

# S K E N È

**Journal of Theatre and Drama Studies**

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“Well-Staged Syllables”:  
From Classical to Early Modern English Metres  
in Drama

Edited by Silvia Bigliuzzi

## SKENÈ Journal of Theatre and Drama Studies

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*Founded by Guido Avezzi, Silvia Bigliuzzi, and Alessandro Serpieri*

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HANNIBAL HAMLIN\*

**Chanita Goodblatt, *Jewish and Christian Voices in English Reformation Biblical Drama: Enacting Family and Monarchy*, London and New York: Routledge, 2018, ISBN 978-1-4724-7978-5, pp. 256**

Abstract

Chanita Goodblatt's *Jewish and Christian Voices in English Reformation Biblical Drama: Enacting Family and Monarchy* rides the second wave of the turn to religion in early modern literary studies, exploring the intertextual relationships between a series of Renaissance plays and the biblical texts they adapt, as well as the commentaries that interpret those texts. A particular strength is her drawing on both Jewish and Christian interpretive traditions, showing how the latter is often dependent upon the former. She also reads these plays, along with their intertexts, within their historical periods, the history itself (both the events and texts generated by them) another of the intertexts that so enriches the drama, and to which the drama contributes. The overarching theme is family and monarchy (the two inextricable in the Tudor period), but other through threads include the nature of performance in both drama and language, narrative, metaphor, and allegory.

KEYWORDS: Bible; Renaissance drama; intertextuality; Reformation; *David and Bethsabe*

The turn to religion in the scholarship of early modern English drama has been underway for long enough now that it is supposedly undergoing a “second wave”, characterized by scholars who are, among other things, “uninterested in recovering or reconstructing the specific belief systems of playwrights or their audience” (Mardock and MacPherson 2014, 9).<sup>1</sup> Gone are the days of academic conferences that threatened to revive and reenact the Reformation, Protestant and Catholic scholars lined up against each other fighting over the true faith of Shakespeare and his contemporary playwrights. Scholars of early modern Catholicism or Protestantism cannot today be assumed to be members of either Christian denomination, or indeed of any faith at all. There was a time

<sup>1</sup> The seminal announcement of the turn was Jackson and Marotti 2004.

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when if one was not doctrinally partisan it seemed necessary to assert, as did Diarmaid MacCulloch in his distinguished history, *The Reformation*, that “I do not now personally subscribe to any form of religious dogma”.<sup>2</sup> Now, almost twenty years on, writing about early modern religion, in its literary or any other manifestations, is no longer automatically suspected of stemming from a position of personal belief, and thus of proselytizing rather than pursuing sound, objective scholarship. Whether scholars of the “second wave” hold such beliefs or not, they nevertheless take for granted that genuine religious belief was virtually universal among early modern English men and women, rejecting both the persistent Whiggish secularization thesis that the Reformation abruptly disenchanting the world, and also the New Historicist conflation of religion and politics that again failed to take religion seriously in its own right.

In *Jewish and Christian Voices in English Reformation Biblical Drama*, Chanita Goodblatt focuses on a body of dramatic texts whose engagement with religion few would contest, since they are based on biblical narratives. Even if there still remain scholars who cling tenaciously to the notion that the theater of Shakespeare, Middleton, and Massinger was secular, the secularity of George Peele’s *David and Fair Bethsabe*, or the anonymous *Godly Queen Hester* and *Jacob and Esau*, would be hard to argue. But Goodblatt is less interested in probing the relative secularity or religiosity of the Tudor theater than in exploring just how these particular biblical plays participate, as she writes, “both textually and performatively — in the Reformation effort to translate and interpret the Bible” (1). Goodblatt describes her approach to this exploration in meticulous detail at the beginning of the book. It is, first, broadly intertextual. Goodblatt does not simply compare the biblical plays to their biblical sources, since those sources are themselves not simple. The sixteenth century was a frenzy of English Bible translation, so the biblical intertext for each of these plays might have been different, or indeed a combination of English versions. Despite Protestant claims for the self-sufficiency of Scripture, the Bible was also a text that needed to be interpreted, and aids to interpretation proliferated, including sermons, commentaries, paraphrases, and literary adaptations which — like the plays themselves — were also a mode of interpretation. Goodblatt includes a range of these materials in each of her chapters. They are not, for the most part, sources for the playwrights but intertexts in the Bakhtinian or Kristevan sense, elements in a complex multimodal discourse of biblical hermeneutics in which the playwrights and their audiences were participants. Reconstructing these intertextual networks, even partially, allows modern readers to participate as well, gaining a better sense of the range of meaning available in and through each of the scriptural narratives.

Goodblatt’s title points to another aspect of her intertextual endeavor, in that she aims to include not just Christian but Jewish intertexts, including the

<sup>2</sup> However he continues, “although I do remember with some affection what it was like to do so” (MacCulloch 2004, xxv).

Hebrew Bible as well as Midrash, the Talmud, and influential medieval rabbinic commentaries by the Spanish Abraham Ibn Ezra and the French Rashi (Shlomo Yitzchaki) and David Kimhi. Goodblatt has written expertly on Christian Hebraism, especially in John Donne, but she is not arguing here for influence (see Goodblatt 2010). The intention seems rather to expand our perspective on biblical texts and their interpretation beyond even the broad range of Christian exegesis. This is an especially intriguing move, since it also moves beyond the standard (not necessarily ‘new’) historicism of most scholarship on Renaissance drama. Always historicize, Frederic Jameson famously commanded. But maybe not. Or perhaps we need to rethink what constitutes historicizing. As Goodblatt points out, Martin Luther puzzled over the verb used by Esau in begging food from his brother Jacob. “Feed me, I pray thee, with that same red pottage” is how the sentence is translated in the King James Bible, but the Hebrew (*hal’itēni*) is a hapax legomenon, a word appearing only in this one biblical verse. Luther recognizes that it is obscure for both Christians and Jews, citing Rabbi Solomon, who “imagines that Esau was so tired that he was unable to raise his hands to his mouth and put the food into himself”. Goodblatt points out that, although he does not admit it, Luther is relying here on *De Rudimentis Hebraicis* by the German Hebraist Johannes Reuchlin, in which Reuchlin explains Esau’s request by citing the explanation of Rabbi Solomon (i.e., Shlomo Yitzchaki, or Rashi). Any English Christian reading Luther’s lectures on Genesis is thus absorbing Rashi’s exegesis, however unconsciously, so that while direct access to Jewish scholarship in early modern Germany (and England) may have been limited, the ideas of those scholars circulated far beyond the reach of their own writings, and in ways often difficult to trace. Furthermore, interpretations presented in sixteenth-century books might well originate centuries earlier.

Appropriately for a study of plays, Goodblatt also emphasizes the performative, by which she means not just drama as it was staged in the theater, but language as “performative utterance”, as theorized by J.L. Austin (1975), in which the very stating of a thing also enacts it. The classic examples are wedding vows, when the celebrant’s, “I now pronounce you husband and wife”, speaks the marriage into being, or when a policeman declares, “you are under arrest”. In a biblical context, of course, one might observe that the ultimate performative utterance is God’s, when he speaks Creation into existence: “And God said, Let there be light: and there was light” (Gen. 1:3). The actors of biblical plays are performing interpretations of the biblical originals, but Goodblatt argues that there is a performative aspect to the writing of Reformation exegetes like William Tyndale, as when he pronounces on the sense of Scripture, famously rejecting the allegorical in favor of the literal:

Thou shalt understand therefore that the scripture hath but one sense which is the literal sense. And that literal sense is the root and ground of all, and the anchor that never faileth whereunto [*to which*] if thou cleave thou canst never err

or go out of the way. And if thou leave the literal sense thou canst not but go out of the way. Neverthelater [*nevertheless*] the scripture useth proverbs, similitudes, riddles or allegories as all other speeches do, but that which the proverb, similitude, riddle or allegory signifieth is ever the literal sense which thou must seke out diligently. (2000, 156)

As Goodblatt recognizes, Tyndale here “cites, but also transforms, the words of his own biblical translation concerning the love and hope given by Christ: Ephesians 3:17 — “that ye being rooted and grounded in love” . . . and Hebrews 6:19 — “which hope we have as an anchor of the soul both sure and steadfast (2)”.<sup>3</sup> I would go further and suggest that he does not cite but rather alludes, though the power of his utterance no doubt lies in the reader’s recognition of the incorporated words of his own Bible translation, even if Tyndale does not set them out as quotations.

The final element of Goodblatt’s general focus is the theme of family and monarchy. This is perhaps an arbitrary choice among many other possibilities, but it is true that in both much of the Bible and Tudor England the concerns and conflicts of the royal dynasty and the royal family are inextricably intertwined. More than in any other European country, the Reformation in England was a family affair, as the monarchical succession of Henry VIII’s children, from different wives (one dead in childbirth, one divorced, one beheaded), swung the country to Protestantism, then back to Catholicism, and then back again to Protestantism in barely more than a decade. Goodblatt’s chosen theme also nicely suits those biblical dramas that survive from the period: *The Enterlude of Godly Queen Hester* (performed 1529-30, printed 1561), *The History of Jacob and Esau* (performed 1552-53, printed 1568), and George Peele’s *The Love of King David and the Fair Bethsabe* (printed 1599). That these plays were written and performed in distinctly different political contexts — the reigns of Henry VIII, Edward VI, and Elizabeth I — also allows for a broader historical scope.

One particular useful decision by Goodblatt is to make crystal clear the structure of her analysis, first in a set of tables that lay out in advance the key plays and their contexts, the supplementary texts she brings them in touch with, and finally the “Jewish and Christian Exegetical/Historical Texts” used to explore the hermeneutical fields in which the primary works move and have their being. I found myself referring to these frequently, and I expect many readers will welcome them too. The structure of the book is also clear, with two chapters devoted to each play, under the section titles, “Rules of reign” (Hester), “Birthright and blessing” (Jacob and Esau), and “Passions and intrigues” (David and Bethsabe). The logic of each of these sections is helpfully articulated at the end of the introduction. Each chapter also ends with a valuable summary and a ‘prospect’ of

<sup>3</sup> Goodblatt cites Tyndale 1989, 284, 352. Page references for this translation are useful, since verse numbers had not yet been adopted in Bibles.

what is to come in the next, making clear the relationship between the several pairings.

Each of Goodblatt's chapters begins with the Bible, including a transliteration of the Hebrew text of the Biblical rabbinica, printed in Venice in 1525, and as Goodblatt points out, a collaborative production between the Jewish scholar Jacob ben Hayim and the Christian printer Daniel Bomberg, as well as Goodblatt's own English translation, based on those of Robert Alter and the Jewish Publication Society (Tanakh). This has the double effect of continually reminding the reader of the primary biblical source, but also of productively estranging us (Goodblatt cites elsewhere Shklovsky's concept of *ostranenie*) from translations with which we may be too familiar to realize their status as translations.

Chapters 2 and 3 are on Esther, often described as the only book in the Bible without God.<sup>4</sup> The key dramatic text is the Tudor interlude, but Goodblatt also compares it to the *Comoedia von der Königen Esther und Hoffärtigen Haman*, a German play printed in 1620 but performed, as announced on the titlepage, by a troupe of English players touring royal courts as well as major towns. It has been argued that the play is a German translation as well as perhaps adaptation of a lost English play, *Esther and Ahasuerus*, payments for which appear in the diary of Philip Henslowe in 1594.<sup>5</sup> Particularly valuable for English readers is the inclusion of a translation of the German text of the *Comoedia*, perhaps the first ever printed, as an appendix. The story of Esther interweaves national, ethnic, and familial concerns. King Ahasuerus of Persia (perhaps Xerxes I?) marries the Jewish beauty Esther. The King's advisor, Haman, is affronted by Esther's uncle Mordecai, who has gained the King's favor by revealing an assassination plot. Haman persuades Ahasuerus to let him exterminate the Jews throughout Persia, but by various means Esther persuades the King to hang Haman, promote Mordecai in his place, and grant Persian Jews not only pardon but special privilege. The celebration of this event is marked by the Jewish feast of Purim. Esther's power, as Goodblatt argues, is verbal, allowing her to cast Haman into disrepute and manipulate Ahasuerus into granting her wishes, though she does not present them as such. Goodblatt cites Susan Zaeske's description of Esther as a manual of "rhetorical theory" (25), and she notes in particular Esther's use of "parallelism to set up 'relationships of equivalence' . . . among the pleas for favor; and in the apt use of end rhyme and a concluding rhyming couplet to

<sup>4</sup> The Song of Solomon might also qualify, though Jewish and Christian readers have always read it allegorically as an expression of God's love for the Church, or Mary, or individual people. Some English Bibles even include allegorical descriptions as page headers (e.g., "Her desire to Christ").

<sup>5</sup> This argument applies not just to this play, since records survive of English players touring Germany with a number of plays, at least some of which may plausibly have been versions of English originals. The most attention has naturally focused on *Der bestrafte Brudermord*, perhaps a version of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (see Creizenach 1889).

underline her emotional intensity”<sup>6</sup>. She also uses conditional verb tenses in a combination of “the conventions of ‘courtly politeness’. . . with a strategic use of sexual promise”<sup>7</sup>.

Through a variety of intertexts, Goodblatt connects the representation of Esther’s performative speech acts in the interlude with Henrician anxieties about good counsel and royal misrule, as well as with the good, wise woman exemplified (at least in 1530) by Katherine of Aragon. The same wise woman theme works even better in the mid-1590s for the lost Esther play with Elizabeth on the throne, as it does in the 1550s with the allegorical play *Respublica* (another intertext) staged at the court of Queen Mary. The valence and significance of many aspects of the story shift, however. Especially interesting are the Jews so central to the narrative. In the Henrician interlude, they are essentially stand-ins for the English, Christian, people, with “Jewish prayer”, as Goodblatt observes, “completely assimilated into Christian ritual” (31). The most obvious Haman figure is the recently disgraced Cardinal Wolsey. Yet when the play was first printed in 1561, it could no longer be comfortably read as (Greg Walker’s suggestion) a championing of Catholic religious orders like the House of Converts supported by Katherine of Aragon and daughter Mary. By this time, as James Shapiro puts it, the “newly elect Protestant nation, England, looked to Jewish practices as a model for its own” (1996, 173). And later in the century, at the time of the lost play, the attitude to Jews had again shifted, especially in the wake of 1594 execution of Robert Lopez, a New Christian (i.e., converted Jew) convicted of attempting to assassinate Elizabeth, to whom he served as physician. The Jews in the German *Comedy* are represented quite differently from the Tudor interlude, hooded and murmuring (German *murmeln*) indistinct prayers. As Goodblatt remarks, this would accord with the experience of actual Jews living in seventeenth-century Germany, required to wear long wide hoods, and highly suspicious to the Christian community for what was perceived as their secrecy and foreignness. Even in Elizabethan England, however, where Jews were still banned, any response to the scene of Haman’s execution in *Godly Queen Hester* would have been complicated by memories of Lopez. Fascinatingly, Goodblatt draws in Robert Devereux, one of Lopez’s accusers, and himself executed for treason in 1601, at which event he gave a speech confessing to having been “puffed up with pride” (39). In the Apocryphal chapters added to Esther, Asuerus condemns Haman as “puft up with so great swelling of arogancie”. The translation Goodblatt cites is the Catholic Douay-Rheims, however, which was only printed in 1609-10. Other English Bibles do not have “puffed up” in this context, and yet Goodblatt is not interested in sources but intertexts, and her argument, bolstered by Foucault’s writing on the “spectacle of the scaffold”, that thinking of the execution scenes of Haman, Wolsey, Lopez, or Devereux can illuminate

<sup>6</sup> Citing on parallelism Berlin 2008, 135.

<sup>7</sup> Citing on “courtly politeness” Clines 1984, 101.

the nature of what she calls this “recognizable national and religious liturgy” remains convincing. Perhaps more useful to Goodblatt than the specific use of “pufft up” in the Douay-Rheims would have been a wider EEBO search of the idiom, charting the various contexts in which this term for pride crops up (the Jews were often called “puffed up”, for instance, and in John Bale’s account of the martyrdom of Anne Askewe, in which he twice refers to Haman, the servants of Bishops Gardiner and Bonner are called “puffed up porklings”).

The inclusion of the *Comedy of Queen Esther* allows Goodblatt to explore not only the significance of the Esther story in different periods but in different genres. If the *Godly Queene Hester* is about right rule, wise counsel, and the elect nation, so too is the Comedy, but in a distinctly carnivalesque mode. The slapstick between Hans Knapkäse (Poor Cheese?) and his wife, for instance, the latter beating her husband into obedience, is obviously a riotous parody of Esther’s power over her husband the King. There is a carnivalesque element to the *Godly Queene* too, in the character Hardydardy, a prototype of the Shakespearean Fool. Goodblatt explores his wisely-foolish chiding of his master Haman and the use of proverbial wisdom (also a biblical genre) in the play. Esther closes a speech condemning Haman with the proverb, “The hygher they clime, the deper they fall”, for instance, the same proverb cited in Erasmus’s *De Contemptu Mundi* (English trans. 1533), suggesting that Esther’s wisdom is less folksy than Humanist, especially given (Goodblatt argues) the same Erasmus’s praise for the learning of Katherine of Aragon. Hardydardy’s final comment on his master’s hanging is the proverb, “I wene by God, he made a rodde / for his own ars!” brings his retelling of Ovid’s account of the tyrant Phalaris (who executed the maker of a torture device by putting him in his own invention) to a bathetic end. Yet Goodblatt points out that reading this as a bawdy parody of Humanist Classical learning belies the tendency to mix the learned and scatological in much sixteenth-century discourse. John Frith, for instance, attacks indulgences using exactly the same proverb as Hardydardy (and Frith was burned at the stake in 1533, the same year Katherine of Aragon’s marriage was declared unlawful).

The focus of chapters 4 and 5 is the Jacob and Esau story, primarily in the anonymous play *Jacob and Esau* (1552-53), but also in a range of intertexts, some already familiar from the previous chapters, some new: the twelfth-century *Ordo de Ysaac et Rebecca et Filiis Eorum Recitandus* (discovered at Vorau in Austria), *Respublica* (again), the *Jacob* play from the Towneley Cycle, and commentary from Luther and Calvin, Midrash and Targum, Rashi and Ibn Ezra, and the Englishmen Gervase Babington and John Preston. Goodblatt packs in far more than can be covered here, but one key hermeneutic principle addressed in this section is the “semantic gap” (76). Biblical writing is famously minimalist, especially in Genesis, as articulated in the celebrated first chapter of Erich Auerbach’s *Mimesis*, but elaborated by later scholars such as Meier Sternberg. One consequence of the minimalist narrative is that the text often raises more questions than it answers, generating in readers an impulse to fill in these ‘gaps’

through allegorization, midrash, interpolation or extrapolation, or some other means. Goodblatt opens with the riddles posed by Genesis 25:21-23: when Isaac prays to God for his wife to conceive, does he pray in the presence of his wife or on behalf of her, the Hebrew allowing both meanings? what, Goodblatt asks, is Rebekah doing while Isaac prays? and what does it mean in verse 25:22 that “she went to inquire of the Lord”? Rebekah’s inquiry is curiously physical, since presumably one does not need to actually walk anywhere to ask something of God. As Goodblatt points out, however, the whole passage emphasizes the bodily, with the twins “crushed” within Rebekah, and God’s promise stating not just that she will be the mother of nations, but that two nations “are in your womb, And two peoples from your inward parts shall be separated” (75). This is only appropriate, since “a child’s fateful birth comprises at once a literal consequence and a metaphor of revelation” (76).

Chapter 4 focuses not just on women’s prayer but on sight, both as featured in the story in Isaac’s blindness and in its essential place in the theater (the Greek root of this word actually meaning “seeing” or “sight”). Among other questions, Goodblatt asks whether Isaac’s blindness is merely literal or also spiritual. In his edition of the play, Paul Whitfield White (1992) has argued that the reference to predestination by the “Poet” in the Prologue to *Jacob and Esau* derives from Calvin, and Goodblatt notes also Calvin’s writing on spiritual blindness in the *Institutes*: “our minds, as they have been blinded, do not perceive what is true” (91). Calvin then cites Paul’s rejection of worldly wisdom in favor of the “folly of preaching” (1 Cor. 1:21), before describing God’s wisdom (again borrowing from Paul) as “this magnificent theater of heaven and earth” (91). The theatrical metaphor can be read back into *Jacob and Esau*, which also requires a kind of right seeing, the audience needing to recognize Isaac’s blindness of mind as well as sight, as well as (apparently) the rightness of Rebekah and Jacob’s theatrical deception of Isaac, which seems nevertheless to have divine sanction. One striking visual element of this particular play is its attempt to represent the story in appropriate historical detail; White calls *Jacob and Esau* “the first professed attempt in an English play at ‘period costume’” (108). Goodblatt cites the references to “cheverell” (goat skins), staff and sheep crook, the scrubbing of vessels, the use of shekels and talents. This in striking contrast to the directions in the twelfth-century *Ordo* that indicate a distinctly medieval Jewish costume, with the same hoods and badges apparent in medieval manuscript paintings.

Despite the unusual historicizing in *Jacob and Esau*, however, how were audiences to interpret the characters they were seeing? Was the story really just about strange people in a far-away land and time? Tyndale fulminates against medieval Roman Catholic allegorizing of Scripture, which Rashi also practiced, explaining Jacob and Esau wrestling in Rebekah’s womb (in Goodblatt’s paraphrase) as between Jacob “struggling to be born when his mother passes by ‘the doors of the Torah [Pentateuch]’ or places of learning, and Esau, struggling to be born when she passes by the ‘door of [a temple of] idolatry’” (101). Sternberg,

as Goodblatt notes, calls this kind of reading “illegitimate gap-filling”, but Protestants practiced it too (as did Paul, interpreting Isaac and Ishmael as Christians and Jews in Galatians 4, using the very word “allegory”). Luther reads the fetal struggle as the conflict between Protestants and Catholics, or Christians and Muslims, and Jacob was for him the figure of a pious scholar, just as he was for Rashi. No surprise, then, that Luther interprets Esau’s clothes (Jacob’s disguise) as “priestly garments”, which jibes with the presentation (if not representation) of the older brother in the play as not actually a Jew (though of course he is, literally) but as “the Catholic anti-Christ”, as Goodblatt puts it (115). Supporting this interpretation of Esau and Jacob as Catholic and Protestant is the language given to each by the playwright: Jacob is constantly quoting or paraphrasing recognizable biblical texts, whereas Esau uses simply low-level Elizabethan speech, including insults like “mopishe elfe”, “hedgereeper”, saying that he will shake his knave of a servant “even as a dog that lulleth” (116). Goodblatt might also have noted the language Esau uses when offering his father meat in hopes of receiving the blessing already given to Jacob: “Have, ete, fader, of myn hunting” (115). “Have, eat” is surely intended to echo, parodically, the words of Jesus at the Last Supper that instituted the Eucharist: “Take, eat, this is my body which is given for you” (Cummings 2011, 31). These are the words as repeated in the service of Communion in the 1549 Book of Common Prayer, but given other signals that Esau is the Catholic to Jacob’s Protestant, audiences would have taken the allusion as to the Mass.<sup>8</sup> As Goodblatt concludes, the play, like the biblical story, “transforms the familial story into a narrative of identity” (98). Who receives the father’s blessing, who does not? Who is chosen by God, and who is rejected? And these questions apply most crucially to readers and audiences in the present (whenever that is), whether Jewish or Christian, Catholic or Protestant.

The final pair of chapters, 6 and 7, turns to the story of King David from 1 and 2 Samuel, and Goodblatt begins with Nathan’s Parable of the Ewe Lamb, what Sternberg calls a “veiled parable, a trap reserved for kings” (128). Drawing on the Bible scholars Erik Eynikel, Jan Fokkelman, and Joshua Berman, the literary critic Regina Schwartz, and the philosopher Stanley Cavell, Goodblatt takes us deeply into the workings of the parable. We have explored allegory earlier, and parables (like fables) are often considered subspecies of allegory, but we must resist, she argues, trying to read all the elements as having clear correspondents in the David story. It’s more flexible, since Bathsheba is obviously in some sense the stolen lamb (specified as female, a ewe), but she is not slaughtered, while her husband Uriah is, so he is both the poor owner of the ewe and the ewe itself. Furthermore, David’s response is actually two-fold, representing two kinds of

<sup>8</sup> Also notable is the presenting of meat rather than bread. Jesus says to his disciples that the bread he offers is his body, but for most Protestants this is not literally true. Catholics believe in transubstantiation, however, holding that the bread does become in some real sense flesh, as signaled in medieval miraculous visions of bleeding hosts.

justice and two different speech acts. First is the “performative, ‘passionate utterance’”, sentencing the offender to death; second, a verdictive speech (Austin’s term) assigning a penalty of four times the value of the lamb. The two statements curiously undermine each other, the fine seemingly oddly calculating after the burst of outrage, and the passion calling into question David’s ability to mete out dispassionate justice.

Goodblatt then examines how this scene is represented in Peele’s *David and Bethsabe* and, by contrast, the medieval Cornish *Origo Mundi*. The latter clumsily deflates the scene, changing out Nathan for the angel Gabriel and simplifying the drama. Peele, on the other hand, intensifies the drama by both staying close to the biblical original and adding in other biblical allusions. Goodblatt does wonderful work with the phrase “child of death”, the Hebrew used by David in his pronouncement: “As the Lord lives, a child of death is the man who has done this”. Among the major English Bibles, the Bishops’ Bible (1568) has “child of death” and the Geneva (1560) includes the phrase in a marginal note, while rendering David’s utterance in more idiomatic English. Peele’s David says that the offender “shall become the child of death”, preserving the idiom that points exclusively to the Bible, and Goodblatt observes that “in the context of family, the phrase retains a metaphoric quality that not only foreshadows the multiple tragedies in David’s family [the death of his child with Bathsheba, the rape of his child Tamar, the murder of his child Amnon, and the killing of his child Absalom, a fourfold punishment, as Rashi interprets it], but also judges him, because of his immoral actions, as the personification and agent of these deaths” (134). Peele’s play also includes the episode with the Teḳoite woman, conscripted by Joab to use another parable (represented as her own personal story) to persuade David to allow Absalom to return from exile. One brother in the parable kills another, and their relatives cry that the murderer “therefore may be the child of death”. The use of this phrase at this point in the story is Peele’s addition, as Goodblatt describes it, the Teḳoite woman thus reminding “David of his own stark concept of justice and [raising] the specter of the blood-avenger, to be supplemented by her allusion to familial and monarchal connotations of the tale” (145).

Peele’s play is the most sophisticated among those Goodblatt includes, transforming “biblical voices”, as she puts it, “into echoes of contemporaneous English affairs” (176). It raises questions about the relationship between law and justice, the problem of a wicked monarch, and whether action taken against such a monarch, including even rebellion, can be legitimate. Goodblatt quotes Naomi Pasachoff’s observation that “Peele may be the only Tudor to use the story of King David to point up the sympathetic aspects of Absalom’s rebellion” (148). Another of Peele’s additions to David’s response to the Teḳoite woman is his statement that “to God alone belongs revenge”, echoing Deuteronomy 32:35, but probably as repeated by Paul in Romans 12:19, often cited in Elizabethan condemnations of vengeance. The critical contemporary context for Peele’s treatment of justice and revenge is the execution of Mary Queen of Scots,

condemned for plotting against Queen Elizabeth, and Elizabeth's first cousin once removed (Henry VII the grandfather of Elizabeth and great-grandfather of Mary). Elizabeth and her Privy Council were keen to represent the controversial execution as an act of dispassionate justice, not revenge, and Sir Christopher Hatton drew on the David and Absalom story to make this point: "*Ne periat Israell periapt Absolon*", he stated to the House of Commons, "Absalom must perish, lest Israel Perish" (143). Historians like Peter Lake and Peter Marshal have recognized this allusion, but Goodblatt greatly enriches our understanding of its meaning by situating it within a broader intertextual field, including Elizabeth's own justification of Mary's execution, acknowledging her own grief at her cousin's plotting but deferring to the will of the "Subjects, the Nobles and Commons" and, most important, to "the Lawes of our Realme" (143).

Chapter 7's focus on epithalamium and elegy seems surprising in the context of law and justice and the legitimacy of monarchy, but Goodblatt demonstrates that Peele employs these genres, "particular adaptations of the pastoral mode", for his exploration of adultery and rebellion in *David and Bethsabe*. In fact, in the previous chapter she already discussed Peele's debt to a sensual, pastoral passage in Joshua Sylvester's translation of Du Bartas's *La Seconde Semaine*, the Chorus's comparison of the sinful David to the "fatall Raven" that, despite flying by "the faire Arabian spiceries, / Her pleasant gardens, and delightsome parkes", nevertheless "doth stoope with hungrie violence / Upon a peece of hatefull carion" (136). The Raven is Du Bartas's, which after a flight through similar "sweet Gardens and delicious Bowers", lights "upon the loathsome quarters / Of some late Lopez, or such Romish martirs" (138), bringing us startlingly back to Lopez (discussed in the context of Esther) and the Protestant-Catholic conflict. Now Goodblatt focuses on the exchange between David and Bethsabe when she is brought to him as he commanded. For Bethsabe to say anything at all is striking, since in Samuel she is given only a single sentence, "I am with child" (2 Sam. 11:5). In the play, David introduces her before her entrance with natural imagery drawn from the Song of Solomon: "Now comes my lover tripping like the Roe" ("My welbeloved is like a roe", Song 2:9), and he welcomes her comparing her to the sun, scorching his "conquered soul" ("Who is she that loketh forthe as the morning, faire as the moone, pure as the sunne, terrible as an armie with banners!" Song 6:9). Bethsabe's parallel response (6 lines for David's 6) emphasizes the debt to the Song of Solomon, here in the dialogue of the lovers (as in chapter 4, though the voices are difficult to disentangle), where the man is also traditionally (as Solomon) a king. Yet she picks up David's sun metaphor and turns it in a different direction, alluding to Ovid's account of Phaëton steering too near the sun: "Too neere my lord was your unarmed heart, / When furthest off my hapless beauty peirc'd" (160). The Ovid story is about recklessness, passion, destruction, and death, and all of the *Metamorphoses* is preoccupied with the dangerous implications of desire. As Goodblatt once again demonstrates, Peele's complex intertextuality is key to understanding his interpretation of the story

of *David and Bethsabe*.

The shift from epithalamium to elegy comes with the movement of the plot from Bethsabe to Absalom, especially after his death, which elicits profound grief from David, even though his son had rebelled against him:

Die, David, for the death of Absolon . . .  
 Hanging thy stringlesse harpe upon his boughs,  
 And through the hollow saplesse sounding truncke,  
 Bellow the torments that perpexe thy soule. (169)

Goodblatt notes David's call for vengeance on the tree upon which Absalom was killed ("Rend up the wretched engine by the roots"), though she might also have noted the anachronistic allusion to the hanging harps of Psalm 137, "By the waters of Babylon". The exiled Jews hang their harps upon trees, refusing and being unable to sing songs of Sion in a strange land. David, also famous as a harpist, hangs his stringless instrument on the cursed tree, wood on wood, the hollow (because rotten? or empty of the emotion it should feel?) trunk sounding even though the harp cannot. Goodblatt brings us back to Elizabeth and Mary, however, quoting the former's letter to the young James VI of Scotland, Mary's son: "I would you knew though not felt the extreme dolor that overwhelms my mind for that miserable accident, which far contrary to my meaning hath befallen" (170). Elizabeth, in the same position as David (as Hatton had implied), grieves for the rebel relative whose death she did not wish for but must accept.

Goodblatt also draws attention to another set of subtle allusions in Peele's play that both echo Du Bartas again and set up an internal allusion that yokes together the two parts of the story. In *La Seconde Semaine*, Du Bartas (in Sylvester's English) has Adam lament his descendent Enoch: "Sometimes he climbs the Sacred cabinet / Of the divine Ideas ... Thine eies already (no longer eies / But new bright stars) do brandish in the skies" (172). Peele's David laments, "Thy soule shall joy the sacred cabinet / Of those devine Ideas ... Thy eyes now no more eyes but shining stars" (171). Both speeches, Goodblatt points out, are about family history, and both combine biblical and religious language with Classical philosophy, converting Adam and David into Christian neo-Platonists, monarchs with whom Elizabeth, famous for her learning, might then easily identify. David continues,

Thy day of rest, thy holy Sabboth day  
 Shall be eternall, and the curtaine drawne,  
 Thou shalt behold thy souveraine face to face,  
 With wonder knit in triple unitie,  
 Unitie infinite and innumerable.

The drawing of the curtain, Greenblatt observes, also derives from Adam's elegy in Du Bartas, though in this case the French original (*la courtine tiree*) rather

than Sylvester's translation ("without vaile"). More significantly, it recalls the very beginning of Peele's play, when the Prologue "draws a curtaine, and discovers Bethsabe with her maid bathing over a spring, and David sits above viewing her" (175). Here a verbal performance alludes to an act performed (stage directions of course unavailable to the audience), reminding us that David is the ultimate cause of his son's revolt and death, as well as his own grief.

Once again, Goodblatt shows how "biblical voices" are transformed "into echoes of contemporaneous English affairs" (176). Or, thinking of how theorists of intertextuality might put it, the reverberation is in all directions, contemporary affairs also echoing biblical and Classical precedents. This is an exceptionally rich book, achieving exactly what Goodblatt promises, a demonstration of the complex intertextual field within which Tudor drama, biblical narratives, Jewish and Christian exegetical traditions, and other Renaissance, medieval, and Classical literature interecho, interact, and generate meaning for readers and audiences then and now. Readers will come away with a deeper understanding of the plays Goodblatt analyzes, but also the biblical stories, characters, and language with which they engage. I did occasionally find myself hearing further echoes and wanting to push this or that analysis even deeper. The section on wisdom and fools in chapter 3, for instance, could be extended to include the Christian concept of the wise fool as described by Paul, as well as its exploration in the hugely influential *Praise of Folly* by Erasmus (Erasmus personifying Folly as a woman, though she ends up seeming rather wise). Another example is when Du Bartas's Adam, in the elegy Goodblatt quotes, also says of Enoch, "thy body, chang'd in qualitie / Of spirit or angell, puts on immortalitie", and that "without vaile (in fine) / Thou seest God face to face" (172-3). The language here is Paul's, from 1 Corinthians 15:53 ("this mortal must put on immortality") and 13:12 ("For now we see through a glass darkly; but then face to face"). It would be interesting, as Goodblatt does elsewhere, to explore Peele and Du Bartas in terms of both Jewish and Christian perspectives. Of course, the Pauline allusions assimilate David into the Christian tradition, which makes it easier to think of English monarchs like Elizabeth as Davidic (though her father Henry was more often cast in this role, Elizabeth as Deborah, her successor James VI and I as Solomon). But how might Jewish interpretations of David and Bathsheba, or David and Absalom, enrich our understanding of David's place in Elizabethan English culture, in Peele's play and elsewhere? The Rabbis (as well as recent feminist critics), for instance, argued about the specific location of Bathsheba as she was bathing. David is walking on his roof when he spies her, but is she also on the roof, or is she inside her room? The former would make her culpable, exposing herself to anyone who might be looking, but the latter makes David the sole guilty party, a voyeur peeping into her private chambers. Peele hedges somewhat, placing Bathsheba at a "spring", which must be outdoors, but also having the Prologue draw a curtain to reveal her, which suggests some kind of privacy. Tudor woodcuts of the scene, as included in English Bibles, tend to place Bath-

sheba (breasts bare), bathing outside, with David looking out of his window from within his chambers. Claire Costley King'oo has explored this iconography (2004), but there is a wider intertextual field to be explored. On the other hand, my eagerness to explore it testifies to Goodblatt's success in exciting the reader about intertextual reading, and the full extent of such intertextual relations is beyond any single study.

Many readers will find *Jewish and Christian Voices in English Reformation Biblical Drama* rewarding: first, those interested in Tudor drama, especially some plays a little off the well-beaten paths of theater history and criticism; second, those interested in the complexities of early modern biblical culture, the influence of the Bible on secular literature, the range of interpretation available to sixteenth century readers, and the interaction of Jewish and Christian interpretive traditions; and finally, anyone interested in the social and political history of Tudor England, given Goodblatt's interest in how the plays interact "family and monarchy" in their engagement with biblical and other sources and analogues. This is an excellent addition to Routledge's series on Renaissance Literature and Culture and gives further momentum to the turn to religion's second wave in literary studies.

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