Shakespeare's Use of the New Testament: Biblical Intertextuality in As You Like It and Romeo and Juliet

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Shakespeare’s Use of the New Testament:

Biblical Intertextuality in *As You Like It* and *Romeo and Juliet*

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By
Joseph Hurtgen

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Shakespeare's use of the New Testament:
Biblical Intertextuality in *As You Like It* and *Romeo and Juliet*

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This thesis examines structure in Shakespeare to show how his plays *Romeo and Juliet* and *As You Like It* intertextually relate to the Bible in such a way that allows them to elicit order. Shakespeare’s plays contain dramatic structure, imagery, themes, and character relationships influenced by the New Testament.

In order to understand how Christian elements find their way into texts, the first chapter demonstrates the function of intertextuality, how plots and words evoke others, and how Shakespeare frequently borrows from many sources. Biblical sources, as well as many others, are ubiquitous in Shakespeare. The first chapter then examines Northrop Frye’s and Tzvetan Todorov’s Structuralist models to show continuities between plot structures. This allows for an examination of the relationship between similarly constructed texts. One of the similarities is how the dramatic structure of Shakespeare’s plays resembles the structure of Jesus’ teaching in the gospels, moving from traditional ideas of righteousness to righteousness achievable only through faith.

The second chapter examines similar themes and images prevalent within the two plays and the gospels. For instance, love, and specifically the bond of love in marriage, is a central theme in both Shakespeare and the New Testament. While human love is often
imperfect and based heavily on *eros*, it points to the perfect *agape* love around which the kingdom Jesus spoke is organized. Among the most important of the images found in both the studied texts and the Bible are light (with all its uses) and the destruction of the beautiful. Through use of oppositional images and ideas such as fate and free will, order in reality is seen as interplay between positive and negative forces. This is not to say that yin-yang is the modicum for making sense out of existence, for the opposition does not have to balance perfectly between the two sides, nor do the disparate elements have to contain traces of the other; rather, sense of self or plot is created by the presence of opposing forces.

The third chapter analyzes the similarity between character relationships in the plays and the gospels. In both are found sets of oppositional characters. The presentation of characters with negative traits more clearly underscores the good traits within other characters. In *As You Like It*, relationships are allegorical for the love between God and man. Rosalind and Celia address each other as intimates when they are close friends in the court, but in the forest, as Rosalind’s love for Orlando develops, she directs her intimate language away from Celia. In *Romeo and Juliet* the lovers’ relationship represents Christ and the Church. The characters function to further themes and images as they are often emblematic, or representative of, particular emotions or ideas.

Shakespeare developed his plays using many Christian elements, many of which are so integral to the plot and movement of the play that they are rarely left out of a critical analysis. However, other subtle Christian elements included in the plays are easy to overlook, as they necessitate a working knowledge of scripture and theology. This thesis delves into many such elements within *As You Like It* and *Romeo and Juliet*. 
Shakespeare’s Use of the New Testament:
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“But didst thou hear without wondering how thy name should be hanged and
carved upon these trees?” (*As You Like It* 3.2.170-71)

*Introduction*

T.S. Eliot states that the function of art is to impose “a credible order upon
ordinary reality, and thereby elicit some perception of an order in reality” (Cole 103). The
New Testament and Shakespeare’s works fit with Eliot’s model for what art should
achieve, as they both establish a widely accepted order upon reality. This thesis examines
structure in Shakespeare to show how his plays intertextually relate to the Bible in such a
way that allows them to elicit order. Shakespeare’s plays contain dramatic structure,
imagery, themes, and character relationships influenced by the New Testament.

In order to understand how Christian elements find their way into texts, the first
chapter demonstrates the function of intertextuality, how plots and words evoke others,
and how Shakespeare frequently borrows from many sources. Julia Kristeva defines
intertextuality as “the concept that any text is an amalgam of others, either because it
exhibits signs of influence or because its language inevitably contains common points of
reference with other texts through such things as allusion, quotation, genre, style, and
even revisions” (Murfin 219). Biblical sources, as well as many others, are ubiquitous in
Shakespeare. Shakespeare verifies that *As You Like It* participates in an intertextual realm
when Duke Senior pronounces,

Thou seest we are not all alone unhappy:

This wide and universal theatre

Presents more woeful pageants than the scene

Wherein we play in. (2.7.136-39)

The duke's words are partially humorous, since the "more woeful pageants" are the tragic plays performed on the same stage, and his words also attach the events of the play to the universal scene.

The first chapter then examines Northrop Frye's and Tzvetan Todorov's Structuralist models to show continuities between plot structures. This allows for an examination of the relationship between similarly constructed texts. One of the similarities is how the dramatic structure of Shakespeare's plays resembles the structure of Jesus' teaching in the gospels, moving from traditional ideas of righteousness to righteousness achievable only through faith.

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Chapter I: Structure in the Gospels and Shakespeare

The overarching idea of this thesis is that Shakespeare shares themes, images, and character relationships with the New Testament gospels and writings (there are a few connections with the Old Testament, but these foreshadow Jesus, so they are tied to the gospels). The examination of Shakespeare in this way is most nearly a Structuralist approach. It methodically examines the similar elements residing within both sets of writings, including, for example, an equation-like view of the moral world which Romeo faces. While intertextuality is linked closest to Poststructuralism, this analysis does not question the ability of words to ultimately convey what they are supposed to convey. The question of significance word to word is not the focus here; rather, it is fixed upon all the elements Shakespeare uses in tandem with the gospels.

Structuralist Models

Structure and Structuralism are terms that have been used to such a great degree that their meanings are sometimes unclear. The overall aim for Structuralism was to become the critical tool—a way of looking at texts, people-groups, relationships, and even body language that elucidates what components are behind those organizations, or what informs their structure. Structuralist critique generally limits itself to what is evidenced within the text, and has stopped being the dominant critical tool because other modes of criticism began asking different questions of the text, despite using similar approaches. For example, “when Marxists or psychoanalysts deal with a work of literature, they are not interested in a knowledge of the work itself, but in the understanding of an abstract
structure, social or psychic, which manifests itself through that work” (Todorov 2100). This thesis uses a dominantly structural approach to examining Shakespeare, as Christian themes and images do more than manifest themselves abstractly throughout the plays; they are often used exactly in the same way as in the gospels.

Todorov developed what he calls narratology. This is structural analysis or, more narrowly defined, the examination of abstract structures within a narrative or plot (2099). He looks at the similarity between plot structures in Boccacio’s *Decameron*, finding within them the recurring pattern of sin-discovery-avoidance of punishment (either because the person with the authority to punish doesn’t believe the sin occurred or is guilty of a similar sin and so is not morally able to punish). What Todorov demonstrates is that stories contain reoccurring plot patterns. Boccaccio shows that one basic story form can be used multiple times to produce different, engaging stories. It takes great inventiveness to produce something original out of a mode that has been greatly used.

Northrop Frye thinks “Shakespeare, in a natural perspective, had no opinions, no values, no philosophy, no principles of anything except dramatic structure” (qtd. in Halpern 123). Frye thinks that Shakespeare’s use of an idea doesn’t necessitate a particular stance or belief; rather an idea’s inclusion develops intrigue in a story; it heightens the meaning. Frye would not view Shakespeare’s inclusion of Christian themes in his play as a certain regard for Christianity, but as a way to produce a good story. Through this, Frye is not limiting Shakespeare. Rather, he emphasizes the playwright’s ultimate concern at writing a good play, and more to the point, earning a good living. Shakespeare uses existing genres and source material to produce popular plays. George Bernard Shaw criticizes *As You Like It* for this reason, saying Shakespeare discovered
the only thing that paid in the theatre was romantic nonsense, and that when he was forced by this to produce one of the most effective samples of romantic nonsense in existence—a feat which he performed easily and well—he publicly disclaimed any responsibility for its pleasant and cheap falsehood by borrowing the story and throwing it in the face of the public with the phrase ‘As You Like It.’ (qtd. in Tolman 75-76)

There can be no doubt that Shakespeare had fun with dramatic structure. For instance, John Wain points out that *Romeo and Juliet* starts with comic elements and only becomes a tragedy because that was what Shakespeare was writing. Wain observes that “it begins with the materials for a comedy—the stupid paternal generation, the instant attraction of the young lovers, the quick surface life of street fights, masked balls and comic servants” (104). Susan Snyder agrees, and says that *Romeo and Juliet* “becomes, rather than is, tragic. Other tragedies have reversals, but in *Romeo and Juliet* the reversal is so radical as to constitute a change of genre” (106).

Intertextuality often occurs between the texts of individual authors, as they use their own work as a source. Rawdon Wilson explains that “the literary text can focus upon itself, its traditions, or its conventions. The text may also self-consciously focus upon the problems, the sheer technical difficulties, or the mere ontological paradoxes of its writing or its having been written” (774). Shakespeare takes a humorous look at *Romeo and Juliet* in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* by placing a near recreation of the play within it. Samuel B. Hemingway writes:

The tedious, brief scene of Pyramus and Thisbe is a burlesque not only of
the romantic tragedy of love in general, but of *Romeo and Juliet* in particular. The two catastrophes are almost identical, and it seems hardly probable that any dramatist would write his burlesque first and his serious play afterward. May it not be, also, that Wall and Moon are the result of Shakespeare’s own difficulties in presenting on the stage the great Balcony-scene. (80)

The appearance of the *Romeo and Juliet* plot in a comic play substantiates the case that Shakespeare consciously placed comic elements in *Romeo and Juliet*. The tragic play in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* is comic because the action is executed so poorly by the mechanicals and because its presence constitutes Shakespeare’s thoughts about his play.

*Romeo and Juliet* does not contain all of the standard tragic elements. The two lovers, while both from noble families, are not royalty. Shakespeare’s tragedies usually make kings and queens their subject. The plays *Richard II* and *Richard III*, which also have kings in the lead role, are normally classified as histories but also can be labeled as tragedies. Conversely, many of the plays classified as tragedies, like *Macbeth* and *Hamlet*, also contain historic elements.

Northrop Frye thought about the comedies from a structural perspective and saw that Shakespeare repetitively begins his plays in a “court world,” where characters are dominated by strict rules and codes, moves them to a “green world” which is something of an antithesis to the world of the court, and then returns them to a changed court world, reformed as a result of their experiences. This theory is patterned after the archetypal hero’s quest. The hero leaves his home, a place where his role is fixed, and goes out in the world where he is unconstrained by his former role and can develop. Upon return to
the home, the hero’s status is changed because of his experience.

Frye’s Green World Theory model is evidenced in the comedies *As You Like It* and *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. With some adjusting, it can be applied with some success to the tragedies. It begins with a character grasping something that is forbidden to them (a kingdom to take), moves to the moral degeneration caused by taking the forbidden object (a kingdom to lose), and ends with their undoing and the establishment of a new order (ameliorated kingdom). The action of *Macbeth* can be viewed in this way. It begins in Duncan’s court, where Macbeth wants to usurp the crown. After Macbeth kills Duncan and becomes king, the constraints on his moral action degenerate as he kills everyone who poses a threat to his reign (because now he has a kingdom to lose), and ends with the amelioration of the court through the fulfillment of a prophecy concerning the coming of the forest to Dunsinane Hill and Macbeth’s death by the hands of Macduff.

The aim of such a theory, which we will refer to as the Ameliorated Kingdom Theory, is to provide a very simple framework with which one can visualize a play’s dramatic structure. Since this theory is so simple, the plots of other tragedies can fit within it. *Romeo and Juliet* starts with a kingdom to take in the form of a love relationship between Romeo and Juliet. The relationship is forbidden since the families hate each other. Once taken, the action of the play underscores the relationship’s fragile state; it becomes a kingdom to lose, and is lost rapidly. The play ends in an ameliorated kingdom with the death of and mourning for the lovers.

*Narrative Sources of the Plays*

Shakespeare’s plays testify to his mastery of the subtle use of language, as well as
his ability to graft other stories onto his own. His texts are an amalgamation of many sources, and *As You Like It* and *Romeo and Juliet* draw from popular expressions, Greek and Roman dramatic tradition and mythology, and the contemporary Elizabethan scene. Shakespeare uses modern French and Italian works, not always translated. He read books on law, medicine, folklore, alchemy, astrology, and natural history (Daniell 382-83). Since Shakespeare drew so readily from a wide variety of sources, it is not surprising that he also relies on the Bible for many of his images and themes.

In Shakespeare’s time it was normal practice to borrow from many sources. Mark Rose writes that “the notion of the author as an original genius who creates works that bear the stamp of his or her personality—is specifically modern” (2). Shakespeare’s membership in an Elizabethan and Jacobean theatrical company allowed him to participate “in a process of cultural production that was essentially cooperative and collaborative” (Rose 2). Rose concludes that Shakespeare would not likely have felt an obligation to produce wholly original works, and certainly would not have desired recognition as a creative genius (2).

When many sources are found within a text, it participates in intertextuality. Hanna Scolnicov states, “We have been intertextualists all along without knowing it: We have taught Shakespeare’s Roman plays as a dramatization of Plutarch’s narratives, taken for granted that every introduction to *The Comedy of Errors* must include a comparison with Plautus’s *Menaechmi* and *Amphytrio*” (212).

The principal narrative source of *As You Like It* is Thomas Lodge’s *Rosalynde* which provides a particularly instructive guide to Shakespeare’s play (Berry 42). Lodge’s romance has its own source in the 14th century poem *The Tale of Gamelyn*, and also in
the play *Orlando Furioso*, in which a young man “runs mad in the woods for love of his lady” (Barton 365, 68). It has been suggested that the cause for Shakespeare’s dramatization of Lodge’s story was the success of the two Robin Hood plays of Munday and Chettle, *The Downfall of Robert Earl of Huntington* and *The Death of Robert Earl of Huntington* (Tolman 75). Mention is made of Robin Hood in Charles’s lines concerning the whereabouts of the old duke: “They say he is already in the forest of Arden, and a many merry men with him; and there they live like the old Robin Hood of England” (1.1.110-12).

*Romeo and Juliet* is drawn from Arthur Brooke’s poem of more than 6,000 lines on Romeus and Iuliet (Moore 68). Shakespeare changed elements in the story so that the movement of the action would work within the context of a play. According to Luigi da Porto, “Romeo frequently climbs upon Giulietta’s balcony at night, and sits listening to her talk, while she remains unaware of his proximity” (Moore 72). In Brooke’s poem, Iuliet’s soliloquy is finished at dawn, when Romeus is just getting out of bed. The hero arises after a night’s slumber, passes his lady’s house in broad daylight, and is promptly espied by her (Moore 71). Shakespeare merges elements from two different renderings of the story in the creation of his own.

James Calderwood sees *Romeo and Juliet* as a “reaction to the formlessness of *Love’s Labour’s Lost,*” which he refers to as a plot with “little more than a series of verbal events brought to an abrupt and frustrate conclusion” (136). Calderwood makes a case for the evolution in Shakespeare’s writing style. He views *Love’s Labour’s Lost* as a reaction against “violent action, contrived plots, and stage sensationalism. The result is a purely verbal, plotless, essentially nondramatic work” (116). *Romeo and Juliet* is then a
balancing of the two plays preceding it, containing many comic elements, including the movement of the drama toward marriage (which is praised as the suitable ending for a play in *Love's Labour's Lost*, but not carried out within it) and returning to a “carefully plotted and symmetrically patterned” sort of play (136).

Narrative Structure of the Beatitudes

Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount, found in Matthew 5-7, exemplifies the model of Jesus’ teaching and ministry and is structured very similarly to Shakespeare’s plays. Analysis of the sermon’s passages reveals strong similarities to both Frye’s Green World and its application to tragic form.

Glen Stassen and David Gushee examine the Sermon on the Mount on a micro level and note a recurring three part pattern. They note that Jesus’ teaching often begins with a discourse on “traditional righteousness.” For instance, Jesus says, “Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy” (Matthew 5:43). The second part of the model is called the “vicious cycle” which contains a logical problem with the aforementioned traditional view. Jesus teaches:

For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so? (Matthew 5:46-47)

Finally, Jesus delivers teaching devoid of moral loopholes, which makes up the third part and is referred to as a “transforming initiative”:

But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and
persecute you, That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. (Matthew 5:44-45)

Jesus’ teaching, often credited as the most advanced of all moral teachings, is difficult because it conflicts with human nature. Jesus identifies the normal order found in our moral reality which isn’t hard to achieve and then introduces a way of living life as contrary to the old morality that is as different as light is from dark. The teachings in the Sermon on the Mount are comprised of “transforming initiatives based on God’s grace. They are the way of deliverance from the vicious cycles in which we get stuck” (Gushee 141). Evidenced here is an exponential increase of insight into moral teaching to men. Until Jesus’ teaching, many attempts at the moral life resulted in so many “vicious cycles.” Philosopher and theologian Dallas Willard also examines the situations in which Jesus contrasts “the old and the new moral reality,” of which three follow:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Situation</th>
<th>Traditional Righteousness</th>
<th>Kingdom Righteousness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Irritation with one’s associates.</td>
<td>No Murder.</td>
<td>Intense desire to be of help. No anger or contempt.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Being Personally injured.</td>
<td>Inflict exactly the same injury on the offender.</td>
<td>Don’t harm, but help, the one who has damaged you.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Having an enemy.</td>
<td>Hate your enemy.</td>
<td>Love and bless your enemy, as the heavenly Father does.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Romeo is not capable of following “kingdom righteousness” and his attempts end
in following “traditional righteousness” because of the value or kind of love he has
towards people is too weak. C.S. Lewis describes four loves: affection, friendship, *eros*,
and charity or *agape*. Affection is usually found between parents and offspring.
Friendship “arises out of mere companionship when two or more of the companions
discover that they have in common” a similar “insight or interest” (65). *Eros* is “that
state which we call ‘being in love,’” and charity or *agape* is God’s love” (91). Romeo is
quite capable with the *eros* and *philia* kind of loves, but *agape* love is foreign to him.
This is evident in the pilgrim sonnet where Romeo uses ideas and language from the
Christian discipline of confessing to describe the exchange of love he has with Juliet.
Ruth Nevo says of the passage: “From the point of view of Christian Agape it is
profanity; from the point of view of romantic *Eros*, epiphany” (252). If Jesus’ morality is
held as the truth or, in the language of image, light, then Romeo is one who walks near
the light but never comes fully into it.

Romeo’s conflict between light and darkness is most evident through his reaction
to Tybalt. When Tybalt provokes him to a fight, Romeo tries to explain that he is living
by a different code, that now through “kingdom righteousness” he is determined to love
his former enemy. When Mercutio becomes irritated to the point of fighting Tybalt,
Romeo tries to restrain the two, still following the code. However, when Mercutio dies
from Tybalt’s stab, Romeo abandons the new moral code for the traditional *lex talionis*
morality, and repays Tybalt with a sword thrust. The charity of Jesus, who set the
ultimate example of not taking offense, proves too difficult for Romeo. Ironically, it is
Romeo’s attempt to extend love to Tybalt that causes Mercutio to fight Tybalt. Northrop
Frye suggests that “Mercutio is disgusted with Romeo’s submissiveness and takes Tybalt
on for himself” (23). It is assumed that Mercutio usually sees Romeo react boisterously in these kinds of situations. The great conflict is not between Romeo and Tybalt as good against evil, but is found within Romeo alone. Shakespeare never describes the two houses as evil or good, instead they are “both alike in dignity” (*Romeo and Juliet* 1.1.1).

Paul Siegel writes of the difference between universal love and sexual love:

*Romeo and Juliet* dramatizes the concept of a cosmic love manifesting itself through sexual love and working against strife and disorder in society. The love of Romeo and Juliet is opposed to the hate of their parents. Although the lightning power of their love helps to bring about their destruction, it is, after all, only the hatred existing between the two houses that makes fatal the magnetic attraction toward each other of the two young lovers. As in Shakespearian tragedy generally, although the hero contributes to his own disaster, the main cause of it lies outside of him. (385)

The problem with Siegel’s thought is that Romeo himself is not capable of living out “cosmic love.” The strife and disorder is worked out because of the collective affection of the Montagues and the Capulets for their dead children.

In *As You Like It*, Orlando changes course from the traditional morality to the kingdom sort. In the first act, when Oliver treats him wrongly, he gives him a beating, but later in the play, Orlando saves his brother from an attacking lion. In this case, Orlando’s love is greater than just a love for Rosalind. If he is only concerned with *eros*, he, like Romeo, wouldn’t have a problem seeking revenge for his wrongs. Rather, Orlando moves from wanting to pay his brother back for the wrongs he suffered at his hands, to helping
him out and seeking his good, which comes in the form of rejoicing with him in marriage by the end of the play.

Orlando places his conflict with Oliver in a moral position by relating it to the prodigal son from Jesus’ parable when he asks his brother Oliver, “Shall I keep your hogs, and eat husks with them? What prodigal portion have I spent, that I should come to such penury?” (1.1.36-38). This connection befits the ending of *As You Like It*, where a high position is restored to the prodigal son after his hard life away from his father’s lands. The son is welcomed back into the father’s house in the parable, and Orlando and his company from the Forest of Arden are restored to the court.

Orlando develops through the drama as a result of the interactions that take place. Edward Berry observes that “in drama as in life . . . our appreciation of complexity in character increases with the variety of relationships against which it is defined” (43). Adam models to him servanthood and sacrifice. Rosalind as Ganymede will not allow Orlando to remain an irrational lover like Silvius, and the company of men, aside from Jacques, instruct him to be merry. Rosalind compares him to Judas Iscariot when she weeps because Orlando has failed his appointment. She says, “His very hair is of the dissembling color.” Celia replies, “Something browner than Judas’s. / Marry, his kisses are Judas’s own children” (3.4.8-9). In old tapestries and paintings, Gnostic texts, and *The Last Temptation of Christ*, Judas is represented with red hair, a sign of treachery (Fulghum 140). There is something deficient within Orlando that causes him to arrive late to all of his trysts with Rosalind.

Instruction/teaching is universal in human experience, and in drama, it is often one of the central devices used to bring about climax; for instance, the resultant action
that occurs when Oedipus learns the true identity of the king’s murderer is a point at which the gaining of knowledge causes the destruction of an individual. Aristotle refers to this arrival of knowledge as the reversal, or *peripeteia*. Ruth Nevo defines it as “the point which articulates the recoil of the action” (244). Shakespeare makes much use of the dramatic force accompanying both the instant of knowledge’s entrance and the development of a character through impartation of knowledge by teaching and experience.

Stassen and Gushee’s model can be clearly linked to Green World Theory. The vicious cycle necessitates and brings about clearer teaching, and the court world is reformed as a result of the learning experience characters receive in the green world. In *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* the escape of the lovers from the rigidity of the court results in dangerous encounters with each other and inconstancy in love. Comparing the action of the play to Gushee’s model of the move from traditional righteousness to transformation reveals that when the constraints of the imperfect (court world) are thrown off, chaos ensues. The bridge between tradition and the transformed state, or green world to reformed court world, must contain empowerment beyond normal human capability. In *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* empowerment comes in the form of Oberon’s magic, and the love juice is never reversed for Demetrius. Similarly, in *As You Like It* the authority of Hymen endows upon the marriages a supernatural bond. The difference between the green world of *As You Like It* and *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* is in the powers that reside therein. In *As You Like It* the good Duke along with his merry men gives to the forest a peaceable air, and makes it a place where justice is in accordance with what is right. In *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* the presence of the fairies turns the green world
into an unstable region, full of trickery and uncertainty.

Within the Sermon on the Mount there is a definite framework, an identifiable Freytag’s Pyramid with rising and falling action similar to the structures seen in Shakespeare’s plays. The structure of the Sermon on the Mount has five parts to examine: Setting the Stage of the King’s Dominion, Announcement of Players, Kingdom Conflict, Patching Up the Ways Life is Lived Wrongly, Full-time Kingdom Life.

The first words Jesus speaks in the gospel of Mark announce the presence of the Kingdom of the Heavens: “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel.” (Mark 1:15). This message contains both the first and second parts of the structure found in Jesus’ teaching, although here, the presence of the Kingdom overshadows the players involved. He reveals that the stage of the King’s Dominion has been set with the words, “the Kingdom is at hand,” and less noticeably includes who will be players when he advises repentance. For one to live decidedly in the kingdom, the process of living must be revised so that it is in accordance with the kingdom.

The Sermon on the Mount begins much the same way, except in this case the Kingdom players have been placed in the foreground. It begins with a list of postures within people that the Kingdom is responsive to: starting with the ones who do not have, and those who mourn for what they have lost, and ending with those who try to make peace, and those, many of whom are the same, that are persecuted. The presence of the kingdom is accounted for as it is what those people will be blessed with, as Jesus says, “Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:3). Jesus blesses all of the people that everyone normally passes off as disenfranchised from
blessedness. Jesus shows that there is no state a person can reach to knock them out of participation in “the Kingdom of Heaven.”

The third part is the conflict. Conflict is central to drama. In verse 11 Jesus speaks about the conflict those in the Kingdom will have with the world: the persecuted versus persecutors, salty versus unsalty, light versus not light. By discussing conflict Jesus is lining up the dramatic element.

The fourth part is in patching up the way life has been lived wrongly. Gushee and Stassen’s transformative teaching model occurs here. Jesus teaches beyond the way the Ten Commandment’s label specific action as sin, showing that all sin stems from the heart. Through a gradual process, thoughts lead to actions. So what is in the heart (the inner desires) is sin as well. Sin-action within the heart comes down to, “For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also” (Matthew 6:21).

The fifth part is the Full-time Kingdom life. This is Jesus’ teaching on how to get closer to the king and his kingdom. Jesus gives a way out of heart-sin and action-sin with the framework for the kingdom life. The heart of such a life includes prayer, not worrying, reliance on God, and asking of Him.

Central to talk of a Kingdom is the King himself; there is no kingdom with no king. Shakespeare sometimes brings into his plays characters with authority beyond that found in the human realm. Hymen (signifying marriage and verdancy) has a supernatural presence. He personifies God, uniting the lovers. The metaphor is extended to show unity of the relationship between God and Man. Touchstone is advised by Jacques not to marry Audrey when Sir Oliver Mar-text is presiding over the ceremonies, but when a real authority is present, the situation is changed.
Chapter II: Gospel Themes and Images in the plays

Shakespeare makes use of important gospel themes and images, which cause his plays to establish order as the gospels do. Some of the same questions are asked. The question whether humans make free choices or are fated to live as they do is examined closely in this chapter. The close association between images in the two sets of texts functions on an unconscious level. Since many of the central images evidenced in the gospels appear with such repetition, the reader is drawn back to gospel ideas, and connects certain elements of the plays to them. Shakespeare incorporates very subtle elements from the gospels, like giving Orlando the same color hair as the traitor Judas, as well as more overt elements like Orlando’s self-given comparison to the prodigal son, who starts off poorly but comes into a great inheritance at the end of his trials.

Fate and Free Will in Romeo and Juliet

Dramatic structure, which deals with the core conflicts found in human experience, is discussed by Aristotle in terms of fate. He says tragedy achieves its function through a person who does not surpass us “in virtue and justice,” experiences misfortune because of an error or misstep, and has “a great reputation and a good fortune” (100). Tragic plot is supposed to contain a change from good fortune to misfortune. In the ancient world, fate was thought to cause the world to turn, and this reflected itself in drama. Christianity, for the most part, made a break with belief in fate (I say for the most part because of Christianity’s sometimes belief in predestination, which is perhaps fate divinely disguised). While conflict remains, self-will allows individuals to
steer the direction of their life, instead of being guided irrevocably by unseen forces.

In these two plays there hangs a balance between fate and free will, but Aristotelian fate is trumped by free will. When Romeo cries out, “I am fortune’s fool” (3.1.134) and later “I defy you stars” (5.1.24), he is wrestling with two traditions within tragedy: the early tradition represented by the conflict between humans and capricious gods in ancient mythology, and the latter seen in the teachings of Jesus with an immovable God and whimsical humans. Romeo is, of course, fortune’s fool, and so by declaring this he highlights the fact that this is a tragic play and he is the focus of the tragic action.

The traditional interpretation of *Romeo and Juliet* is the drama of fate or misfortune in which the lovers are not at all responsible for the catastrophe they suffer. Edgar Stoll, questioning what it is exactly that turns the play into a tragedy, suggests that the struggle the lovers face “is not with each other, nor within themselves, but only with their quarrelling families” (40). This perspective relies heavily on fate as the dominant cause of the tragedy, as the enmity between the families is outside the control of the lovers.

Ruth Nevo views the play as holding “two opposing traditional views concerning the origin of suffering,” which for her are coincidence and inevitability (241). Of course, these are not the only two means by which suffering can occur. It is possible to suffer as a result of one’s free will as well. Nevo interprets Romeo’s announcement of defiance to the stars as expressing “a consolidation of his will, a determination to take one finally free action left” (248).
Douglas Cole balances the question of fate with “tragic inevitability” since “much of the action turns on ignorance . and sheer mistiming” (15). However, ‘tragic inevitability’ sounds much like a repackaging of fate, so his argument is based on how fate is defined. It is an exercise in semantics. His version of fate is ‘a destructive agent’ within the play, thwarting Romeo and Juliet from reuniting at the end of the play.

Cole sees within Shakespeare’s tragedies a stressing of “the connections between the character of men and the disaster that may befall them,” which is really Aristotle’s hamartia. The play is not simply about how fate controls everyone’s destiny. Although the case can be made that it does for both Romeo and Tybalt, it does not hold for Juliet or Mercutio. It is Romeo’s fantastical vision of love that endangers him. He is prepared to die in order to carry out his vision, and is swept along by it. James Calderwood says of the lovers:

"Self-engrossed to the end, their speech admits no impediments, not even death. Death in fact is less an impediment than a goal, a terminal value whose stillness, privacy, and endlessness sum up the character of their love. In this final marriage to death they divorce the world." (131)

Fate does not control all of the characters. Some make their own choices based on what they freely desire and reason in their minds. Free will is more than what has been handed down by existentialist thought, which commends those possessing the courage to create one’s own meaning despite living in what is perceived as a realm of meaninglessness. In Christianity, free will is the choosing of what god one will worship. C.S. Lewis thought that God does not want people to worship Him like programmed robots. The fix for that is in allowing free choice. He writes:
Free will, though it makes evil possible, is also the only thing that makes possible any love or goodness or joy worth having. A world of automata—of creatures that worked like machines—would hardly be worth creating. The happiness which God designs for His higher creatures is the happiness of being freely, voluntarily united to Him and to each other in an ecstasy of love and delight compared with which the most rapturous love between a man and a woman on this earth is mere milk and water. (Mere Christianity 52)

The two lovers choose to worship one another. At their first meeting, the lovers interact with one another through Christian language which they convert into a sexually laden kind of rhetoric. Juliet tells Romeo, “swear by thy gracious self, / Which is the god of my idolatry” (2.2.113-14) and Romeo says to Juliet, “Give me my sin again” (1.5.111). The Elizabethans, with their Christian background of thought, would have regarded the lovers as guilty sinners rather than innocent victims (Siegel 371). Juliet’s god suddenly becomes Romeo, and Romeo’s becomes Juliet. Their worship of one another culminates in a bloody, ritualistic ceremony, as cult religions often do.

Paul Siegel says that within the play, “ideas of the religion of love and those of Christianity are interwoven into a unified artistic pattern,” and even the earlier versions of the story “contain the same mixture of the Christian moralistic condemnation and the glorification of passionate love” (372). Romeo and Juliet’s use of Christian language to further their own relationship is evidence of their obsession with love over all other things. The lovers attempt to subvert the high love of Christianity into the love they share between themselves.
Such an organization is quite fragile since for Juliet a world without Tybalt and Romeo is a meaningless one. When the Nurse proclaims to Juliet “He’s dead!” Juliet, uncertain of whom the nurse is speaking, cries:

Is Romeo slaughtered, and is Tybalt dead?
My dear-loved cousin, and my dearer lord?
Then, dreadful trumpet, sound the general doom!
For who is living if these two are gone? (3.2.65-68)

This passage references Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians, “In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed” (15:52).

The deaths in the play can be examined in terms of fate and self-will. While both Romeo and Juliet die for true love, only Juliet follows the self-will pattern. Juliet is driven by free will. She enters into a romance with Romeo as a reaction to the marriage to Paris that her mother and father arrange. Juliet’s activity with Romeo is always under her control. Carolyn Brown says that the final destructive act of Juliet maintains the same spirit of defiance she held throughout the play (355). In order to control her own destiny (not submitting to the will of her parents) she defiantly takes her own life. Further, she vicariously experiences freedom through commanding Romeo, and with his death, freedom lies out of her grasp.

Jesus also deals with the issue of destiny against choice. On one hand, his reason for becoming a man is to die to save humanity from its separation from God, so he seems destined or fated; however, Jesus says of his life, “No man taketh it from me, but I lay it
down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again” (John 10:18). Jesus says here that it is his choice alone to lay down his life.

Tybalt dies because he hates and because he lives by the sword, fulfilling the old proverb, ‘live by the sword, die by the sword.’ Romeo resists his natural inclinations and does not immediately fight Tybalt when he is provoked, but Tybalt’s murder of Mercutio pushes Romeo to the limits of his morality to, indeed, take up his sword. Tybalt is fated because of his limited range of feeling. Mercutio directs his own course, and is not a victim of fantasy and fate like Romeo. He perceives that Tybalt is no more than a hotheaded sword-fighter, knows he can provoke him to fight at a moment’s notice, and dislikes him for it. He fights Tybalt willfully, drawing his sword first, and fights not because of the feud, but because he finds real fault with ‘The Prince of Cats.’

Mercutio’s motives stem from an adolescent desire to establish himself as a man and prove his virility. He wants to exert his strength and skill to show that he is powerful and able to fight. There is a reckless side to Mercutio. Despite his invitation to the ball, he crashes the party with members of the uninvited Montague family. This recklessness is a part of his generally provoking manner. His sexual banter is often intended to get a rise out of Romeo, but as in the case of his long speech on dreams, he affects himself the greatest, and Romeo even attempts to console him saying, “Thou talk’st of nothing” (1.4.96). However, Mercutio is so affected because he cannot get Romeo to see that he lives in fantasy and should live in reality. Mercutio, like Jesus, knows that inner thoughts eventually work themselves out into action (Mark 7:14-23). It would only be so long before Romeo acts out his fantasies.

Romeo’s reasons for action are not grounded in reason as Mercutio’s are. Romeo
is locked into the same pattern that causes the Capulets and Montagues to feud, but instead of being against Tybalt because he is in the wrong family, he 'loves' him because his affiliation with Juliet suddenly places him in the right one. Romeo does not make individual choices about people, but rather allows other relationships to inform his actions toward others, whether they are good or bad.

Paris dies for himself to support his own honor as a lover. Paris is a professional lover while Romeo is a secretive one. Even though both of them are from viable households, Romeo refuses to go through the right channels in order to pursue relationships. Of course, the pressure that "If they find thee they wilt kill thee" with its forbidden aspect may have further enticed him.

**Prominent Biblical Imagery**

Texts are interrelated through the sharing of images. Light is one of the principle images in the gospel of John and also in *Romeo and Juliet*. Caroline Spurgeon writes of the play, "The dominating image is light, every form and manifestation of it, the sun, moon, stars, fire, lighting, the flash of gunpowder" (73). Romeo and Juliet use light to express their love. Romeo says, "Oh she does teach the torches to burn bright" and Juliet says,

   Give me my Romeo, and when I shall die
   Take him and cut him out in little stars,
   And he will make the face of heaven so fine
   That all the world will be in love with night
   And pay worship to the garish sun. (3.2.21-25)
The play contains light imagery that refers to beauty and light imagery that refers to the insight of knowledge (Nevo 253). Romeo’s remark about the torches being taught is a joining of the two. A third meaning for light imagery is of salvation. John describes Jesus as “a light to mankind.” Such imagery is carried over from the Old Testament. For instance, Isaiah writes that light will be brought to dark places.

The characters that die in *Romeo and Juliet* are all in their youth. This along with their beauty greatly heightens the sense of loss in the play. Romeo highly prizes beauty; it is perhaps the attribute he most glorifies. It must be trusted that Romeo’s ability to spot beauty was great. When he first sees Juliet, he is at the Capulet ball in order to have a shot at connecting with Rosaline; despite his original intention, he says of Juliet: “Did my heart love till now? forswear it, sight! / For I ne’er saw true beauty till this night” (1.5.53-54). It is just as important to notice Juliet’s instant attraction to Romeo. They are both struck with immediate attraction by the beauty of the other through the lines of the Chorus who say of the two, “Now Romeo is beloved and loves again, / Alike bewitched by the charm of looks” (2.1.5-6). While the subject in these lines is Romeo, his position as beloved includes Juliet, since she places him in that position, and makes sense of the use of alike. Both are bewitched by beauty.

There is an attachment here to the death of Christ. The beauty of youth is similar to the perfection of Christ. He is “the spotless lamb” without sin. This translates into his not deserving to die a death of a criminal, but it also allows for something great to occur as result of his death. Jesus said, “I lay my life down for my friends.” The sacrifice of the perfect is given so that the imperfection in humanity is covered in a way that allows for a reconnection with God, who is perfect.
The death of Romeo and Juliet achieves a similar end, as the enmity between the two families ends. The nurse alludes to a connection between Jesus’ sacrificial death and Juliet’s. The nurse swears by the rood, or Jesus’ cross, that eleven years before, Juliet had fallen and hurt her brow. At which point her husband, unknowingly, gave a prophecy concerning Juliet’s death. He says, “dost thou fall upon thy face? / Thou wilt fall backward when thou has more wit” (1.3.45-46). Of course, the nurse’s husband is primarily making a sexual reference, as strange as it is to speak bawdily to a two-year old, but falling backward is also an image of death.

While the deaths of the lovers may achieve unity among their families, it is too much of a stretch to say that the lovers intentionally sacrifice themselves to achieve harmony between their families. Ruth Nevo says their death is not a sacrifice of love, but “an act of freedom and of fidelity” (257). If anything, the lovers are incredibly selfish, so wrapped up in their own affairs that they could not dream of sacrificing themselves for others.

**Biblical Themes in the Play**

These plays of Shakespeare’s are related to the gospels in theme. Jesus describes the kingdom of the heavens as a treasure in a field. When a man saw the treasure, he sold everything he had to buy the field so that he could get the treasure (Matthew 13:44). While the treasure here has immediate connotations, it is now in a field; it extends past the temporary as it is imperishable. Jesus impresses upon his disciples to hold as the greatest treasure of their lives, the knowledge that their names are written in the book of life. Richard Hays writes that in Matthew’s Gospel, “eschatology becomes a powerful
warrant for moral behavior. The motivation for obedience to God is repeatedly grounded in the rewards and punishments that await everyone at the final judgment” (106). Jesus’ teaching does not leave out the present. With the treasure parable, the element of the treasure’s lasting worth is not what causes initial excitement; rather it is its immediate availability. Romeo’s vision of a connection with Juliet is regarded so highly that duration is not considered necessary. For him, marriage is the final reward:

Amen, amen! But come what sorrow can,
It cannot countervail the exchange of joy
That one short minute gives me in her sight:
Do thou but close our hands with holy words,
Then love-devouring death do what he dare,
It is enough I may but call her mine. (2.6.3-8)

The servant character, Adam, calls upon God to care for him, saying: “He that doth the ravens feed, providently caters for the sparrow” (As You Like LI 2.3.43-44). This idea originates from Jesus’ teaching concerning God’s resources towards those who believe: “Consider the ravens: for they neither sow nor reap, which neither have storehouse nor barn; and God feedeth them: how much more are ye better than the fowls?” (Luke 12:24). Adam exhibits a very Christian attitude in his actions. Even though his age and wealth should place him in a higher position than Orlando, he, like Jesus, who said “For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45), chooses to serve his old master’s son rather than be served by him.

One of the more difficult passages in Romeo and Juliet is Mercutio’s speech on
Queen Mab, which has a variety of sources. Mabh (old spelling) is an Irish queen of fairies mentioned in Beaufert’s *Ancient Topography of Ireland*. In Welsh and kindred dialects of Brittany, Mab signifies a child or infant. There is also the Mabinogion, which is the collection of tales “told to the young in by-gone days” (Reeves 11). Samuel B. Hemingway thinks Mercutio’s description of Queen Mab is borrowed from *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. He says it “has the exquisite delicacy and daintiness of the descriptive passages of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, but it is not an integral part of *Romeo and Juliet*, and there is no particular reason why, in this play, Shakespeare should be thinking of fairies or fairy-land” (80). Indeed, Harold Jenkins points out that “In fairy tales, evil is always absolute, clearly recognized, and finally overthrown” (110). In *Romeo and Juliet* evil does not fit into such a neat package, but this is of course one of the central tensions of the play.

Romeo is an Aristotelian tragic character in that he draws pity despite his shortcomings and murderous crimes. There are elements within Romeo of the hero and the villain. In Romeo, darkness commingles with light. It is found in Romeo’s “O brawling love, O loving hate” (1.1.176) and Juliet’s response to hearing Romeo has slain Tybalt:

O serpent heart, hid with a flowering face!
Did ever dragon keep so fair a cave?
Beautiful tyrant! Fiend angelical!
Dove-feathere’d raven! Wolvish-ravening lamb!
Despised substance of divinest show!
Just opposite to what thou justly seem’st,
A damned saint, an honourable villain! (3.2.73-79)

Mab is significant in the play because she is used by Mercutio to point out how disconnected with reality Romeo is. Even though Romeo’s language attests to this, as in “Misshapen chaos of well-seeming forms” (1.1.179), he will not admit to his disconnection to Mercutio. Before he gives the Mab speech Mercutio makes the remark “Dreamers often lie,” which is a veiled allegation that Romeo, the dreamer, lies to himself about the real state of things. Romeo makes a joke out of it, replying with “In bed asleep, while they do dream things true” (1.4.51-52), and glosses over Mercutio’s psychoanalysis of him.

The Queen Mab speech is Mercutio’s insight into the state of his friend Romeo, and Mercutio even says, “O, then, I see Queen Mab hath been with you” (1.4.53). Romeo will not admit that his thoughts are lost in imagination. Mercutio talks about the dreams that come out of an idle brain, or more to the point, fantasy. Mercutio’s analysis of Romeo is that he is lost in his own world. In the New Testament, the Apostle Paul recognized the danger of fantasy and wrote that following Jesus involves “Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ” (2 Corinthians 10:5).

This condition first plays itself out in Romeo’s quest for and heartache over Rosaline, a girl he never has contact with in the play. Rosaline is not much more than a name, much like Mercutio’s brother Valentine who is only mentioned through the invitation to Capulet’s dinner party (Porter 31). Kristian Smidt refers to such a character as one “introduced in stage directions or briefly mentioned in dialogue who have no speaking parts and do not otherwise manifest their presence” (qtd. in Porter 31). While
there is textual evidence to support Rosaline as the archetypal chaste maid, virgin character, it is not clear if it is her desire to become a nun, or if she is only chaste towards Romeo’s wooing, of which he says:

She’ll not be hit
With Cupid’s arrow. She has Dian’s wit.
And in strong proof of chastity well arm’d.
From love’s weak childish bows she lives unharm’d.
She will not stay the siege of loving terms,
Nor bide th’encounter of assailing eyes.
Nor ope her lap to saint seducing gold.
O she is rich in beauty; only poor
That, when she dies, with beauty dies her store. (1.1.206-14)

The goddess Diana said of herself, “No one has lifted my veil,” which is to say, she is virginal. However, it is difficult to tell if this passage isn’t just Romeo’s way of saying she is not interested in him specifically. The difficulty with her is that she never utters a single word, even though she is present at the Capulet ball. She is known only through what Romeo and Mercutio speak about her, and Mercutio’s contribution is obviously not trustworthy. His attempt to conjure Romeo with words about Rosaline turns her into a sexual object. The images quickly degenerate from bright eyes to quivering thighs, images which are plucked from Mercutio’s own idle brain.

A classic test to discover one’s level of obsession is to gauge the frequency and regularity of reinterpreting the meaning of objects and events into the obsession. Jesus puts it this way: “But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the
heart; and they defile the man” (Matthew 15:18). It is clear that Mercutio is obsessed with sex since he is able to find sexual meanings in anything. For instance, Benvolio says, “if he hear thee, thou wilt anger him” (2.1.23) in an attempt stop Mercutio from yelling after Romeo who had snuck off to Juliet’s orchard. Mercutio replies that the yelling won’t make him mad, and then imagines through his obsession what would:

‘Twould anger him

To raise a spirit in his mistress’ circle

Of some strange nature, letting it there stand

Till she had laid it and conjured it down. (2.1.24-27)

Mercutio imagines that Romeo would get angered if Rosaline had sex with someone else. This strengthens the argument that Rosaline had at least intimated to Romeo that she wanted to remain chaste. In such an imagined case, Romeo’s anger would not then be caused by jealousy as much as by Rosaline’s deception to cause him to forget about her.

Jesus says that where your treasure is, there also your heart will be (Matthew 6:21). Romeo’s heart is all about the beauty of women. Romeo falls in love because that is what he lives for. Even his love for Juliet is based entirely on beauty. He does not come up with tests for Juliet’s character. The approval of his eyes is the only test he ever places upon her. Romeo, an embodiment of literary Petrarchanism, which is language “associated with loftiness, flight, and ascension into a spiritual world above a mundane existence,” soars above the particulars of who Juliet is as a person as well as the question of the relationship’s tenability because of the feud (Brown 338). When Mercutio evokes sexual images of Rosaline, he is trying to demonstrate to Romeo how easy it is to construct something in the mind which is false. Rosaline’s thigh never quivered due to
Romeo, Mercutio, or ostensibly, any man, but Mercutio can create the image without impediment.

James Calderwood points out the deficiency of the Petrarchan mode, writing that the “style aspires to pure poetry and in so aspiring becomes an airy, hyperbolic, mechanically artificial expression of unfelt and undiscriminating feelings” (125). Romeo’s speeches are euphuistic as well as Petrarchan. Euphuism is marked by artificiality, using “elaborate and extended figures of speech” (Murfin 145) and Romeo is unrelenting in its use. In 1st Corinthians Paul writes, “Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal” (13:1). Juliet had asked “dost thou love me?” and Romeo’s responses are all too much. To Juliet his speech is gong-like. This is why Juliet gives Romeo an unrelenting order before he departs from the orchard. Her test for Romeo to see “If that thy bent of love be honourable” is whether he will marry her the next day, not if he can speak poetically.

Romeo fails to see, or at least care, that Juliet has a very controlling, if not masculine persona. Carolyn Brown observes the reoccurring falconry images within the play. To Juliet, Romeo is a trainable falcon. Brown says “Juliet transforms her future husband from a ‘flighty,’ impractical man of fancy who engages in long, unrealistic speeches, into a pragmatic, obedient man of few words who learns to give her the succinct answers she wants and to fulfill her commands” (334). While Romeo’s visit to Juliet in the orchard is for romance, Juliet’s idea is marriage, and before the end of the balcony scene she secures herself a husband.

Brown says Juliet is “not a reticent virgin but a multifaceted character who
transcends Romeo in maturity, complexity, insight, and rhetorical dexterity” (332). Juliet uses these attributes to manipulate Romeo and even trade gender roles with him. She acts as a man, and Romeo, glad to have a lover, allows her to. In the balcony scene, Juliet tells Romeo to forget his name and love her instead. This switches the way married couples traditionally handle union, since the female’s name is always replaced with the male’s. Further, “Shakespeare allows for the reading that Juliet only pretends not to see Romeo and takes advantage of the darkness so that she can be more forward and can assume a typically masculine position of power, proposing to Romeo rather than waiting for him to act” (Brown 340).

In the last lines of the play the gender role switch is made abundantly clear: “For never was a story of more woe / Than this of Juliet and her Romeo” (5.3.309-10). There is more here than the solution to a rhyming problem. At the last Romeo is in Juliet’s possession, just as he desires when he uses the falconry image himself saying, “I would I were thy bird” (2.2.183). Lovers often use language in unorthodox ways to demonstrate that their love is separate from all else, but Juliet’s vision of Romeo as her bird includes a cord around his neck. This image is one of entrapment, and shows that Romeo, while well versed in the rhetoric of love, is not perceptive in catching the rhetoric of manipulation.
Chapter III: Character Relationships in Shakespeare

Many characters in Shakespeare relate to each other in the same ways as characters from the Bible. Sometimes they are allegorical, standing for particular Christian themes, such as Romeo and Juliet standing for Christ’s relationship to the church. Other character relationships are oppositional in nature. Specifically, characters like Jacques are in opposition to love relationships, the type of human relationship that most clearly demonstrates Christ’s love for humanity. While they do face opposition, some of the characters, like Rosalind, exhibit that love in their relationships. Shakespeare also makes great use of emblematic characters, ones that stand for specific types such as the Petrarchan character.

Emblematic Characters

Stories can share similar structures by containing characters of the same archetype. Shakespeare often uses emblematic characters which fit a particular mode or follow a set belief. For example, Tybalt personifies hate, so his response to people reflects an undue amount of vindictiveness and anger. Jacques, as Monsieur Melancholy, views experience bleakly, and Orlando, or Signior Love, is fated to an amorous experience and is enamored with Rosalind from the moment he first speaks with her.

Richard Levin objects to a tendency in modern criticism to subordinate character to theme, as if a play owed its life to the dramatization of an idea rather than “a particular moving human experience” (29). Letting characters represent certain attitudes, emotions, or themes can result in extremely one-dimensional characters, but it was a common
literary tool of the day. The New Testament also contains emblematic characters. In the Gospel of John the disciple Thomas maintains a strong skepticism. Upon hearing the story of Jesus’ appearance from the disciples, Thomas refuses belief. He is on an errand and absent when Jesus first appeared to the disciples after his resurrection. From this account, the skeptic disciple earns the name doubting Thomas, but this is not the first time he had reacted in such a manner. In the Gospel of John, Jesus tells the disciples he is going to prepare a place for them so that he can return to take them where he is, and he says, “And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know” (14:4), and Thomas replies, “Lord, we know not whither thou goest; and how can we know the way?” (14:5). Here, Thomas maintains the level of skepticism we expect from an emblematic character.

Celia, also emblematic, exhibits selflessness. In her love for Rosalind, she gives up her rightful place as a princess in her father’s kingdom to accompany her childhood friend. Jesus knows that real love takes self-sacrifice, and when a rich young man asks “what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life” (Mark 10:17), Jesus tells him to sell everything he has, give the money to the poor, and follow him. Jesus’ promise that if you give up your life, you will get it back works itself out in Celia’s situation. Celia finds a husband in the forest and is set back in the community of the court at the end of the play.

Even though he changes in the Acts of the Apostles, the disciple Peter is largely emblematic in the gospels. He often claims great determination and attempts acts of bravado only to fail miserably. The night before the crucifixion, Peter swears his faithfulness to Jesus three times and then abandons him during the arrest. Jesus easily discerns the nature of Peter’s promises and prophesies that “The cock shall not crow, till thou hast denied me thrice” (John 13:38). To counter the denial, Jesus later reinstates him
in a ceremonial fashion, asking him three times if he did indeed love him. Peter’s analog in these plays is not another character but is found in *As You Like It*’s lines “men are April when they woo, December when they wed” (4.1.147-48), which shows the difference between heavy promise making and the actual living out of promises. This is why Rosalind brings Hymen along to wed everyone. He provides assurance that the marriages will stand for something and be more than words.

Hymen presents marriage as a force that binds not only individuals but the universe as a whole (Berry 50). He says, “Then is there mirth in heaven, / When earthly things made even / Atone together” (5.4.108-10). At this point in the play, the chain that Rosalind gave to Orlando becomes “a bond of love that unites not only Rosalind and Orlando but, in Hymen’s song, earth and heaven” (Berry 44). Heaven is evoked throughout the whole play, but up until the last of it, there is a divide between earth and heaven. Marriage followed by the repentance of the usurping duke is atonement for what is out of kilter on earth, the result of which, we are informed, is mirth in heaven.

Hymen’s interpretation of marriage’s importance has more to do with spiritual reality than physical. It is related to the prayer that Jesus teaches his disciples which begins “Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven” (Matthew 6:10). Jesus uses the wedding image to describe the unity of heaven and earth, saying that when he returns, the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins, five of them wise and five unwise. The wise ones prepare in advance for the coming of the bridegroom, filling their lamps with oil, and the unwise do not. At midnight when the call goes out that the bridegroom approaches, the wise virgins find their way to him and join the wedding banquet, and the others are left out (Matthew 25:1-13). Here, the central image of unity is
the wedding feast.

The Petrarchan character, more complex than the aforementioned types, is a literary convention used to populate Elizabethan drama. In *As You Like It*, Silvius (whose name means ‘living in the woods’) is the stock Petrarchan character. He exhibits the type well as he runs through, declares his love, and is gone no sooner than he appears saying, “If thou hast not broke from company / Abruptly, as my passion now makes me, / Thou has not loved” (2.4.38-40). Edward Berry observes that “by heightening the artificiality of the Silvius-Phoebe episodes, Shakespeare indirectly increases our acceptance of the love between Rosalind and Orlando” (47). Silvius exhibits the characteristics that Rosalind only jokes about, and his love is scorned. When Shakespeare uses extended metaphors and unnecessarily airy language, it is usually as a joke. The characters that speak in the mode are not to be taken seriously.

Shakespeare makes use of the Petrarchan lover in *Romeo and Juliet* and *As You Like It*. Silvius makes the unreasonable claim that none has loved like him: “But if thy love were ever like to mine, / As sure I think did never man love so” (2.4.26-27). Such a claim is standard in the exchange of artificial love-language. Here, “artificial” is used in the idea of the artificer. Since the language is artsy it has a seeming lack of verity. Edward Berry thinks Silvius is full of romantic faith which is “played out in terms of Petrarchan convention; his truth to Phoebe, despite her cruelty, is rewarded in marriage” (51-52). The friar in *Romeo and Juliet* represents a counter to Romeo’s Petrarchan announcement that all he needs for fulfillment is to be joined with Juliet for a moment. The friar counsels the newlyweds to “love moderately. Long love doth so; / Too swift arrives as tardy as too slow” (2.6.14-15). His counsel represents the unchanging love of
God, who is devoted to man and desires man’s devotion in return. As before, with the disciple Peter, attesting to love with words is not enough.

Orlando is a character of devotion. When Rosalind first gives him attention, she places her chain around his neck, and afterwards he never sways in his love for her. To make sure that Orlando’s idealism and deifying of her will last once he truly knows her as a person, Rosalind tells Orlando the truth about women is that they are “changeable, longing and liking, proud, fantastical, apish, shallow, inconstant full of tears, full of smiles; for every passion something and for no passion truly anything” (3.2.402-04). It is as Ganymede that Rosalind tells Orlando he should come woo her so she can cure him of love, which she calls “a madness” (3.2.391). She claims her deprogramming worked before, and the audience wonders if this is not true.

Orlando is not a Petrarchan convention. One way this shows is how he vows to keep time, “not according to the dictates of the court or of conventional courtship, but according to the forest of Arden, in which there are no clocks, and in which to ‘fleet the time carelessly’ (1.1.188) may be a way of redeeming it” (Berry 51). Neither does Orlando use unnecessarily difficult language or conceits when he writes of or speaks to Rosalind. His language, like his dress and mannerisms, are all ‘point device’ (As You Like It 3.2.373), as Rosalind notes.

Rosalind uses the image of the Petrarchan lover to comically detail a true lover’s appearance, and Orlando doesn’t fit any of the descriptions. Orlando asks, “What were his marks?” as if to see if he matches them:

Rosalind: A lean cheek, which you have not; a blue eye and sunken, which you have not; an unquestionable spirit, which you have not; a beard
neglected, which you have not—but I pardon you for that, for simply your having in beard is a younger brother’s revenue. Then your hose should be ungartered, your bonnet unbanded, your sleeve unbuttoned, your shoe untied, and everything about you demonstrating a careless desolation. But you are no such man: you are rather point-device in your accouterments, as loving your-self than seeming the lover of any other. (3.2.365-76)

Love, by these terms from Rosalind, is very artificial and more akin to madness than anything else.

*Oppositional Characters*

Often in Shakespeare there are relationships in opposition to each other. Characters of opposition also populate the gospels. The sisters Martha and Mary illustrate that salvation is attained by faith rather than works. When Jesus visits the sisters at their house, Martha busies herself with serving Jesus, and Mary sits with him. When Martha becomes agitated with her sister for leaving her to do all the work, Jesus says to her, “Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things: But one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her” (Luke 10:41-42).

Touchstone’s and Jacques’ outlooks oppose Rosalind’s, extending her role as heroine (Berry 43). Rosalind is first made to endure Touchstone’s parody of Orlando’s verses. From Rosalind’s entrance into the play, she conspires along with Celia to play a game, that of falling in love. When Rosalind reads the verses Orlando has written in praise of her, the audience must wonder whether she takes the writer seriously or treats
his verses as part of the game. The nature of the Rosalind/Celia relationship is so close that one wonders if it is possible for Rosalind to love anyone else. This is especially true of Orlando, whose poetry calls attention to the fact that he doesn’t know Rosalind well enough to write something true of her. Touchstone’s critique is of how cliched the thoughts from the poems are. Consider Orlando’s “All the pictures fairest lined / Are but black to Rosalind” (3.2.90-91) against Touchstone’s parody: “Wintered garments must be lined / So must slender Rosalind” (3.2.103-4).

Touchstone’s experience in gaining love rivals Rosalind and Orlando’s experience as well. Touchstone uses his incredible wit to rid himself of Corin’s competition for Audrey’s love, and includes a biblical reference. Jesus said that when Judgment shall come, the Son of man shall “sit upon the throne of his glory . . and before him shall be gathered all nations; and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left” (Fulghum 224). Touchstone jests Corin about being a shepherd, getting “a living by the copulation of cattle . . If thou beest not damned for this, the Devil himself will have no shepherds. I cannot see else how thou shouldst ‘scape” (As You Like It 3.2.77-78, 81-83). Touchstone joins in on the celebration and game of love as easily as he joins the banished ladies flight from the court to the country. Marriage, especially to Audrey, doesn’t seem like a perfect fit for him, but he enters into to it without need of games or tests.

Jacques cryptically declares that he is going to give Orlando and Rosalind a hard time at the end of his song bemoaning the hardship of exile in the forest. He says, “I’ll go to sleep, if I can; if I cannot, I’ll rail against all the first-born of Egypt” (As You Like It
2.5.57-58). Fulghum notes the tenth plague that the Lord brought upon Pharaoh and the Egyptians: “And it came to pass, that at midnight the Lord smote all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh that sat on his throne unto the firstborn of the captive that was in the dungeon” (Fulghum 82). If Jacques cannot find pleasure in exile, then he will make certain that no one else does either.

Jacques’ melancholy places him in opposition to the celebration and optimism of the other characters. Despite the feelings of love everyone around him participates in, he remains aloof, making light of the whole situation, even calling Orlando Signior Love. Jacques, who is called ‘Monsieur Melancholy,’ speaks once with Orlando and once with Rosalind directly before two different meetings between the lovers. His aim is really to lessen the desire of the lovers and to turn their optimism into melancholy. He heckles Orlando’s high words of love saying, “You are full of pretty answers. Have you not been acquainted with goldsmiths’ wives, and conned them out of rings?” (3.2.267-69). Here, Jacques is bringing up the same point that Touchstone had noticed, and the nickname with which he designates Orlando, “Signior Love,” turns him into an allegory (Berry 49). It underscores that rather than being in the position of the lover/beloved, at this point, Orlando is only in pursuit of that.

Out of Jacques’ negativism towards couples, he refers to Noah’s Ark when he says of Touchstone and Audrey: “There is, sure, another flood toward, and these couples are coming to the ark. Here comes a pair of very strange beasts, which in all tongues are called fools” (Fulghum 185). The story of animals being taken to the ark two by two connects with the mass of marriages that occur at the end of the play in a mocking way. Jacques interprets all of the coupling he sees as a sign of weakness. The animals head for
the ark in pairs for rescue from certain doom, and the lovers pair up for rescue from, among other things, Jacques’ central defining characteristic, melancholy.

Rosalind’s meeting with Jacques brings to the forefront the heroine’s greatest conflict: the choice between a melancholy or merry state of mind. The decision to be merry and devise a game at the beginning of the play curbs Rosalind’s melancholy state. She says to Celia, “Unless you could teach me to forget a banished father, you must not learn me to remember any extraordinary pleasure” (1.2.3-6). To Rosalind, Jacques speaks of his great sadness which he gleans by the reflection of his travels. At this point, Orlando arrives very late to his tryst with Rosalind. Rosalind could easily give in to feelings of sadness, but she chooses against that, saying, “I would rather have a fool make me merry than experience to make me sad” (4.1.25-27). Here, by the fool, she is not, as one may at first think, referring to the clown who accompanied Celia and herself to Arden, but rather to Orlando, who has only just arrived and probably deserves some chiding. Orlando’s actions in pursuit of love are characterized by foolishness. Although he decides to wrestle Charles before meeting Rosalind, certainly her encouragement to him before the combat inspires him to throttle his opponent. This behavior is very adolescent, as is the unprovoked composition and disbursement of poetry in praise of one’s object of affection.

In *Romeo and Juliet* Mercutio’s bawdiness is set up against the language of real relationship. One reading of Mercutio is that he is stuck in the locker-room, an impetuous youth with a dirty mouth. The counter-argument here is that he deliberately questions Romeo’s motivations. The language of the sexual jest could be an attempt to discover the verity of the language exchanged between the lovers. Rosalie L. Colie says Mercutio
freely chooses his rhetorical style and often provides “an Ovidian voice, that of the high-spirited libertine whose awareness of the physical delights of love balance the sweetness, the near-nambypambyness of the Petrarchan traditional language” (146).

*Christian Allegory in Romeo and Juliet*

Romeo and Juliet can be read allegorically, Juliet representing Christ and Romeo the church, the central lines being Juliet’s “doff thy name” and Romeo’s response “call me but love and I’ll be new baptized” (2.2.50). Throwing off the name is also a part of the throwing off of the Petrarchan mode, as Romeo’s name evokes the over-the-top lover, sounding like a series of sighs with its “o’s” and “o me’s.” It cannot be overlooked that this is an extension of the Christian rhetoric between the two at the ball, but now the subject has grown more serious. Rather than flirtation and kissing as the aim, the text has moved to talk of lover/beloved, the taking on completely of the other.

Shakespeare’s intent for Juliet to speak the words “that which we call a rose / By any other name would smell as sweet” (2.2.43-44) is Juliet’s indictment against Romeo’s pursuit not of one woman, but for any good-looking girl that will love him back. Specifically, he is looking for a girl of Rosaline’s type, his former desire. Such an interpretation of the line replaces rose for Rosaline. If Romeo is only after a type, rather than a particular within the group, this explains how he can so quickly forget the past object of his affection. Juliet becomes the new rose.

Juliet’s perceived death and entombment evokes the death of Christ. After he dies on the cross (Mark 15:33-37), he is placed in a tomb (Mark 15:42-46) and then returns to
The death of Christ functions as a sacrifice so that man can find reconciliation with God. Donald Miller writes:

"The message is that man sinned against God and God gave the world over to man, and that if somebody wanted to be rescued out of that, if somebody for instance finds it all very empty, that Christ will rescue them if they want; that if they ask forgiveness for being a part of that rebellion then God will forgive them." (124)

Like Christ, after Juliet is entombed and believed dead, she reawakens. She dies in this way so that she can gain the life she really desires. She neglects Jesus’ teaching that by trying to save your life, you’ll lose it, but you have to lose your life in order to save it. When she dies it is to save her life as Romeo’s wife, and it turns out that she really does lose it.

The death of Jesus contains elements found in Aristotle’s tragic pattern, and the resurrection of Jesus contains comedic elements. Tragedy follows the fall of a great man, usually a king. Jesus is “the King of the Jews” (Luke 23:38) and the “King of Kings” (Revelation 19:16). Jesus does not have any sin or tragic flaw. However, his *hamartia*, or the reason he falls, is because he takes on the sins of the world. Indeed, he dies by the weight of it. There is, also, a purging or catharsis when Jesus pronounces forgiveness over the world: “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34).

The end of the gospels contains elements of comedy. The gospels do not end with Jesus’ death. There is *peripeteia* or a reversal in his return to life. By overcoming death, Jesus substantiates his promise of extending eternal life to mankind. The reversal of death to life also reverses the genre from the tragic to the comic. This reversal is communicated
most effectively through wedding stories, the first of which is when Jesus’ first miracle takes place. At the wedding at Cana in Galilee, all of those attending the banquet drink all the wine before the end of the celebration, so Jesus’ mother tells the servants to do whatever Jesus says. At his command they fill large jars with water and afterwards he turns it into wine (John 2:1-11). This miracle symbolizes his promise to send the Holy Spirit after his resurrection to those who believe in him (John 14:16-18).

All along in the gospel stories, Jesus speaks about the reversal, how he will die and return. One instance of this is, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up” (John 2:19). So, the image of the wedding in the gospels is one of union between God and man, as it conveys the blessing the Lord has given to humanity, just as weddings in Shakespeare symbolize harmony between man and woman. Shakespeare makes use of the way the gospels use the wedding theme in Romeo and Juliet and As You Like It, allowing the union of the star-crossed lovers to end the feud, and causing the marriages in the comedy to link earth and heaven.

*Truth in love in As You Like It*

The love which Shakespeare’s characters have for one another sometimes goes beyond human love, and demonstrates Christ’s love for humanity. The language between Rosalind and Celia contains the mystical elements found in the relationship between Jesus and the Father in the Gospel of John where Jesus says, “I and my Father are one” (John 10:30) and between Naomi and Ruth where Ruth says to Naomi, “intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge” (Ruth 1:16). Celia tells Rosalind, “thou and I am one”
and, “Shall we be sund’red, shall we part, sweet girl?” (As You Like It 1.3.95-96). Martin Buber holds that I-Thou language is important because human existence can be understood through the ways in which we engage in dialogue with one another and with God (Bloom 1). The I-Thou is a subject-to-subject relationship, not the subject to object relationship of the I-it (Bloom 1). When Celia speaks with Rosalind, it is in a manner that reveals the depth of their love for each other. This passage also parallels Jesus’ talk in the Gospel of Mark concerning marriage: “What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder” (10:9).

The relationship between Rosalind and Celia changes throughout the play due to Rosalind’s increasing attention to the opposite sex. The change is evidenced by the identity changes in the play. When Celia takes on a different identity, she takes the name Aliena, or foreigner, alien. The outward identity changes compromise Rosalind and Celia’s I-Thou relationship. In their charade they are no longer best friends, but are role-playing a man-woman relationship, of which Celia takes on the female part. This change allows Rosalind a tentative experience in hetero relationships. In the relationship between Naomi and Ruth, Ruth proves her dedication and faithfulness by remaining with her mother-in-law even after her husband, Naomi’s son, had died. Through this, Naomi helps Ruth find a new husband. Rosalind and Celia are rewarded with husbands for their faithfulness to each other as well. These relationships are, to be sure, platonic, but it is the discipline of faithfulness which is modeled.

In these two plays, the female heroine is often the dominant character in relationships, and usually takes the lead in bringing about marriage. Rosalind controls both Orlando and the movement of the play, setting all the terms for the relationships and
even speaking the epilogue. To wield such power she dresses up as a man, unlike Juliet who just acts like one. Rosalind becomes Ganymede, “Jove’s own page” (*As You Like It* 1.3.122). Ganymede drew Zeus’ attention just as Rosalind drew Hymen’s down to “sanction her festivities” (Berry 44). The Ganymede myth also contains some of the same sexual tensions found in *As You Like It*, as Zeus and Orlando are both drawn to the boy Ganymede.

The relationship between Zeus and Ganymede contains some of Leslie Fiedler’s homoerotic elements, but those, while implied, are not at the forefront of *As You Like It* between Ganymede and Orlando. Shakespeare is well capable of presenting a play charged with aberrant sexual behavior as he does in *Twelfth Night* where Duke Orsino finds himself attracted to Viola even though he thinks she is a boy and Olivia falls for the feminine youth. In *As You Like It* the homoerotic appears more subtly. Celia does not confuse close friendship with desire for Rosalind in the likeness of a boy, and neither is Orlando’s desire for Rosalind so great that he is attracted to her as a boy.

Phoebe and Olivia, like Rosalind, want to try their hand at the masculine role and go after the men they love rather than wait on their approach, but Phoebe mistakenly falls in love with Ganymede. This theme appears in sonnet 144 where the lady woos “his purity with her foul pride” (8). Consider Olivia’s words to Viola, “Love sought is good, but given unsought is better” (*Twelfth Night* 3.1.156). Olivia’s platitude shares some of John’s thought “Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us” (1 John 4:10). Olivia, however, speaks in something of a paradox as she does not want the love given unsought but wants to seek out love herself, and this is the pride of which
Shakespeare speaks: that we do not accept the love that comes to us, but rather attempt to seek out love elsewhere.

In *Twelfth Night* the change in identity is supposed to give Viola a degree of safety, but results dangerously with people falling in love with her. In *As You Like It* Rosalind changes identity to acquire the safety of the male role as well as to test the verity of Orlando’s love, and the change still results in Phoebe falling for her.

Celia’s pseudonym signifies multiple things. In *The Letter to Can Grande*, Dante Alighieri notes “allegory is derived from the Greek *alleon*, which means in Latin *aliemus* (‘belonging to another’) or *diversus* (‘different’)” (251). So, Aliena denotes Celia’s position as a stranger to the Forest of Arden. Secondly, it signifies that she belongs to Rosalind (alias Ganymede), and thirdly that the story of Rosalind/Celia or Ganymede/Aliena is an allegory, that being Rosalind’s passing from finding contentment within the context of female companionship to male companionship.

The switch for Rosalind to accepting love language from Orlando rather than Celia is not without its problems. At first, Orlando is only capable of the I-it of Subject to Object. His tree-poetic represents her in comparison with objects:

   From the east to western Ind,
   No jewel is like Rosalind
   Her worth, being mounted on the wind,
   Through all the world bears Rosalind.
   All the pictures fairest lined
   Are but black to Rosalind.
   Let no face be kept in mind
But the fair of Rosalind. (As You Like It 3.2.88-95)

Orlando equates Rosalind with jewels, pictures, and faces, not with attributes dealing with her personality. The poems are meaningful to Rosalind, not for what they say, but because they signify Orlando’s attraction for her, and thus the possibility of becoming the beloved. Orlando verifies this while placing them, saying, “hang there, my verse, in witness of my love” (As You Like It 3.2.1).
Conclusion

“All the world’s a stage, / And all the men and women merely players” (As You Like It 2.7.139-40)

Shakespeare often borrows characters, images, and themes from the New Testament, which endow his plays with Christian meaning. Conflict with Tybalt is a chance for Romeo to test newfound moral obligations; hearing of death sends Juliet into a short discourse on Christian eschatology; and marriage in As You Like It is viewed as an ultimately spiritual event rather than a physical one. Shakespeare is very thorough in his use of the New Testament gospels, including not just a character type here and an image there, but a myriad of all.

Shakespeare is as much of a master at incorporating the gospels into his plays as he is at creating puns with a sexual orientation, and in Romeo and Juliet he uses the two, the sacred and the profane to create a world of tension. That world is a mirror of our own. Shakespeare makes intertextual links not only to the gospels but also to the Christian life. The Bible is not just examined by the reader, but it examines him. The stories, a mirror to human living, draw readers in and cause them to think about their own experiences in their light. Shakespeare’s use of the power of the gospel stories endows his plays with that same force. We want our passion to be as extravagant as Romeo’s, our wit to be as precise as Rosalind’s, and our love to be as true as Jesus’
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