curiously it is the figure of Merlin who serves to mark this divide. *King Lear* takes place *before* the time of Merlin; the audience exists *after* that time. Instead of a BC and AD divide, we have BM (*Before Merlin*) and AM (*Anno Merlini)*. So why Merlin?

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Parker, John, *The Aesthetics of Antichrist: From Christian Drama to Christopher Marlowe* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007).

Joanne Diaz
"That most sacred Spring of pregnant Metaphors"[1]:
Jeremiah and the Biblical Rhetoric of Complaint

Even as theologians, physicians, and dramatic theorists recommended the moderation of the passions, early modern dramatic texts consistently presented characters in extreme emotional distress. Actors threw themselves to the ground when their characters heard unbearably bad news, folded their arms as a sign of inconsolable sorrow, sat on the stage when the burden of their tragedies was too great to bear, and pulled at their hair to enunciate the physiological effects of their suffering. These prescribed gestures resulted in a heightened attention to complaint as a rhetorical and physiological process made intelligible onstage.

Throughout the early modern period, rhetoricians and theorists of dramatic performance referred to Jeremiah as a complainant whose gestures and words of despair were effective, wide-ranging, and powerful in large part because of their foundations in divine communication. In my seminar paper, I will consider how Jeremiah functions as a Biblical precedent for Shakespeare's complainants. I will examine scenes of complaint in

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[1] John Bulwer, *Chirologia, or, The naturall language of the hand* (London: 1644), 13.

Shakespeare's *Richard III* and *King John* to better understand how extreme emotional distress becomes crucial to effective testimony while at the same time providing consolation to those who utter complaint. In doing so, I hope to demonstrate to pervasive power of complaint as a mode of expression that investigates questions about the impossibility of ever doing—or saying—enough about despair in post-Reformation England.

Suggested Readings:

Brian Cummings, *The Literary Culture of the Reformation: Grammar and Grace.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002.

Goodland, Katharine, "'Obsequious Laments': Mourning and Communal Memory in Shakespeare's *Richard III*." *Religion and the Arts* 7, no. 1-2 (2002): 31-64.

Deborah K. Shuger, *Renaissance Bible: Scholarship, Sacrifice, and Subjectivity*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994.

Joseph Jenkins
"Dead Hand Rising: Dialectics Beyond Last Wills in *The Merchant of Venice*"

This paper marks ways that *The Merchant of Venice* refers to the struggle for control of Grace, as the Word passes down from forebears to followers. Shylock compares himself to Jacob, *Genesis*' primary figure of the follower who actively participates in his own blessing by his forebear. But Shylock slips to representing that which is old and overcome: representing not only Laban vis-à-vis Jacob (per Lars Engle), but the Hebrew Scriptures themselves as taken by Christian (typological) hermeneutics (per Julia Reinhard Lupton). Portia, who, in the trial scene, names herself Balthasar, as the Jew Daniel did in the Court of Nebuchadnezzar, blots out the distinction between Christian and Jew, at least as it applies to harsh dealings in law and contract. Portia is also Jacob-like, as she helps Bassanio in the casket trial to become the one her father will have Willed to be her husband. Ultimately, this paper attempts, with the help of Giorgio Agamben's book on Paul, to delineate as precisely as possible the cross, depicted in this play, between inter-generational Grace (the Jacob-like struggle with the received Word) and the seemingly synchronic Grace-as-Mercy these Christians demand from Shylock in his contractual dealings.

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Lars Engle, “Thrift is Blessing,” *Shakespeare Quarterly*, Vol. 37, Iss. 1 (Spring 1986), 20-37.

Mauricio Martinez

The Pelican, the Owl, and the Raven: Biblical Birds in Shakespeare’s Tragedies

Shakespeare’s use of images of birds has never escaped critical appreciation or scrutiny. And while the classical and folk traditions behind some of Shakespeare’s most portentous natural symbols have already been effectively mapped, the significance of their Biblical allusions remains in large part still to be explored. This paper argues that certain birds in Shakespeare’s plays, such as the owl, pelican and raven, when considered alongside the Biblical imagery they provoke, not only add to our understanding of the richness of Shakespeare’s language but also illuminate the larger religious undercurrents within the plays themselves, particularly with respect to the tragedies. Thus the paper will consider whether Shakespeare had the owl and the raven in Isaiah 34.11 of the Geneva Bible in mind when crafting Tamora’s lines invoking the “nightly owl” and “fatal raven” (2.3.97) in *Titus Andronicus,* and the implications of this reading to the relationship between this play and what E.D. Mackerness describes as a late-Elizabethan “literature of warning” which positioned London as a Biblical Nineveh or early-Christian Jerusalem. The paper will then explore similar connections in *Hamlet*, whose “croaking raven bellows for revenge” (3.2.265), in Lear’s understanding of his “Pelican daughters” (3.4.73), and in the repeated image of the owl in *Macbeth* as a theologically-inflected indicator of ill-omen and impending generalized catastrophe. The paper therefore argues that exploring the Biblical allusions contained in some of Shakespeare’s bird imagery not only offers an enhanced understanding as to the significance of these specific images themselves, but also provides greater insight into the theological terrain these plays ultimately occupy.

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Michele Osherow

I Henry VI and the Women of Judges

Shakespeare makes numerous references to the Book of Judges in *I Henry VI*. He names a character from Judges outright, quotes biblical language, parodies biblical episodes, and

undermines representation of biblical heroines. This paper will examine the complexities of these references and the ways in which they reflect a larger early modern anxiety surrounding the women of this biblical book. A number of references to Judges women appear in Shakespeare's characterization, specifically, of Joan la Pucelle. Early on the Dauphin describes her as fighting "with the sword of Deborah" (1.2.105). It is not surprising to see the French regard Joan in divine terms. What is surprising are the ways Shakespeare enables the comparison between Joan and Deborah even while indulging in representations of la Pucelle as witch and whore. Though I have examined previously the description of Joan as Deborah, in fact, I think Shakespeare's characterization of la Pucelle conflates a variety of Judges women, demonstrating the alarming ease with which a heroine may shift from prophetess to prostitute. By referencing the additional narratives of Jael, Jephthah's daughter, Delilah, and an unnamed concubine, Shakespeare crafts a holy redeemer who degenerates into a "foul accursed minister of hell" (5.4.93).

Shakespeare's manipulation of the histories of Judges women, in particular, reminds us of the significance of the book to the early modern English. Jephthah's daughter was celebrated for her uncompromising obedience and self-sacrifice; the prophetess Deborah was, of course, a popular referent during Elizabeth's reign to justify a woman's place as political, social, and religious leader. But the women's narratives toward the book's close feature tales of deception, harlotry, and rape. The discomfort with and ultimate corruption of female power that occurs in Shakespeare's *I Henry VI* is mirrored in his contemporaries' readings of Judges endorsing, in effect, the book's final argument that what Israel needs is a king (21.25).

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Holly Crawford Pickett
"O Taste and See": Tasting Mercy in *Henry V*

> "O taste, and see that the Lord is sweet: blessed is the man that hopeth in him."
> — Psalm 34:8 (Douay-Rheims)

Though controversies surrounding idolatry in early modern England centered largely around what Michael O'Connell has usefully called the "idolatrous eye," the majority of the five senses were nonetheless involved in both religious and theatrical praxis. Taking as my scriptural warrant the surprising alliance between taste and sight in Psalm 34, I query the religious significance of alimentation in early modern English religious debates

at large, and in Shakespeare's *Henry V* in particular. The Eucharistic controversies obviously loom large here, both in early modern discourse, and in the "flowing cups" of Henry's Crispin Crispian speech. But, for early modern Christians, there were other foods with sacred genealogies, including, most notably, Eden's fruit from the Tree of Knowledge. To what extent did taste offer an alternative way of knowing (or at least expressing one's knowledge of) God? Is alimentation an epistemological model or metaphor? If so, how might it differ from one based on sight?

In *Henry V*, references to taste are always surrounded by the biblical language of either judgment or mercy (or, more often, judgment couched in the language of mercy). Such references play a part in the larger patterns (in the Crispin Crispian speech, in particular) associating taste with communion (with both a big and a little *c*), memorialization, and responsibility. Those references, in turn, resonate with both the theory and warnings surrounding the Eucharist in the *Book of Common Prayer*. There, Eucharist becomes either a chance to "benefyte" or to "drincke our owne dampnation," depending on the mindfulness and discernment of the participant. To "taste death," in the language of both the Gospels and the play, holds the punning promise of either salvation or damnation.

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O'Connell, Michael. *The Idolatrous Eye: Iconoclasm and Theater in Early-Modern England*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000.

Cody Reis

Misrecognizing *The Tempest*

The Tempest has had a high, if uneven, profile in both the curious modernist controversy over whether or not to practice allegorical interpretation as well as in the more or less historicist return to religion in contemporary Renaissance studies. If the play might continue to be read in terms of both allegory and religion, I propose that it must also be read in terms of a history of skepticism stretching from Shakespeare's reading of Montaigne to Harry Berger Jr.'s reading of Stanley Cavell. Such a reading entails an acknowledgement of the extent to which allegory and religion, without being denied or declined in the play, are both a source and a product of *misrecognition* in its various senses in critical theory.

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Still, Colin. *Shakespeare's Mystery Play: A Study of The Tempest*. Folcroft: Folcroft Press, 1921.

Marilyn Simon

The paper I am proposing is, broadly speaking, about grace in Shakespeare. I will be looking specifically at Bottom's waking speech in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and showing how in this moment Shakespeare uses religious discourse to describe a transcendent yet wholly secular moment of grace and love. It is well known that Bottom's declaration, "the eye of man hath not heard, the ear of man hath not seen" (4.218-219) is a muddled reference to 1 Corinthians 2:9, the verse in which Paul describes the bliss that awaits the Christian in heaven. My goal is to show how Shakespeare uses the promise of Christianity's belated heavenly joys to characterize moments of human love (or in this case, animal/human and fairy love) that occur, however fleetingly, now, in this world. Further, I'll also be showing that since Bottom is, arguably, one of the greatest fools in the canon, Shakespeare uses him to express the mystery of divine grace: "God hathe chosen the foolish things of the worlde to confounde the wise" (1Cor. 1:27), writes Paul, just a few verses before the passage to which Bottom alludes. Brian Cummings writes that "grace is nothing if not 'outrepasse': it is the definitive expression of what is beyond experience, and even beyond language" (48). It is precisely Bottom's embrace of the illogical and the inexplicable that allows him to express and accept his strange and wonderful experience in the woods; further, the muddled misquoting of Paul's letter expresses – ironically, with perhaps even greater clarity than Paul's original verse – the illogical and inexplicable nature of love.

My research will focus mainly on the Protestant discourse of Shakespeare's day. Specifically, I'll be showing how Shakespeare taps into ideas that are expressed in the sermons of Lancelot Andrewes, the writings of Richard Hooker, and the foundational documents of the Anglican Church to give a deeper context to Bottom's experience in the forest. The work of critics Debora Shuger, Patrick Collinson, and, of course, Brian Cummings will inform much of my work.

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Dustin Stegner
Identifying Sin and Guilt in Shakespeare's *Sonnets*

In the *Sonnets*, Shakespeare represents confessional speech as incapable of overcoming the effects of the speaker's sinful desire. After experiencing feelings of betrayal and guilt, the speaker of the *Sonnets* may momentarily renounce the young man, but he remains committed to merging his identity with the object of his desire. The speaker's interior conflict between penitential impulse and transgressive desire leads him to identify more completely with sin. Over the course of the *Sonnets*, the poet paradoxically seeks to reconcile these contrary impulses by identifying himself with various meanings of will or, more specifically, with what Augustine terms "disordered will" or *voluntante perversa*. In this essay, I want to examine how this strategy recalls the medieval tradition in which allegorical representations of sins destabilize their identity through confessional speech. I focus on how the *Sonnets*-speaker's assumption of the name Will simultaneously functions as a revelation of identity and an admission of sinful desire. In short, the speaker's dual-naming of himself, on the one hand, promises resolution to the fractured unitary relationship, but, on the other, condemns him to a form of unending desire. Shakespeare's representation of the speaker's fractured identity, I want to suggest, engages contemporary debates surrounding the biblical nature of penitence and repentance.

Will Stockton
Portia's Pauline Perversion: The Merchant of Venice and Romans 1:26-27

This paper reads Portia's transvestite intercession in the Venetian court against Romans 1:26-27 – verses now frequently utilized to condemn homosexuality. Portia's disguise has

long been understood in terms of her efforts to reorient Bassanio's homoerotic affections, and is thus rarely discussed at any length by critics of the play's religious and/or racial politics. I will suggest, however, that Portia's disguise and performance also reproduce the gendered logic of Pauline Christianity, wherein Christian righteousness equates with masculinity, and sinfulness with femininity. I will further suggest that Portia's performance is itself vulnerable to Pauline critique: that she at once models the active, masculine posture of righteousness and its female perversion.

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2001. 133-72.

Adrian Street
Measure for Measure and the Problem of Romans.

Almost half of the biblical references in *Measure for Measure* are, according to Naseeb Shaheen, taken from the book of Romans. At a time Paul, and Pauline theology, is making something of a philosophical comeback (Žižek, Badiou etc), this paper will re-examine Shakespeare's engagement with Pauline ethics in *Measure for Measure*. It will particularly focus on the play's exploration of justification and grace, issues that were topics of intense theological and exegetical contention in 1604.

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Jennifer Waldron

Loving by the Book in *Love's Labor's Lost*: Theater, Typology, Secularization

In act four, scene three, of *Love's Labor's Lost*, the witty Berowne cites scripture to justify violating his prior oath to steer clear of women: "It is religion to be thus forsworn,/ For charity itself fulfills the law,/ And who can sever love from charity?" This is a comic moment: clearly he will say anything at this point to justify his embarrassing turnabout from skeptic to "idolater." However, it is also a turning point that corresponds to several later iterations of the law/love structure in Shakespeare's plays. These include the trial and "death" of Hermione in *The Winter's Tale* and the corresponding scene at the end of the play, when Paulina defends the statue's quasi-miraculous revival as "lawful." These plot structures draw in significant ways both on a Christian typology of love as the "fulfillment" of the law (Romans 13:10) and on particular Reformation debates surrounding the holiness of matrimony, Tyndale's translation of *agape* as "love" rather than "charity," and others. As at key moments in Shakespeare's later plays, the scriptural allusions in *Love's Labor's Lost* serve among other things as a kind of literary and performance theory. This essay will examine the way in which Berowne's Pauline justification of love accompanies a parallel shift in representational media as the play progresses. As the four lords violate their vows of chastity, they also eventually abandon the text-based discourses of the academy, what Berowne calls the "slow arts" confined to the brain. These are dismissed as "barren practisers" that "scarce show a harvest of their heavy toil." On the side of love, fulfillment, and fertile labors, the play then turns in act five to embodied theatrical productions such as the Muscovite masque and the Nine Worthies pageant (though these do not exactly show a harvest either). How might Shakespeare use this structuring trope of law and love to invest live theatrical performance with certain kinds of quasi-religious significance? How might these love plots—and, differently, these plays-within-plays—be tied to particular post-Reformation forms of secularization?

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Julia Lupton, *Afterlives of the Saints: Hagiography, Typology, and Renaissance Literature* (Stanford, 1996).

John Parker, *The Aesthetics of Antichrist: From Christian Drama to Christopher Marlowe* (Cornell, 2007). See especially chapter one, "Lying Likenesses: Typology and the Medieval *Miracula*."

Lewis Walker
Biblical Imagery in Shakespeare: Two Cases

Stephen Marx's Shakespeare and the Bible usefully points out that "Shakespeare read the Bible with a wide range of interpretative responses to its vast plenitude of meanings." Examples of two different kinds of response to the Bible's verbal stimuli can be seen in Antony and Cleopatra and 1 Henry IV. In the former, Antony makes a clear reference to Psalm 22 when, having sent Thidias to be whipped for kissing Cleopatra's hand, he bitterly exclaims, "Oh, that I were / Upon the hill of Basan, to outroar / The horned herd" (3.13.128-30). The psalmist uses the roaring of bulls of Bashan to indicate both the cry of pain uttered by the oppressed as well as the menacing sound made by his tormentors. Shakespeare has Antony imagine himself, in his anguish, as roaring louder than the herd of bulls. He also modifies the psalm, giving the bulls horns, which allows Antony to see himself as a victim of cuckolding. The two ways in which the psalmist uses roaring are merged in Antony's "outroar." The indisputable reference to the bulls of Bashan opens the possibility that the rest of the psalm, or at least parts of it, might be allusively implicated in the play. In v. 14, the psalmist describes his weakness in terms of fluidity, and this may be a source for the imagery of water and everything associated with it as a marker of character and action, especially as an indication of decline, degeneration, and decay—even though there are no exact correspondences between the psalm's vocabulary of fluidity and that of the play. In 1 Henry IV, among the scriptural echoes that have been identified is Hal's reference to "redeeming time" (1.2.207). The two-verse sentence from Ephesians that contains this phrase reads as follows: "Take hede therefore that ye walke circumspectly, not as fooles, but as wise, / Redeeming the time: for the days are evil" (5: 15-16). With the clear reference to the Pauline phrase from the second part of the sentence, there is warrant for considering the image of walking circumspectly from the first part as significantly implicated in the play. Throughout the play, and especially in the Gadshill robbery scene, the partially secularized resonances of this scriptural "walking" seem to be in play. It should be noted that forms of the verb walk are more numerous in 1 Henry IV than in any other Shakespearean play besides Hamlet.

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