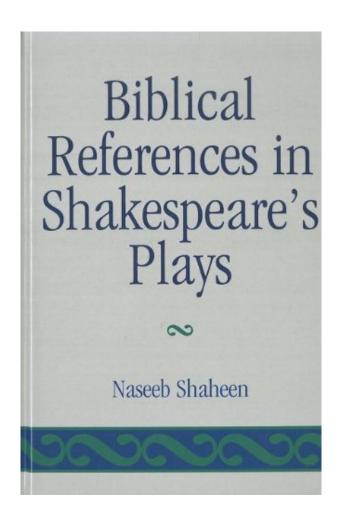
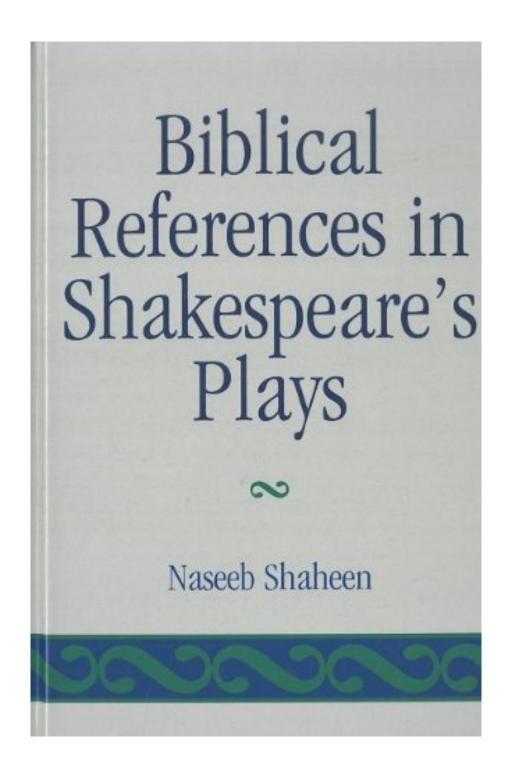
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About the Author

Naseeb Shaheen (1931-2009) was professor of English literature at the University of Memphis, Tennessee and an internationally known authority on Shakespeare.

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The hundreds of biblical references in Shakespeare's plays give ample evidence that he was well acquainted with Scripture. Not only is the range of his biblical references impressive, but also the aptness with which he makes them. Hamlet and Othello each have more than fifty biblical references. No study of Shakespeare's plays is complete that ignores Shakespeare's use of scripture.

The Bibles that Shakespeare knew, however, were not those that are in use today. By the time the King James Bible appeared in 1611, Shakespeare's career was all but over, and the Anglican liturgy that is evident in his plays is likewise one that few persons are acquainted with. This volume provides a comprehensive survey of the English Bibles of Shakespeare's day, notes their similarities and differences, and indicates which version the playwright knew best. The thorny question of what constitutes a valid biblical reference is also discussed.

This study of Shakespeare's biblical references is not based on secondary sources. The author owned one of the world's largest collections of early English bibles, including over one hundred copies of the Geneva bible and numerous editions of other Bibles, prayer books, and books of homilies of Shakespeare's day.

To be of real worth, a study of Shakespeare's biblical references should also enable the reader to determine which references Shakespeare borrowed from his plot sources and which he added from his own memory as part of his design for the play. The author studies every source that Shakespeare is known to have read or consulted before writing each play and has examined the biblical references in those sources. Shaheen then points out which biblical references in his literary sources Shakespeare accepted, and how he adapted them in his plays. This information is especially valuable when assessing the theological meanings that are sometimes imposed on his plays, meanings that often go beyond what Shakespeare intended or what his audience must have understood.

Biblical References in Shakespeare's Plays is considerably broader in scope than any other study of its kind and provides the scholarly checks and balances in dealing with the subject that previous studies lacked.

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• 880 pages

About the Author

Naseeb Shaheen (1931-2009) was professor of English literature at the University of Memphis, Tennessee and an internationally known authority on Shakespeare.

Most helpful customer reviews

8 of 10 people found the following review helpful. Shakespeare's understanding of faith in humanity By Leonardo Wilborn

Shaheen is a good reference for anyone who is interested in learning how much of the bible Shakespeare used in his plays. Along with the biblical chapter and verse citations, Shaheen also reference's the commonly understood practice of faith during the time Shakepeare was writing. What did the Catholic and Angelican church practice? What bible or biblical references did Shakespeare have access to? Shaheen gives one a bird's eye view of how the Christain church may have positively impacted the words, thoughts and faith of William Shakespeare.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful.

Should be used in conjunction with Steven Marx's midrash approach to Shakespeare's biblical plot echoes By PF-Flyer

Naseeb Shaheen's book is a valuable resource (but perhaps too expensive). It's very similar to Charles Wordsworth's book, Shakespeare's Knowledge and Use of the Bible, originally published in the 1800s, and like C.Wordsworth's book, includes appendices that allow one to search according to scripture passage (what are ALL of the Shakespeare plays that contain a reference to a certain passage in the bible?), and by play (what is the progression of scripture references as one pages through a particular play?). C.Wordsworth devoted an early section of his book to the similarities in phrasing (between bible and Shakespeare), and admitted that perhaps this would seem superficial to some. Shaheen pays very close attention to detail, to distinguish when Shakespeare seems to be alluding to the Geneva (Protestant) Bible (often from the older Greek texts), or the Douay-Rheims (Catholic translation from the already-translated Latin), or from the liturgical translation of the Psalms in common use.

This is all fine and interesting, but it avoids the more interpretive questions that follow: In a particular play, at a particular point in the text, *why* would the author have alluded to a particular scripture passage? What does it mean? Why hold the scriptural mirror up to the audience at that particular moment? What does the author and play attempt to accomplish by pushing the buttons of the church-going, bible-reading Elizabethan audience in those ways? (Shaheen's book does not explore these questions, but Steven Marx's much shorter book, mentioned below, does.)

Shaheen is perhaps too quick to dismiss possible biblical references merely on the basis of a non-biblical reference being another option. For example, if a passage in Julius Caesar resembles a passage from the bible, but also resembles a passage from an ancient Greek or Roman text, Shaheen tends not to consider that it may reference both the biblical and non-biblical sources. This is a disappointment, but at least Shaheen attempts to note these places and argue his case.

Also, as with Charles Wordsworth's book, Shaheen tends to look much more to the surface of the text in the phrasing of the words, rather than to consider plot similarities or echoes. This is perhaps where this otherwise very valuable resource really falls short.

On this point, a better approach is outlined by Steven Marx's Shakespeare and the Bible (Oxford Shakespeare Topics), who not only considers the surface allusions, but also examines the plays as a sort of midrash, rethinking biblical themes and plots.

 $http://www.amazon.com/Shakespeare-Bible-Oxford-Topics/dp/0198184395/ref=tmm_pap_title_0?ie=UTF8 \\ \&qid=1419711681 \\ \&sr=1-1$

Steven Marx considers a handful of plays, but not all of them. For example, he does not consider Hamlet, which is rich in biblical plot echoes that are not touched by the surface allusions. He also misses some

allusions that are really not far below the surface.

For example, early in Hamlet, when Horatio and Hamlet are first reunited after Horatio's first encounter with the ghost, Horatio declares himself to be Hamlet's servant, and Hamlet says, no, he would switch places with Horatio on that score. This is clearly a reference to the scriptural admonition from Jesus to his disciples that, if anyone wants to be the greatest, he must be servant of all. But the reference is not encapsulated in the superficialities of the language, and therefore, it can't be attributed to the Geneva Translation, or the Douay-Rheims, or the Book of Common Prayer, and in fact, it seems to escape Shaheen's gaze, at least in this booklength treatment. And this is only one example. There are many, many more in the plays, where the references are often not contained in the phrasing.

And in fact, it could be that some of the most important biblical references, by necessity, could not be so obviously contained in the phrasing, because of the government censors who had to approve the text. Certain similarities to biblical passages or stories might be more dangerous to make too obvious.

This is not to say the book is not a fine accomplishment and a most helpful resource. It certainly is. But perhaps too many readers will assume that it's an exhaustive treatment of the biblical references in the plays, when in fact it only tries to be an exhaustive treatment of the references in the phrasing of the plays, a level quite close to the surface. Yet we know that Shakespeare's plays are many fathoms deep, to paraphrase Hamlet, and if we ignore that, we may be blown at the moon for all we miss.

8 of 11 people found the following review helpful.

MUST OWN!

By Wende L. Wagner

I have had the wonderful pleasure of having Dr. Shaheen as a professor for the past 5 years and this book is pure literary genius. Having spent his entrie professional career researching and documenting all biblical references in all of Shakespeare's works, Shaheen leaves nothing to question. He knows exactly what he is talking about and this book is a must have for any Shakespeare scholar or anyone interested in the literary use of the bible. Not only are his lectures amazingly informative, this book is as well.

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