8

"NOT OF AN AGE, BUT FOR ALL TIME"

SAMPLE

In the slender space of twenty years not one but two corpora exploded the course of English language and literature. Two centuries separate Goethe (1749–1832) from Luther's Bible (1534). Pushkin (1799–1837) consolidated Russia's vernacular a century after East Slavic's push and pull between Church Slavonic and Peter the Great (1672–1725). From 1590 to 1611 England witnessed the emergence of *both* Shakespearean poetry *and* the King James Bible. The world has never been the same since. The Bard of Avon is now regarded as the preeminent dramatist on the world's stage; no book has been published more often, in more editions, than *The Holy Bible* of 1611. Such are adequate reasons to consider both in tandem, though neither corpus intersected with the other[1] and either easily overpowers a chapter's scope and an essayist's competence.

Differences and Similarities

Identifying differences between these corpora is easy. A professional playwright, Shakespeare (1564–1616) wrote for a secular audience in open air; the divines at Oxford, Cambridge, and Westminster crafted an instrument for worshipers in the young Church of England. The King's

1. That Myles Smith sought Shakespeare's assistance in rendering the Book of Ezekiel is a product of Rudyard Kipling's whimsy ("Proofs of Holy Writ," in Beyley and Lewis, eds., *Mrs Bathurst and Other Stories*, 251–63).

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Translators were wedded to Scripture; state censorship permitted Shakespeare to dramatize almost anything but Scripture.[2] The six companies overseen by Archbishop Richard Bancroft (1544–1610) were constrained by royal mandates for collaboration and a common belief that God had authored the sacred text;[3] Shakespeare (one imagines) enjoyed comparatively unfettered freedom in generating works of individual genius. Myles Smith and his colleagues proceeded conservatively; Shakespeare's talent exfoliated. The Translators favored a literary style already archaic in 1611, as Shakespeare was nearing retirement from theater;[4] in later works, he conjured a language that, as Frank Kermode demonstrated, would have been nearly incomprehensible to his listeners on a first hearing.[5] This catalogue of variances could be multiplied.

Precisely because the corpora were produced independently of each other and seem so opposite in character and substance, the points of similarity between Shakespeare and the King James Bible become fascinating. Both corpora were created, not for scholars, but rather for popular audiences. Groundlings at the Globe regularly attended Sunday services, or at least were expected to; it was for them that the King's Translators toiled. The record of Shakespeare's attendance of holy services is nil; nevertheless, he knew his audience and depended on its religious assumptions to lead his customers dramatically where he wanted them to follow.[6] Moreover, his poetry's resonance with the Geneva Bible of 1560 (in some admixture with the Great Bible [1539] and Bishops' Bible [1568]) proves Shakespeare's pilfering of Holy Writ and its ideas.[7] By express acknowledgment the King's Translators depended heavily on the matter

SAMPLE

2. Gardner, *Religion and Literature*, 61–89.

3. See Norton, *A History of the English Bible*, 1:139–61; Nicolson, *God's Secretaries*.

4. Schoenbaum, *Shakespeare*, 278–319.

5. On the KJV's deliberate archaisms (e.g., "hath" and "sayeth" for "has" and "says"), see McGrath, *In the Beginning*, 265–76; on later Shakespeare's obscurity, Kermode, *Shakespeare's Language*, 3–17. Note *Coriolanus* (4.8.45–49): "but one of these / (As he hath spices of them all, not all, / For I dare so far free him) made him fear'd, / So hated, and so banish'd; but he has a merit / To choke it in the utt'rance."

6. Whether Shakespeare "died a papist" (Richard Davies) or "a tolerant Anglican" (Schoenbaum, *Shakespeare*, 61) remains as controversial as it is probably irresolvable. For a perceptive assessment of the plays' religious elusiveness, consult Nuttall, *Shakespeare the Thinker*, 16–21. Milward, *Shakespeare's Religious Background*, and Groves, *Texts and Traditions*, offer balanced accounts of Catholic and Protestant pressures during the playwright's era.

7. Consult Noble, *Shakespeare's Biblical Knowledge*; Shaheen, *Biblical References*.

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and techniques of their predecessors, especially Tyndale's extraordinary rendering of the NT (1526).[8] So also Shakespeare drank deeply from the well of rhetorical practice incorporated in the curriculum of Elizabethan schools[9] and, in accordance with the fashion of his day, cribbed most of his plots and characters from a motley mess of Homer and Ovid, Plutarch and Holinshed. The playwright corresponds to Peter Ackroyd's "English archetype; he seems most original when he borrows most freely";[10] he exhibited, without articulating, Myles Smith's representation of his fellow translators' concern: "not to make of a bad [resource] a good one, . . . but to make a good one better, or out of many good ones, one principal good one."[11] For their part the Jacobean companies exercised greater freedom in translation than their self-imposed mandate might lead one to expect.[12] Still, both they and Shakespeare served at their monarch's pleasure, under his edicts. Certainly the King's Translators had neither license nor disposition to proceed otherwise. Neither could Shakespeare. Operating as a patented shareholder of the King's Men, the country's finest theatrical troupe, Shakespeare was obligated to write a specific number of plays *per annum*, for which he did not hold the copyright: his works were the property of the King's company of which he was a member.[13] Artistically Shakespeare was both restricted and enriched: he tailored leading roles to the talents of Richard Burbage and comedic parts to clowns like Robert Armin, much as Duke Ellington (1899–1974) later orchestrated his compositions by studying Johnny Hodges, Cootie Williams, and every other "man in the orchestra and [found] out what he can do best, and what he

SAMPLE

8. Daniell, *The Bible in English*, 113–450; Daniell, *William Tyndale*.

9. Joseph, *Shakespeare's Use of the Arts of Language*. In Kennedy's judgment "[Shakespeare's] works are in a very concrete way perhaps the greatest achievements of classical rhetoric" (*Classical Rhetoric*, 213). Ironically, the speeches of Brutus and Antony in *Julius Caesar* (3.2) comprise Exhibit A in the case *against* rhetoric, owing to their easy manipulation of popular emotion.

10. *Albion*, 222.

11. "The Translators to the Reader," in *The Reader's Bible*, xxvi.

12. Though the six translation companies were directed to adhere to the Bishops' Bible, "as little altered as the Truth of the Originall will permitt," only 8 percent of its phraseology found its way into the KJV. Different critics acknowledge varying degrees of the KJV's "beauty," but most concur on its basic clarity. "[There is] an English book and one only, where, as in the *Iliad* itself, perfect plainness of speech is allied with perfect nobleness; and that book is the Bible" (Arnold, *On Translating Homer*, 89).

13. See Bentley, "Shakespeare, the King's Company, and *King Lear*."

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would like to do."[14] The critical point to remember is that Shakespeare was as bound to others—politically, professionally, artistically—as were the King's Translators. Genius strikes fire within social networks, however much it may in turn sear them.

Language glues human society. Across four centuries Shakespeare's works and the KJV have knitted us together. As a convenient means of pondering this phenomenon, consider two specimens of both corpora: *King Lear* and the King James Book of Job. Reference to both has become commonplace in considerations of theodicy and human suffering. I am in no way concerned to build a case for literary dependence in either direction.[15] My interest lies in the peculiar ways these works use language to create, dissolve, and reconstitute their listeners' social and religious imaginations.[16] *Lear* was first performed at Whitehall on St Stephen's Night (26 December), 1606.[17] While Job's origin is shrouded in the mists of late centuries before the common era, the version embedded in the thought and speech of most English-speaking moderns derives from the KJV. Apart from their protagonists' intense turmoil and the folktales' rudimentary framework, replete with a trio of friends or daughters, Job and *Lear* are very different. Job is a sonata for dissonant voices on the adequacy of the sapiential truism that vice is punished and virtue, rewarded. *Lear* is Shakespeare's only tragedy that entwines a pair of plots (Lear and his daughters; Gloucester and his sons). Job's characters differ

14. "I regard my entire orchestra as one large instrument, and I try to play on that instrument to the fullest of its capabilities. My aim is and always has been to mold the music around the man" (quoted in Giddins, *Visions of Jazz*, 104).

15. For Muir "There is no doubt that Job was much in Shakespeare's mind when he was writing *King Lear*" (*King Lear*, 289). Curiously, however, this very long play neither quotes nor indubitably alludes to anything in that very long biblical book. "I such a fellow saw, / That made me think a man a worm" (4.1.34–35) may echo Job 17:14, though Gloucester's comment—if biblically allusive at all—could as easily refer to Ps 22:6. Shakespeare's clearest allusion to Job (7:6) is in (of all things) *The Merry Wives of Windsor* 5.1.23: "I know also life is a shuttle." *Lear*'s nearest biblical paraphrase is of Luke 2:49: "O dear Father, / It is thy business that I go about" (4.4.23–24). Fisch (*Biblical Presence*, 137–38) insightfully points up extra-Joban biblical comparisons, such as Cordelia's likeness to the Prodigal Son (Luke 15) and the competition between Edmund and Edgar for a blind father's blessing with that of Esau and Jacob toward Isaac (Gen 27:1–46).

16. A good reason to consider Job is that the efforts of King's Translators may be examined on their merits: they could not rely upon Tyndale. Marx, *Shakespeare and the Bible*, 59–78, compares other aspects of these works.

17. Foakes, *King Lear*, 4–5. All quotations from the play refer to this AS critical edition.

SAMPLE

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only in broad strokes: the LORD God and Satan, the plaintiff Job and his nearly interchangeable interlocutors. Each of these characters exists to convey a position clashing against another; none, save Job, who finally "repent[s] in dust and ashes" (42:6), demonstrates that development, witnessed toward the play's end, in Lear the king and even in the bastard Edmund (4.7.60; 5.3.241–44). Eventually in Job, God speaks; in *Lear* the gods—Jupiter, Juno, Hecate—are silent while mortals occasionally speak of or to them (1.1.111, 161–62, 179; 2.1.45, 2.2.211; 3.2.49; 4.6.34). Job ends with multiplied restoration of wealth and children (42:10–17); *Lear*, with the old king dead beside three dead daughters: one poisoned, the second a suicide, the third hanged (5.3.238–39, 304–9).

Social and Traditional Contexts

While marching their separate ways, these works rhyme. To begin with, both Job and *Lear* are highly poetic, sophisticated enlargements of primitive tales, fresh reconsiderations that almost immediately attracted important interpretive accretions. Long before the King's Translators laid a finger to Job, its discourses appear to have extruded the folktale recounted in chapters 1 and 2 and the closing verses (7–17) of chapter 42.[18] While the declamations of Job and his friends do not trace a straight line of logical development, as do Plato's *Dialogues*, they state themes and variations, with *dimenuendi* and *crescendi*, like a Bach fugue.[19] The Hymn to Wisdom in Job 28 may have been a later interlamination or, alternatively, the author's own jarring incorporation into the discourse. The same seems true of Elihu's speech (33:1—37:24). Other textual patches hobble sense (e.g., 22:29–30; 24:18–24; 26:1—27:23), with which the King's Translators and their successors had to cope. We find the same phenomena in *Lear*, also based on an older tale that Shakespeare probably knew in different versions: Leir of Britain in Monmouth's *Historia regum Britanniae* (*ca.* 1135), Holinshed's *Chronicles* (1587), Higgins's additions to *The Mirror for Magistrates* (1574).[20] The text of the play (3.1.17–39; 5.3.102–15) in its First Quarto (1608) and First Folio editions (1623) is

18. See Habel, *Job*, 25–42.

19. Zuckerman (*Job the Silent*, 175–79) applies to Job the metaphor of fugue to make a point different from my own.

20. These are only representative; for detailed discussion consult Muir, *Sources*, 202–6.

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seriously disturbed.[21] Nahum Lane infamously gave *Lear* a happy ending (with Cordelia's marriage to Edgar), used in staging the play from 1681 until 1838.[22] My reason for rehearsing these tradition-histories is to point up the complex web of social transactions and translations that have occurred before, within, and since the composition of both books. The lives of these texts are themselves expressions of the grounding and slippage of language within society, a matter with which both books are much preoccupied.[23]

Injustice and Ruin

> [God] destroyeth the perfect and the wicked.
> If the scourge slay suddenly, he will laugh at the trial of the innocent. (Job 9:22b–23)

> As flies to wanton boys are we to th' gods,
> They kill us for their sport. (*King Lear* 4.1.36–37)

Both Job and *Lear* pose painful questions about society's unraveling and humanity's expulsion into the terrible wonders of the natural world. To acknowledge this is to recognize that these texts have not merely undergone different kinds of *linguistic* translation. At a fundamental level their characters endure profound *social* translations, challenging audiences to make sense of radically transposed sensibilities. A few examples must suffice.

Although the prologue of Job has been derided for a theological naïveté undermined by the discourses that follow, the crux of the deal cut by God and Satan pervades the rest of the book. The LORD is certain that his servant Job is "a perfect and upright man," expressed in social relations: one who "escheweth evil" and "still holdeth fast his integrity" (1:8; 2:3). Satan wagers that such probity runs no deeper than the hedges protecting him (1:10). Knock out all of the social props—his assets, entourage,

21. See the analysis in Foakes, *King Lear*, 110–28, 393–402.

22. Tate's "Dedication and Prologue" to his version of *Lear* ("a Heap of Jewels, unstrung, and unpolisht") is available in Kermode, *King Lear*, 25–26.

23. Murphy (*Darkness and Devils,* 213): "Like Job, King Lear is part of this Wisdom Literature tradition . . . Tragedy is Wisdom Literature dramatized." Newsom concludes her monograph with Job's "imaginary theater production" on "a semidarkened stage" (*Job*, 259, 260).

SAMPLE

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family, finally "skin for skin" (2:4)—and, Satan bets, "he will curse thee to thy face" (1:11; 2:5): the ultimate divorce between a man and God. Across the next forty chapters Job and his interlocutors erect, then demolish, one social construct after another: the goodness of life versus a "soul [that] chooseth strangling, *and* death rather than my life; I loathe *it*" (7:15–16a; also 3:11); trouble's inevitability "as the sparks fly upward" (5:7) versus "the arrows of the Almighty" and "the terrors of God" (6:4); assurance of divine upholding of justice (8:20) versus a God who "will laugh at the trial of the innocent" (9:23). The triadic series of debates between Job and his friends are but a semblance of conversation; between them there is in fact little social intercourse as they typically talk past each other (5:17–27/6:1–13; 11:13–20/12:1–25; 18:5–21/19:1–12). In chaps. 29–31 Job reminisces of "months past" (29:2), when "[u]nto me *men* gave ear, and waited" (29:21), laments their current derision (30:1–15), and asserts his desire to "be weighed in an even balance, that God may know mine integrity" (31:6), "*that* the Almighty would answer me, and *that* mine adversary had written a book" (31:35; see also 23:1–27). Job wants his day in court and he wants it now, because he knows himself in the right and God in the wrong. Elihu states this (35:2) while effectively laying the groundwork for the answer from the whirlwind (35:5–11; 36:24—37:13). The steel hoops encircling plaintiff and defendant have not snapped: says Job, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him" (13:15a); God replies, "I will demand of thee, and answer thou me" (38:3b). Unbound by society's mores, God overwhelms Job by aligning himself with nature unfathomable: songs of the morning stars (38:7), seas swaddled in thick darkness (38:9), prey for the lion and food for the raven (38:39, 41), birthing goats (39:1–4) and scornful peacocks (39:13–18), behemoth (40:15–24) and leviathan (41:1–34). All things, and more, God restores to Job, though not before the man of Uz confesses that his eye has now seen what therefore his ear had heard—and that Job hasn't known what he was talking about (42:2–5).

Regarded socially, Lear's tragedy is precipitated by his ridiculous attempt to divide the indivisible: to retire from power without abdication (1.1.35–50).[24] That way lies, first, schizophrenia—"Who is it," he

24. "The [king's] body natural is the lesser, and with this the body politic is consolidated. So that . . . he has not a body natural distinct and divided by itself from the office and dignity royal, but a body natural and a body politic together indivisible, and these two bodies are incorporated in one person" (*The All-England Law Reports 1558–1774* 1.148, cited in Foakes, *King Lear*, 18).

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soon asks, "that can tell me who I am?" (1.4.221)—then total madness, which Lear evokes on the storm-blasted heath (3.2). Both Job and Lear are exposed to themselves in a cyclone, an apocalyptic "crack [of] nature's moulds" (3.2.8).[25] Both are flung into the natural world of "unaccommodated man . . . no more but such a poor, bare, forked animal" (3.4.105–6) that "eats cow-dung for salads; swallows the old rat and the ditch-dog" (3.4.127–28) and dies with less breath than that of "a dog, a horse, a rat" (5.3.305; cf. Job 4:10–11; 6:15–18, 26). Likewise Edmund's dupes, his father Gloucester and brother Edgar: branded as traitors, "a credulous father and a brother noble" (1.2.177) end up staggered at Dover Cliff, the one hideously maimed, the other Poor Tom O'Bedlam (4.6). Nature is Edmund's goddess (1.2.1); this unaccommodated man revels in society's unraveling, to whatever he "can fashion fit" (1.2.182). Unlike Job, nature in *Lear* affords little restorative vision. Beneath the waist "there's hell, there's darkness, there is the sulphurous pit, burning, scalding, stench, consumption!" (4.6.125–23). The hand that would be kissed should first be wiped; "it smells of mortality" (4.6.129) in a world red in tooth and claw: "When we are born we cry that we are come / To this great stage of fools . . . Then kill, kill, kill, kill, kill, kill!" (4.6.178–79, 183; cf. Job 3:11). Lear's world is that of a "hog in sloth, fox in greediness, dog in madness, lion in prey" (3.4.91–92); Goneril is "the sea-monster" (1.4.253) and "detested kite" (1.4.254), with "a serpent's tooth" (1.4.280) and "wolfish visage" (1.4.300). To his vicious wife, Albany comments (4.2.50–51): "Humanity must perforce prey on itself, / Like monsters of the deep." Rare, bleak glimpses of clarity for unaccommodated humanity open possibilities for compassion: "Poor naked wretches, wheresoe'er you are, / That bide the pelting of this pitiless storm, . . . / [Undefended by] houseless heads and unfed sides" (3.4.28–30). "Come, let's away to prison; We too alone will sing like birds i'the cage" (5.3.8–9).

Language Undone

> Thou shalt not sigh, nor hold thy stumps to heaven,
> Nor wink, nor nod, nor kneel, nor make a sign,
> But I of these will wrest an alphabet
> And by still practice learn to know thy meaning.
> (*Titus Andronicus* 3.2.42)

25. See Wittereich, "Image of Horror."

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Religiously and politically Jacobean society was highly unstable;[26] it's easy to imagine hardscrabble Christian playgoers keenly responsive to an all-powerful king and an utterly righteous commoner stripped of everything they had. But Job and *Lear* would do more than console audiences with familiar fables; their translators appalled the same listeners with fractured words in worlds of disjointed meaning. Both works use language stretched to the breaking point for revealing layered cultures broken and collapsing.[27] Of this, *Lear*'s opening scene offers a fine illustration: repeatedly the king commands his daughters, "Speak" (1.1.54, 68, 86, 90), during a state ritual most impertinent for genuine declaration of a daughter's love.[28] The gullible reward of Goneril and Regan's chilled smoothness (1.1.54–85), their mettle turned to metal (1.1.69),[29] is matched by undammed fury at Cordelia's bonded "nothing" (1.1.87–89). "Nothing" unleashes the old dragon's wrath (1.1.123), soon directed against his trustworthy, rude confidant: "be Kent unmannerly / When Lear is mad. What wouldst thou do, old man?" (1.1.147). As a flattering façade is plastered over truth, the state crumbles fast. Progressively Lear's Fool distends word and sense (1.5.31–36, 44–45):[30]

> LEAR: Be my horses ready?
>
> FOOL: Thy asses are gone about 'em. The reason why the seven stars are no more than seven is a pretty reason.
>
> LEAR: Because they are not eight.
>
> FOOL: Yes indeed, thou wouldst make a good fool. . . .
>
> LEAR: O let me not be mad, not mad, sweet heaven! I would not be mad. Keep me in temper, I would not be mad.

Madness, nonetheless, is Lear's destination. At its nadir his speech is scrambled beyond intelligibility (4.6.): "No, they cannot touch me for coining. I am the King himself . . . Nature's above art in that respect. There's your press-money. That fellow handles his bow like a crow-keeper:

26. Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*; Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars*.

27. Mack calls *King Lear* "the greatest anti-pastoral ever penned" (*Everybody's Shakespeare*, 166).

28. Danson, *Tragic Alphabet*, 163–68.

29. Hughes ("Politics of Forgiveness") speaks of Lear, Goneril, and Regan's "commodification of love."

30. An insightful consideration of the Fool's role as "the consciousness of a split society[, . . .] a twin-headed monster at strife with itself," is Danby, "The Fool and the Handy-Dandy" (esp. 387).

SAMPLE

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draw me a clothier's yard. Look, look, a mouse: peace, peace, this piece of toasted cheese will do't. There's my gauntlet, I'll prove it on a giant. Bring up the brown bills. O well flown, bird, i'the clout, i'the clout! Hewgh! Give the word."[31]

Are there analogues for this verbal tottering and shredding in the King James Job? Yes, as a few examples may prove.[32] (a) Among the book's most famous euphemisms is *bārek*, "bless," for its inversion: "*curse* God, and die" (2:9; also 1:11; 2:5). (b) One is hard pressed to imagine a more perfect Englishing of Job 5:7 than "Yet man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward" (*ûbênê-reŝep yagbîhû ʿûp*).[33] Nor can the KJV of 10:10 be bettered: "Hast thou not poured me out as milk, and curdled me like cheese?" (with Kent's contextually offensive pronoun "thou").[34] (c) While English is incapable of playing the pun *tiqwâ* ("thread"/"hope"), "My days are faster than a weaver's shuttle, and are spent without hope" approximates the running-stop cadence of 7:6. (d) Equally faithful to the Hebrew, the Translators' rendition of 7:17 preserves its acidic parody of Ps 8:4: seized by overwhelming anguish, puny man feels prey to a mysteriously stalking, wolfish God. (e) Though the meaning of the last stich in 15:30 eludes everyone (*wēyāsûr bĕrûach pîw*), "and by the breath of his mouth shall he go away" whispers human evanescence. (f) Guided by poetry, not orthodontics, the King's Translators bequeathed to us an escape "with the skin of my teeth" (19:20).[35]

31. Weiss ("As the World Sits," 87): "Shakespeare, at the threshold of the modern world, in *Hamlet* and *King Lear* provides the boldest, most searching examination of that world's most fundamental dilemma: the falling apart of thing and thought, thought and feeling."

32. On "The Language and Style of Job," consult Gordis, *The Book of God and Man*, 157–68.

33. Alternatively, one may translate this verse, "Man, indeed, is born for trouble, / And Resheph's sons wing high" (Pope, *Job*, 40). In my view the reference to a Northwest Semitic god makes small sense in the context of Job 7.

34. In early modern English "you" was the typical mode of address within upper classes talking to each other; "thou" could be used among lower classes talking to each other, by superiors to their inferiors, in cases of special intimacy or insult. "So, in a scene, when someone deviates from this normal pattern, it always means something—usually a change of attitude, or a new emotion or mood" (Crystal and Crystal, *The Shakespeare Miscellany*, 13).

35. Pope's translation, "My teeth drop from my gums" (*Job*, 139), makes equally good sense of an obscure Hebrew clause, though his dismissiveness of the King James's poetry seems unwarranted. Since teeth have no skin, an escape with such is no escape at all—and that seems the point.

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Ultimately, in Job as in *Lear*, speech collapses with its speaker. "I was at ease, but [God] hath broken me asunder: he hath also taken me by the neck, and shaken me to pieces, and set me up for his mark. His archers compass me round about, he cleaveth my reins asunder, and doth not spare; he poureth out my gall upon the ground. He breaketh me with breach upon breach" (Job 16:12–14a). Caroline Spurgeon could have been speaking of Job's grotesque abuse:

> [T]here runs throughout only one overpowering and dominating continuous image . . . [:] the general "floating" image kept constantly before us, chiefly by means of the verbs used, but also in metaphor, of a human body in anguished movement, tugged, wrenched, beaten, pierced, stung, scourged, dislocated, flayed, gashed, scalded, tortured, and finally broken on the rack.[36]

Spurgeon spoke not of Job; she referred to *King Lear*. And as the body goes, so goes the mind. Job 24:18–25; 26:5–14; and 27:8–23 are notoriously troublesome: though placed on the mouth of Job, they iterate the friends' point of view. Some commentators rearrange the speeches of Bildad and Zophar,[37] though there is no textual warrant for that expedience (as the KJV indicates). Carol Newsom suggests the alternative of "a perception and a language that verge on madness," which, if accepted, would align the character of Job even more closely to that of Lear:

> Though Job ostensibly says only the most conventional words, his contextualization of them shows that he has constructed an unstable and shifting set of equivalences and oppositions. What should be is the opposite of what is, yet he speaks as though all were as it should be . . . In such a "Wonderland" word, Job speaks the only speech possible—an insanely inverted speech in which everything shadows and gestures to its opposite and in which one naturally swears by one's betrayer.[38]

"How long will ye vex my soul, and break me in pieces with words?" (Job 19:2) "Hark in thine ear: change places and handy-dandy, which is the justice, which is the thief?" (*Lear* 4.6.148–49)

36. *Shakespeare's Imagery,* 338–39.
37. Thus, Gordis, *The Book of God and Man*, 268–77; Pope, *Job*, xix–xx, 174–96.
38. Newsom, *Book of Job*, 167–68.

SAMPLE

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Translation

> Bless thee, Bottom, bless thee! Thou art translated!
> (*A Midsummer Night's Dream* 3.1.114)

> [B]ut God's hand is in every translation; and his hand shall bind up all our scattered leaves again, for that library where every book shall lie open to one another.[39]

George Steiner identified four phases in every act of translation: a leaning into the text, a cognitive invasion, a withdrawal with meaning heavy-laden, and a compensatory restoration of balance.[40] Shakespeare achieved this with his sources in 1606; the King's Translators did so with theirs in 1611. Had they not succeeded, their works would not be so deeply embedded in our consciousness as they are. I would gloss Steiner's analysis at three points. It describes, first, not only the carriage of literature from one language to another, but more fundamentally humanity's lifelong translation of nonsense into sense and its ambient sensibility. With Job and Lear the righteous and foolish of every generation lean into turmoil and diminution before withdrawing from the verge to find their footing. Second, so exquisitely did the King's Men of the early seventeenth century do their jobs that they have colonized our imagination: the conceptual home from which we depart and to which we return is scaffolded by the 1611 Bible and the 1623 Folio. If English is our native or adopted tongue, we can no more escape either corpus than we can outjump our own shadows. Third, Steiner's final stage—put simply, *le mot juste*—is forever an approximation at best, never an equivalence. In life as in letters, there is always a gap between the experience and its articulation, that which "we feel, not what we ought to say" (*Lear* 5.3.323). Writ large, that is the reason the endings of Job and *Lear* irritate us so; writ even larger, that is why our lives frustrate us, particularly as we near our ends. Job's last words: "I abhor *myself*, and repent in dust and ashes" (42:6). Why? What has he learned? Lear's last words: "Look there, look there!" (5.3.309). Why? What should we see? The ingrained paradox of the King James Bible and Shakespearean poetry is a feeling of "at-homeness"[41] in a universe, quickened by faith and by love, which is irreducibly strange and

39. John Donne, "Meditation XVII," in Booty, *John Donne*, 271.

40. *After Babel*, 296–301.

41. Steiner's apt description of the KJV (*After Babel*, 348).

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often frightening. These works demand of us lived answers: When the globe torques toward torturous imbecility, will you, in spite of everything, reach beyond yourself and dare dedication to another, even to the Other? For that question, among others, these are works "not of an age, but for all time."[42]

SAMPLE

42. Ben Jonson's eulogy of Shakespeare was published in the First Folio.

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