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BELIEVING IN SHAKESPEARE

This groundbreaking and accessible study explores the connections between the English Reformation's impact on the belief in eternal salvation and how it affected ways of believing in the plays of Shakespeare. Claire McEachern examines the new and better faith that Protestantism imagined for itself, a faith in which skepticism did not erode belief but worked to substantiate it in ways that were both affectively positive and empirically positivist. Concluding with in-depth readings of *Richard II, King Lear*, and *The Tempest*, this book represents a markedly fresh intervention in the topic of Shakespeare and religion. With great originality, McEachern argues that the English reception of the Calvinist imperative to "know with" God allowed the very nature of literary involvement to change, transforming feeling *for* a character into feeling *with* one.

CLAIRE MCEACHERN is Professor of English at the University of California, Los Angeles. She is the author of *The Poetics of English Nationhood, 1590–1612* (Cambridge, 1996) and editor of eight of Shakespeare's plays, including the Arden 3 *Much Ado About Nothing* (2015). Her essay collections include the *Cambridge Companion to Shakespearean Tragedy,* second edition (Cambridge, 2015) and, with Debora Shuger, *Religion and Culture in the English Renaissance* (Cambridge, 1997).

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Studies in Longing

CLAIRE MCEACHERN

University of California, Los Angeles

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For Helena Rose Mandeville and Marielle Ann Mandeville

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Preface

This is a long book, and an overview of its goals and structure may prove welcome. My inquiry concerns the relation between two experiences of believing that emerge in tandem in the wake of the Reformation: believing in a play and believing in salvation. I am interested in the cultural effects on Shakespeare's compositional choices of the Reformed tenet that one's salvation is "known about" by God. One way to describe the project is as an account of what happened when classical models of dramatic *anagnorisis* met Protestant soteriology: recognition, election. Reformation believing is, I argue, a profoundly sociable structure of anticipation in which the believer longs for the moment when intuition becomes knowledge. This book is thus also a study of a Reformation-prompted type of narrative suspense, describes a culturally inspired turn in the career of dramatic irony, and proposes a new historically informed *caritas* model of imaginative involvement in a literary world and the plights of its characters, one that addresses difference as well as affiliation. The terms in which we typically discuss our imaginative and emotional involvements in a fictional world – Aristotle's description of catharsis and Coleridge's "willing suspension of disbelief" – were coined at some chronological and cultural removes from the early modern moment; in their place, I propose we consider the acuity of two phrases of Shakespeare's contemporary, Francis Bacon: "with pity . . . in charity" and "the mature suspension of judgment."

The plan of this work is as follows. The book is divided into three parts. Part I, "Believing," consists of two chapters that address the ways in which belief in both literature and salvation have been understood in the wake of the Reformation and how Elizabethans sought to grapple with the implications of Protestant soteriology. Chapter 1 reviews how both character and religion have been addressed in studies of Shakespeare's works and examines the grounds of the conventional opposition between literary and religious commitments that governs our understanding of the plays' relations to early modern English religious culture. The chapter goes on to

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explore the ways in which the Reformation has shaped our vocabularies of belief and disbelief, whether in literature or in religion, and the difficulties those vocabularies have posed for describing what it is that early modern Protestants believed in, as opposed to what they objected to in the beliefs of their antagonists. Chapter 2 turns to the initial decades of Protestantism's reception in England, a period in which theologians of all stripes were engaged in elaborating what I identify as a "discourse of comfort," or the modes of assurance possible with respect to one's conjectured quality of afterlife. I examine the central role of feeling as a diagnostic guide to knowing in the puritan experimentalism of William Perkins, as well as its influence on the philosophical basis of Bacon's scientific experimentalism. Believing emerges from the Calvinist imperative to assurance as an evidence-based forensic structure of proof that takes feeling as its object of knowledge and in which skepticism functions not, as has been conventionally held, as an antagonist but as a servant.

Part II, "In Shakespeare," shifts terrain to the history of Elizabethan drama. Chapter 3 lays out possible models of contiguity between the world of the theater and the "discourses of comfort," examines the nineteenth-century origins of the theory of dramatic irony, and considers whether Catholicism or Protestantism is the more suspense-inducing soteriological experience. I then turn to an examination of two early Elizabethan versions of the Oedipus story, Alexander Neville's 1563 translation and an anonymous northern English manuscript play for schoolboy production, probing the way these receptions of the Oedipus story handle differences between Sophoclean and Senecan models of suspense and the understanding of human character that accompanies each. Chapter 4 then makes the case for a Reformation naturalization of these classical structures of recognition in the iconographic "deformation" of the pre-Reformation horned Moses and his redemption thence by Protestant philologists. I then go on to address the ways in which the story of mistaken belief corrected in the fullness of time affects our experience of generic difference through comparison of two plays bound by a common preoccupation with cuckoldry. I read *Much Ado About Nothing* and *Othello* with a view to describing what knowledge silenced and revealed feels like in comedy and tragedy and how that difference accounts for the work of genre.

Part III, "Person, Plot, Place" consists of three chapters, each of which focuses on one of the formal categories of Shakespearean verisimilitude that have dominated critical discussion since first being specified by Samuel Johnson. The trio acknowledges the hold these categories exert on our critical methods and argues for Shakespeare's renovation of them.

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The chapters in this part are also linked, with all treating the limit case of Shakespearean compassion: the *caritas*-challenging (and challenged) figure of the abdicating ruler. In Chapters 5 and 6, I address Shakespeare's construction of "person" and "plot" in *Richard II* and *King Lear*, respectively. The reading of *Richard II* recounts Shakespeare's development of the techniques of recognition in the earlier history plays and the way in which these are transformed in the later one as he thinks through the narrative structures and formal methods of the Reformation Passion, particularly the suspenseful episode of Pilate's interrogation of Christ. Chapter 6 examines the multiple forms of probability that *King Lear* instructs us in and urges that we revise our skeptical views of its hero's knowledgeability – as well as Shakespeare's dubious grasp of plotting – in light of the Shakespearean template of the multiple potentials contained within the equally Calvinist and Oedipal irony of character in which a protagonist's best and worst intentions are one and the same. Finally, Chapter 7 essays Shakespeare's methods of "place" in a reading of the *Tempest* in light of three soteriological measures of Reformation believing: congregation, destination, and denouement.

One of this book's claims is that the experience of true believing requires the occasional failure to believe. It has not been lost on me during the many years that I have been working on this project that one of the things to which this might apply is the experience of believing in one's own book. At those times when one's own belief must waver, the power of one's friends to sustain it is vital. I have been fortunate in the staunch companionship of a number of wonderful people, whose shrewd questions, patience for reading drafts, and friendship prodded and consoled in just the right measures. At UCLA, Debora Shuger has been a font of theological pointers and practical kindnesses, and Rob Watson has been an enthusiastic unapologist for Shakespeare studies. Further away in both place and period of study, James Chandler and Jayne Lewis have, in their different ways, pushed me to see beyond the Tudor-Stuart moment; Jim also asked a crucial question about the relations of belief to suspense. David Scott Kastan gets his own sentence (which by rights should be at least a paragraph): I am indebted to him for decades of unfailing friendship, his ability to mind read, and countless wise words, including in this particular instance having brought to my attention a manuscript of a play that broke open the whole case. Assistance for research was provided by the UCLA Center for the Study of Women and the British Academy, the latter via the kind offices of Robert C. Ritchie and Steve Hindle of the Huntington Library. Reading room staffs at the Huntington Library and the library of

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Lambeth Palace were extremely helpful. Versions of various chapters were presented as talks at the Huntington Library Renaissance Seminar, the University of the Republic, Montevideo, Uruquay, and the History and English Departments of Yale University, and I am grateful to the hosts of these occasions for their hospitality, both intellectual and otherwise. Sarah Stanton, since of Cambridge University Press, has been the best of editors over many years and several projects, and I am grateful for her willingness to take this one on as she packed up. Emily Hockley and Tim Mason have guided the production of this book admirably. I also learned a great deal from the anonymous readers for the Press. Andrew C. Wagner of UCLA was a terrific help in the final sprint of manuscript preparation. I would like to thank the *Huntington Library Quarterly* and the *British Journal of Aesthetics* for allowing me to reprint portions of the manuscript that first appeared in their pages. Illustration permissions were kindly granted by the Huntington Library, the British Museum, and the National Gallery of Great Britain. My family members both near and far have been a great source of support. I dedicate this book to my two unbelievable daughters, who have taught me everything I know about mattering.

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