PART I

Believing

CHAPTER 1

An Apology for Belief

OED – Believe

Etymology: Probably an alteration (with prefix substitution: see *be-* *prefix*) of *yleve v.* (compare also [aphetic] *leve* $v.^{2}$); *yleve v.* is in turn cognate with Old Dutch *gilōbian* (Middle Dutch *gelōven*, Dutch *geloven*), Old Saxon *gilōbian* (Middle Low German *gelōven*), Old High German *gilouben* (Middle High German *gelouben, glöuben*, German *glauben*, †*gleuben*), Gothic *galaubjan*, all showing a similar range of senses; further etymology uncertain and disputed (see below). *yleve v.* . . . may show an ablaut variant of the Germanic base of *love v.*,[2] *lof n.,* and probably also *love n.*[1] and (with different ablaut grade) *lief adj.*

1. *intr.* To have confidence or faith in, and consequently to rely on or trust to, a person or (*Theol.*) a god or the name of a god.
2. *intr.* With *in*, †*of* (rare), †*on*, †*to* (rare). To have confidence in the truth or accuracy of (a statement, doctrine, etc.). In later use also: to have confidence in the genuineness, virtue, value, or efficacy of (a principle, institution, practice, etc.).
3. *trans.* a. To give intellectual assent to, accept the truth or accuracy of (a statement, doctrine, etc.), give credence to.
4. To accept the reality of the impressions transmitted by (the physical senses). Chiefly in negative contexts.

"Believe" is a word that courts modifiers: truly or falsely, strongly or feebly, willfully or reluctantly, fervently or faintheartedly. We distinguish believing by its objects and its agents, what is believed in, and who is doing the believing. We can believe in a deity, an institution, or an ideal; a play or a person or a principle; with a whole heart or a halved one; with our minds or with our bodies. Believing can be religious, or political, or, as in the present case, literary. It can be eager or despite oneself. It can have a temperature, ranging from warm zeal to cool reason. We use the same verb in the passionate statement, "I believe in you," and in the grudging one, "I believe so."

To say one believes in a literary text can also mean many things. It can name how a representation honors some model of verisimilitude, for instance, neoclassical strictures on time, place, and action (in seventeenth-century drama), or an empiricist model of causal probability (in realist fiction), or some less formal fidelity to "real life," such as when Samuel Johnson praised Shakespeare's "just representations of general nature" and choice to "exhibit only what he saw before him."[1] It can mean that we feel that a text attends to social inequity, goes sparingly on the poetic justice, or, conversely, engages us in the wish fulfillments of a utopian vision. It can mean that we feel that an author has captured some "truth" of human experience or has held a mirror up to human nature or to the natural world. Most famously, perhaps, it can invoke Coleridge's "willing suspension of disbelief, for a time, which constitutes poetic faith," in which a viewer volunteers indulgence of a fiction's representational claims.

To so assiduously beg distinctions is undoubtedly a feature of other imaginative engagements we undertake with the world, although, as I hope to convince, believing has a peculiar relationship to the work of difference making. But such variegation behooves precision. And so this book is about believing in Shakespeare's plays – specifically, how our believing in the plays relates to the believings of characters *in* the plays – the latter frequently being a case of the characters believing, or more often not believing, in each other. Why is it that we believe the most in the plays in which the characters have the most trouble believing in something? Furthermore, why is that "something" so very often the love of a woman the audience knows to be true? (Why, indeed, is believing in Shakespeare's plays so often framed as a matter of character?) The emblem of the engagements I seek to describe is a scene of disbelief, a crisis of belief that rapidly takes on metaphysical implications and proportions: "But to the girdle do the gods inherit; / Beneath is all the fiend's"; "Get thee to a nunnery – why wouldst thou be a breeder of sinners?"; "If I mistake / In those foundations which I build upon, / The centre is not big enough to bear / A schoolboy's top."[2] What prompts this vertiginous leap from body to spirit, local to global, physical to metaphysical, erotic to salvific, cunny to cosmos? And why and how does it move us? To specify further, by "believing in a play," I explore the relation between two motions of

[1] Samuel Johnson, "Preface to Shakespeare" in *Selections from Johnson on Shakespeare*, ed. Bertrand H. Bronson with Jean M. O'Meara (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1986), p. 10.

[2] Unless otherwise noted, all Shakespeare citations are from the *New Cambridge Shakespeare: King Lear* (4.5.122–23), *Hamlet* (3.1.119–20), *The Winter's Tale* (2.1.100–3).

recognition that occur when we feel the membrane that separates us from the action growing thin, the experience of feeling spoken to *by* a character and the desire to lean forward and speak *to* a character.

Of these two motions, the former is perhaps the most familiar to critical apprehension; it is the province of character, identification, and soliloquy and of those dazzling existential reflections that tempt connections between us and Shakespearean persons, typically on metaphysical or philosophical grounds. By contrast, the latter motion – the urge to breach the fourth wall from our side – is a less exalted, more atavistic, and less examined form of connection. It pertains to a more embodied and less cerebral form of kinship with the world of a play. Insofar as it speaks to our forgetfulness that a play is just a play, it calls up more suspect forms of literary response, such as imagining girlhoods for Shakespeare's heroines or conjuring offstage lives and unconscious motives – reading between, around, or past the lines of the play text. While the urge to recognize ourselves in Shakespeare's characters has certainly come in for its share of scholarly chastisement, it is the desire to be recognized by them that suggests utter abandonment of the accepted protocols of scientific inquiry.

In pursuing the relation between the latter and the former, this book's object of study could be described as that ache of the heart caught in the throat that steals upon us as we silently will a character to know what we know, those times we are said to forget we are "only" watching a play, even – especially? – a play we know well. Care is the coin of belief – the sign that one is responding to the beckonings of a fictional world. What compels this care? Paradigmatic cases of this yearning are the wish for Emilia to know what we know she knows about the handkerchief, for Edgar to succor his suffering father with filial forgiveness, for Juliet to wake in time. Being "moved" often means a sheerly visceral desire to *move* (or that, for instance, Juliet would); our hearts rise up in our chests, our bodies move to the edge of our seat. This desire frequently travels with a sense that matters hang in the balance – that a crossroads has arisen in the action where something very important is at stake – even if we know with another part of our minds what end must come. I take up a series of moments in the plays when this sense of mattering becomes materializing, when the convergence between what we know and what a character knows can produce the sense in which being right becomes being itself.[3]

[3] Christopher Pye discusses the role of materialization in discussions of subjectivity; here I invoke the term "mattering" in the simpler sense of a character's actions being determinative of his or her fortunes. See Christopher Pye, *The Vanishing: Shakespeare, the Subject and Early Modern Culture* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000), esp. pp. 1–16.

The chapters that follow will explore the specific compositional techniques that generate this desire. The most general horizon of this inquiry, however, is the debts of those techniques to the theological cultures of the Elizabethan Reformation. What might the ways in which Shakespeare gets us to believe in his plays have to do with how believing in salvation came to be experienced in the wake of reform? What might the doubled mind with which we experience a play have to do with the experience of believing one is headed to heaven? What might believing in characters have to do with the ways in which Protestantism upended notions of human particularity and efficacy? As David Scott Kastan has observed, "crises of belief in the plays are more likely to be provoked psychologically than doctrinally," with theological concerns "filtered down into the terms and forms of connection that mark our social world." For Kastan, however, "if there is some analogy to be sensed between these, it is still only an analogy."[4] This study believes, by contrast, that there is a way to move beyond the merely analogical to the technological grounds of connection between theater and theology. To that end, I examine the inverse correlation between a character's disbelief and our own belief – what they won't credit and we do – in light of the tectonic shifts that the English Reformation instigated in the cultural understanding not of *what* was believed in but of what believing *was*.[5] Thus this book occupies itself with the "how," or even the "how to," of belief as it was experienced in the initial decades following the introduction of Protestantism into England.

Unlike the brunt of recent scholarship engaged by the topic of Shakespeare and religion, I am interested less in what Reformation persons believed in than in how they believed in it. Indeed, I argue that the distinction between the "what" and the "how" of belief is one uniquely central to the work of early modern reform – as is, also, the "when." As Paul Veyne aptly points out, "believe can mean so many things"; his work justly observes that time and place condition not only what counts as an object of belief but what the subject of belief undergoes in the believing in it.[6] Variation marks the experience of belief from culture to culture, from person to person, and even within the life of an individual. Believing in a

[4] David Scott Kastan, *A Will to Believe: Shakespeare and Religion* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 10.

[5] For a book that treats with a longer durée of belief's formation, see Ethan Shagan's *The Birth of Modern Belief: The Creedal Revolution in Early Modern Europe, 1500–1750,* forthcoming from Princeton University Press. I am grateful to Professor Shagan for the opportunity to see this book in manuscript.

[6] Paul Veyne, *Did the Greeks Believe in Their Myths? An Essay on the Constitutive Imagination* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1988), p. 1.

play, for instance, is conditioned by what one thinks a play is, whether one likes going to plays, whether the actors are any good, and one's own personal circumstances. Before I had children, I considered *Titus Andronicus'* spectacle of vengeance to be Shakespeare's youthful exercise in a hyperaesthetic Senecan *imitatio*; teaching it in the months after I became a mother, it seemed to be an entirely persuasive recommendation of the actions to take if someone harms your children.

Driving this book's historical inquiry, then, is the question of what our believing in a play in which a character has trouble believing in a person might have to do with how believing in salvation was experienced as of the latter half of the sixteenth century in England. In other words, how did all these kinds of believing respond to what I call (with apologies to Raymond Williams and Lady Anne Bacon alike) the "structure of feeling-knowledge" enjoined by Calvinism in the pursuit of salvation's assurance?[7] The bluntest statement of my thesis is that the English absorption of the Calvinist imperative to self-knowledge of one's own ultimate ending – to "know with" the deity (*con-science*) – allows Shakespeare, for one, to renovate the nature of literary involvement, to transform what we usually term "pity and terror" into something more like, in the phrase of Francis Bacon, "pity and charity" – to transform feeling *for* a character to feeling *with* one. Hence the most ambitious argument herein concerns a theologically prompted historical turn in the career of the theatrical effect that we call "dramatic irony." I argue that Calvin's unique inflection of predestination as a condition of one's foreordained ending being "known about" pressures a renovation of this ancient structure of omniscience, a renovation that affects a variety of early modern cognitive experiences, soul-searching, scientific inquiry, and playwriting among them. The methods and structures of dramatic irony undergo significant renovation in the latter half of the English sixteenth century. They do so in consequence of the powerful notion that individual human salvation is known to God and must be conjectured about by human beings. As I will undertake to document, the ripples of Calvin's rock spread throughout Reformation culture in multiple domains, as thinkers sought to determine whether and how far it was ethical, possible, prudent, or pleasurable to attempt a God's-eye view of the world.

It would be hard to name two topics of study in the annals of Shakespearean criticism more overdetermined than character and religion.

[7] Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977); for Lady Bacon, see Chapter 2.

A comprehensive description of these critical traditions would require a book (or two) unto itself. Part of this book's task is to rethink the empyrean cognitive ambitions and alleged affective attenuations of spectatorship – the presumption that to know more is to feel less and that to survey a field is to remain above the fray rather than to participate in it. Nevertheless, a brief review of these two bodies of work will help to signal what the following study hopes to contribute to extant conversations, as well as where it departs from them.

Shakespearean person surely has the longer critical history of the two. Since the first stirrings of a Shakespearean critical tradition, it has been acknowledged that Shakespeare's power to convince lay in the description of character over and above other possible components of a dramatic world. (It is no coincidence that the same man who coined "willing suspension of disbelief" also wrote "I have a smack of Hamlet in myself, if I may say so.") Deidre Shauna Lynch has argued that our current relations to literary character came into being during the eighteenth century, but as early as 1644, Margaret Cavendish observed of Shakespeare, "so Well hath he Express'd in his Plays all sorts of Persons, as one would think he had been Transformed into every one of those Persons he hath Described."[8] Where Cavendish imagines Shakespeare having been transformed into his own characters, Samuel Johnson describes the way a reader is: "his scenes are occupied only by men, who act and speak as the reader thinks that he should himself have spoken or acted on the same occasion . . . he has not only shewn human nature as it acts in real exigencies, but as it would be found in trials, to which it cannot be exposed."[9] Whether it was Elizabeth I allegedly wishing to see Falstaff in love, Charles I noting "Beatrice and Benedick" above the title of his folio copy of *Much Ado About Nothing*, or Ernest Jones discussing Hamlet's Oedipal conflicts, readers and viewers have spoken of *dramatis personae* in the same manner that they might discuss a living person, as autonomous agents with hidden depths of interiority, pasts, and futures. (It is also possible to say that we discuss ourselves in terms we have learned from discussing these characters.) The formal prey of such an inquiry is generally the soliloquy; its quarry, the illusion of a particular kind of interiority, produced by what Lorna Hutson has compellingly described as the invitation of Shakespeare's work "to infer a coherent *fabula*, or imagined world,

[8] Deidre Shauna Lynch, *The Economy of Character: Novels, Market Culture, and the Business of Inner Meaning* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1998); Margaret Cavendish in Brian Vickers, ed., *Shakespeare, The Critical Heritage, 1623–1692*, vol. I (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974), p. 43.
[9] Johnson, "Preface to Shakespeare," p. 13.

from a theatrical *mise-en-scène,* or *sjuzhet.*"[10] "Believing in" these characters does not necessarily entail that we "believe" the truth of their statements or endorse their actions – in the way, say, we might say we believe in each other – but that we grant the coherence and idiosyncrasy of their assembled traits and the motivated probability of their choices within that set, the likelihood of their actions following from what we call personality. All sorts of Shakespearean figures have stood testimony to their author's skill in sketching highly particular incarnations of interiority, meaning literary conjuration of persons whose actions and reactions to both "real exigencies" and impossible "trials" seem both uniquely their own and models for emulation. We all have our favorites.

In recent critical epochs, the celebrated presence these characters convey – of fullness, offstage lives, mental processes, motives, unconscious desires – has appeared more as a kind of basilisk, whose power to compel belief it is incumbent on the critic to demystify. Beginning in the 1960s, in the wake of resistance to a focus on the liberal individual among intellectuals and as a more amateur model of literary scholarship gave way to a professional one, critical methods deriving from psychoanalysis, poststructuralism, and New Historicism or cultural materialism – united in their emphasis on the external forces that shape identity – began to caution that it is incorrect to discuss character thus, though I suspect even the most austere among us persist in doing so in the classroom. People in earlier ages and those who persist in their mold now seem insufficiently abashed in their celebration of Shakespearean character as both timeless and cross-cultural as scholarship on the origin of the "invention of the early modern subject" has worked to dismantle the illusion.[11] Historians of subjectivity, privacy, and the body

[10] Lorna Hutson, *Circumstantial Shakespeare* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 7. Hutson takes issue with the long-standing Johnson-inspired denigration of Shakespeare's cavalier treatment of place and time (and corresponding disregard for neoclassical mores), arguing that the inferential impulse results from Shakespeare's reliance on the rhetorical topoi of circumstance.

[11] The secondary literature on this question is diverse; see, for example, Catherine Belsey, *The Subject of Tragedy: Identity and Difference in Renaissance Drama* (London: Methuen, 1985); Francis Barker, *The Tremulous Private Body* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1995); David Aers, "A Whisper in the Ear of Early Modernists; or Reflections on Literary Critics' Writing 'the History of the Subject,'" in *Culture and History 1350–1600: Essays on English Communities, Identities and Writing*, ed. David Aers (New York, NY: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992), pp. 117–202; Elizabeth Hanson, *Discovering the Subject in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Katherine Eisaman Maus, *Inwardness and Theater in the English Renaissance* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1995); Lee Patterson, "On the Margin: Postmodernism, Ironic History and Medieval Studies," *Speculum* 65 (1990): 87–108; Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1992); Pye, *The Vanishing*; and Brian Cummings, *Mortal Thoughts: Religion, Secularity and Identity in Shakespeare and Early Modern Culture*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

have worked to make us aware of the historical and cultural differences that shape notions of personhood. Literary historians have warned against interpreting Shakespearean character as a backformation from the novel. Much as we now imagine human beings to be shaped by an array of cultural forces ranging from globalization to genetics, a literary person is, we are warned, neither a result of unselfconscious mimesis nor an appropriate object for it. (This is a version of the reminder that a play is just a play.) The same reprimands are rarely issued with respect to Shakespearean plot or place, apart from the occasional Baedecker-style caveat that Bohemia does not have a seacoast.[12]

Some of this demystification proceeds by underscoring the cultural and historical differences between early modern personhood and our own, litigating against our identification with (and of) characters on the grounds of anachronism; other strands route our own contemporary notions of selfhood to an early modern point of origin. The latter link agonistic selfhood, the illusion of psychological depth, and the onset of modernity; while nature abounds in seemingly unconflicted selves, they are generally tagged as less contemporary, authentic, and self-knowledgeable.[13] The epitome or poster boy of this Shakespearean self remains Hamlet, agonistic, skeptical, self-conscious, (early) modern, and male. Believing in literary character (or at least admitting that you do) is certainly harder than it used to be, so what now salves our scholarly scruples is the idea that Shakespeare's most credible character is the one who is most self-conscious about epistemic uncertainty. Coleridge – who clearly has a lot to answer for in these matters – in speaking of a "smack of Hamlet," refers to his own "abstracting and generalizing" habits of thought. This is on the face of it a disparaging trait, but one gets the impression that Coleridge is rather skeptical of the man of action. For postmodern believers in Shakespeare, then, Johnson and Coleridge have melded, in that action has become self-reflection.

In the past decade, the most powerful attempts to pluck out the heart of the Shakespearean character's mystery have been as surgical as they are skeptical. Works on book history, theatrical history, and history of the rhetorical poetics of probability have all described Shakespeare's compositional and collaborative milieux and their bearing on his

[12] The discrepancy perhaps speaks to the relatively less charismatic qualities of the latter components, although for some critics one of the ways to resist the gravitational pull of Shakespearean character has been to defend these other components. See Hutson, *Circumstantial Shakespeare*.

[13] "The history of the self in the early modern period has been falsely constructed on a history of emerging secularism," Cummings, *Mortal Thoughts*, p. 15. See also Taylor, *Sources of the Self*.