Introduction

GEORGE PEELE

The author of *David and Bathsheba* was born in London in 1556; forty years later, in 1596, in London he died (Horne, 3, 108). Peele was born into the middle classes of London citizenry. James Peele, George's father, was an accountant (he published two books on double-entry accounting), clerk, teacher, and writer and producer of Lord Mayor pageants. Liveryman of the Salters' Company, in 1562 James became Clerk of Christ's Hospital, an institution established by the City to provide relief for the City's 'impotent poor', the aged and orphans. He held this position until his death in 1585. His annual salary, including the value of free rent, his teaching, and his clerkship, amounted to £65. The average clerkship ran between £10 and £20 (Horne, 4–16). Yet James died in debt, perhaps, David Horne speculates, because of the costs of George's university education (Horne, 17).

George was James's eldest child. He had three sisters, Anne, Isabel, and Judith, and a younger brother, James (Horne, 18–19). George would have commenced his education in Christ's Hospital's 'pettie school' upon his father's acceptance of the position of Clerk. After learning the basics of reading and writing there for three years, George attended the Hospital's grammar school for the next six before leaving in 1571 at the age of fourteen for Christ Church, Oxford. He was awarded his BA in 1577 and his MA two years later, in 1579 (Horne, 32, 37). In 1580 Peele married Ann Cooke, whose father died shortly thereafter, leaving Ann a good inheritance of around £250. Gaining control over that inheritance seems to have been problematic, however, and for the next four years Peele was involved in constant litigation over the property on which the inheritance was based (Horne, 49–56). During this period Peele shuttled back and forth between London and Oxford, where in June 1583 he managed the stage, scenery, costuming, and special effects of the university's production of two plays by William Gager, *Rivales* and *Dido*, to honour its visiting guest Albertus Alasco, Count Palatine of Siridia, Poland (Horne, 57–64). In spite of his wife's inheritance,

however, Peele's financial position was not secure, and he spent the remainder of his life in London seeking, like many of his fellow university graduates such as Robert Greene, Thomas Watson, Thomas Lodge, Christopher Marlowe, and Thomas Nashe, to eke out an existence through his pen, writing court plays, patronage-seeking verses, City pageants, and plays for the professional stage, and dying in poverty in 1596 (Horne, 65–109). A number of contemporary allusions to Peele indicate that he was well known as a poet during his life, and he figures as the hero of an anonymous jestbook, *The Merry Conceited Jests of George Peele Gentleman* (1607), published a decade after his death.

Peele's earliest known work is a lost translation of Euripides's *Iphigenia*, for which survive two commendatory verses by William Gager, who was Peele's contemporary at Oxford. The verses place Peele's translation of the classical Greek tragedy among the accomplishments of his Oxford days and declare that 'Viueret Euripides, tibi se debere putaret, / Ipsa tibi grates Iphigenia daret [Were Euripides to be alive, he would consider himself indebted to you; Iphigenia herself would give you thanks]' (Horne, 43). Throughout his literary career, Peele penned and published a variety of non-dramatic verse. In 1589 he published *The Tale of Troy* together with *A Farewell. Entitled to the Famous and Fortunate Generals of Our English Forces, Sir John Norris and Sir Francis Drake Knights and All Their Brave and Resolute Followers*. *The Tale of Troy* is a 493-line epitome of the Trojan War that concludes when 'The good Aneas' (478), for whom the gods have 'Reserv'd some better future' (479), 'Arives at Lavine land' (482). The work with which this display of Peele's classical learning was coupled by the printers, *A Farewell*, praises two other seafaring heroes, Norris and Drake, who 'bid statelie Troynovant adiewe' (4) in order to 'fight for Christ and Englands peereles Queene, / Elizabeth, the wonder of the worlde' (66–7) against the Spanish. Norris and Drake set sail from Plymouth on 18 April 1589 as part of England's counter-attack against Spain's failed Armada (Horne, 161–2).

Before the return of the English ships several months later in failure, the events sparked another opportunity for Peele's versifying: the Earl of Essex had joined the expedition against Elizabeth's prohibition, and upon his return to England's shores Peele praised the valiant earl in *An Eclogue Gratulatory. Entitled: To the Right Honourable and Renowned Shepherd of Albion's Arcadia, Robert Earl of Essex and Ewe for his Welcome into England from Portugal*. This

dialogue between the two shepherds Piers and Palinode imitates Spenser's *The Shepherd's Calendar* and observes a pastoral decorum: 'Of Armes to sing, I have not lust nor skill, / Enough is me, to blazon my good will' (32–3), declares Piers, 'To welcome home that long hath lacked beene, / One of the jolliest Shepherds of our Greene' (34–5). Peele published another occasional poem in 1590, *Polyhymnia*, in honour of Sir Henry Lee's last performance as the Queen's champion in the Accession Day tilts on 17 November 1590 (Horne, 165–6). He wrote two other occasional pieces before his death: *The Honour of the Garter*, published in an undated quarto in 1593 to celebrate the Earl of Northumberland's entrance into the Order of the Garter (Horne, 173), and *Anglorum Feriae*, which survives only in manuscript and celebrates Elizabeth's 1595 Accession Day (Horne, 178). To Peele is also attributed *The Praise of Chastity*, a 111-line poem in a collection of poetry by Oxford poets, *The Phoenix Nest*, published in 1593.

Along with this varied mass of largely occasional verse Peele also wrote three Lord Mayor's pageants: *The Device of the Pageant Borne before Woolstone Dixi, Lord Mayor of the City of London* (1585), *The Device of the Pageant Borne before the Right Honourable Martin Calthrop Lord Mayor of the City of London* (1588), and *Descensus Astraeae: The Device of a Pageant borne Before M. William Web, Lord Mayor of the City of London* (1591). The second of these three civic pageants is no longer extant (Horne, 155–6), but in the other two Peele deploys his classical education to present the spectacle of a London in rapturous harmony with the 'peerless mistresse soveraigne of my [London's] peace' (*Woolstone Dixi*, 64) and 'Astraea daughter of the immortall Jove, / Great Jove defender of this antient towne, / Descended of the Trojan Brutus line' (*Descensus Astraeae*, 14–16).

During his time in London from 1581 until his death in 1596 Peele also wrote a considerable amount of dramatic verse. A.R. Braunmuller wryly remarks that 'with the possible exception of Robert Greene', Peele 'has the dubious distinction of being claimed as the true father of more dramatic foundlings than any other Elizabethan dramatist' (9), and Samuel Schoenbaum lists twelve plays besides the ones currently accepted in the Peele canon that have been attributed to Peele at one time or another (xvii–xviii). Modern scholarship, however, has narrowed Peele's dramatic oeuvre down to seven plays that survive in whole or in part. The following five are attributed to Peele in Alan B. Farmer and Zachary

Lesser's *Database of Early English Playbooks*: *The Arraignment of Paris*, *The Battle of Alcazar*, *Edward I*, *The Old Wives' Tale*, and *David and Bathsheba*. Charles Forker has made a compelling case for adding *The Troublesome Reign of John, King of England* to these five in his recent Revels edition of the play. There also survive portions of a seventh play by Peele, *The Hunting of Cupid*. To place this in some context, the canon of Marlowe's plays, written in the slightly shorter period between 1587 and 1593, also contains seven plays.

Peele wrote *The Arraignment of Paris*, performed at court by the Children of the Chapel, between 1581 and its publication in 1584. The play returns to the incident that might be said to be the immediate cause of the Trojan War, Paris's giving the golden ball to Venus rather than Juno or Minerva, and rewrites it so that the play concludes with a tribunal of the gods reassigning the role of judge from Paris to Queen Elizabeth. '*The Araygnement of Paris* is typical of royal entertainments in its hyperbolic treatment of its royal spectator and her fictional personae', Louis Montrose observes, 'But it differs from many of the entertainments of the previous two decades in that it fully acknowledges and celebrates the Queen's own choice, her complex transcendence of the simplistic oppositions contrived by her courtiers' (444). Peele seems to have written another courtly pastoral drama, *The Hunting of Cupid*, of which only fragments have survived in a manuscript transcription by William Drummond (1609) and excerpts in *England's Helicon* (1600) and *England's Parnassus* (1600) (Horne, 153).

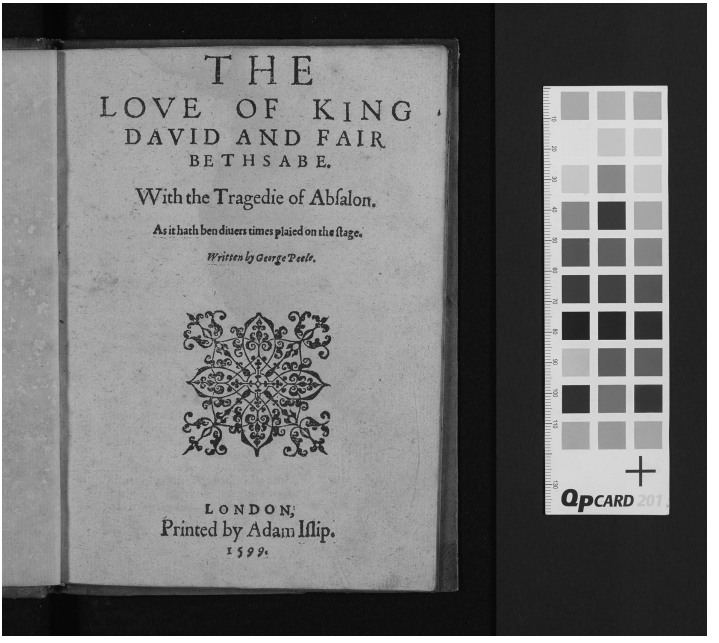
Peele's other five plays were written for the professional London stage or, more precisely, for the professional adult acting companies for whom the London stages were major venues if not home. *The Battle of Alcazar*, the title page of whose first, 1594 quarto assigns it to the repertoire of the Admiral's Men, dramatises the life of the notorious English adventurer Thomas Stukeley in the hyperbolic style of Marlowe's *Tamburlaine* plays, first performed 1587–88, and the play's composition is usually dated slightly after Marlowe's plays, 1587–89 (Edelman, 15–16). *Edward I* is one of two of Peele's forays into the genre of the history play. First published in 1593 and written as early as 1590 (Hook, 5), the play is a romantic dramatisation of Edward I's engagement with the rebellious Welsh. The play's title page does not assign the play to any company, but, if the play entitled *Longshanks* in Henslowe's diary is the same as *Edward I*, then by 1595 the play was in the Admiral's Men's repertoire (Hook,

8). The title page of the 1595 quarto of Peele's romance comedy, *The Old Wives' Tale*, states that this play was performed by the Queen's Men; *The Troublesome Reign of John, King of England*, for which the play's most recent editor suggests a date of composition between 1589 and 1590, was also performed by the Queen's Men (Forker, 31). Elmer Blistein has suggested that *David and Bathsheba* (1587–94) also might have at one point belonged to the Queen's Men (153 n.1), although more recently Annaliese Connolly has cogently argued that it belonged to the Admiral's Men.

On the basis of an allusion in *The Merry Conceited Jests*, Leonard Ashley speculates that in addition to these seven plays Peele also wrote a play, now lost, entitled *The Turkish Mahomet and Irene the Fair Greek* (*Authorship*, 89). Many scholars now also consider Peele to be co-author, along with Shakespeare, of *Titus Andronicus* (Vickers, 243). Given the diversity of Peele's literary output, both non-dramatic and dramatic, A.R. Braunmuller has concluded that 'The single unifying element [in Peele's oeuvre] appears to be an economic one: Peele wrote to earn money' (10). Braunmuller's conclusion may be true, but it belies the intellectual and creative intensity and dramatic and poetic craftsmanship that can be found throughout Peele's work, especially Peele's biblical drama *David and Bathsheba*.

DAVID AND BATHSHEBA

On its title page, the 1599 quarto of *David and Bathsheba* advertises Peele's play as 'The Love of King David and Fair Bethsabe. With the Tragedie of Absalon'. The terseness of the title belies the complexity with which the play treats its topics, the Israelite King David's adulterous relationship with the beautiful Bathsheba and his son Absalom's rebellion against him. Early modern readers of the quarto, arguably more familiar with biblical history than modern readers, would have readily bridged the title's period and connected the two topics as central events in David's long reign, and to stress their interconnectedness Peele's play inventively rearranges the chronology of its biblical sources even if at times individual passages in the play appear to be mere paraphrases of the Bible. The Bible, church sermons, and other cultural sources would have given ambivalent resonance to the title's key words: 'love', 'fair', and 'tragedy'. As early modern readers would know, David's love for Bathsheba is sinful, David is tempted by Bathsheba because she



Title page of the 1599 Quarto, reproduced by permission of the National Library of Scotland

is fair, and, according to Elizabethan homilies, Absalom's tragedy expresses God's punishment of wicked rebels.

The play itself extends the title's connotative richness and ambivalence. Dramatising at length David's initial sight of Bathsheba and his immediate sexual solicitation of her, the play's first scene juxtaposes the splendidly erotic lyrical poetry of Bathsheba's opening song and speech and David's breathless appreciation of her beauty to multiple unvarnished and frequently ironic acknowledgements that the sexual affair that will spring from this eroticism is morally wrong and coercive. David's later penitence for his sins, staged repeatedly throughout the rest of the play with melodramatic flair, increases rather than closing down the ambivalence of the play's treatment of this theme. However weak and sinful David might be, his penitence and his status as God's anointed king ensure that

he ultimately escapes the potentially tragic consequences of his actions.

The play displaces the tragic consequences of David's actions on to his son Absalom, whose rebellion is represented not unsympathetically as a response to David's moral laxity and political ineptitude generally and specifically to David's failure to punish a sexual crime that resembles his own, his eldest son Amnon's rape of Absalom's sister Tamar. Even so, the play's second chorus calls Absalom's fate the 'dreadful precedent of His just doom' (1). The complexity of Peele's drama is demonstrated not only by its refusal to simplify these entanglements of the sexual, political, and theological but also by the prominence it gives to the voices of the female characters who are caught up in and traumatised by them. Through Bathsheba, Tamar, and David's concubines the play exposes the role of sexual violence against women in the establishment and maintenance of patriarchal sovereignty. In the play, rape is paradoxically both criminal and sanctified. The play's treatment of this paradox is enriched by its engagement with other, non-biblical intertexts. The play's often ironic treatment of Guilliaume Du Bartas's *Divine Weeks* and Marlowe's *Tamburlaine* plays deepens its development of the themes discussed above and extends their resonance into the literary and dramatic worlds of Elizabethan England in the 1580s and 1590s, a resonance further extended by David's popularity as a figure across a range of Elizabethan cultural discourses, from poetic to political.

DAVID IN MEDIEVAL AND RENAISSANCE LITERATURE AND CULTURE

David's popularity in Elizabethan cultural discourses was a legacy of his prominence in Western culture generally. As Raymond-Jean Frontain and Jan Wojcik observe in their introduction to *The David Myth*, that prominence was the result of his exemplarity as much as his historical significance. 'For the pre-Renaissance world – from the time of the earliest religious interpretations through the European Middle Ages – David's significance was as a type', they write: 'For the Jews, he satisfied the type of the Old Testament hero: an improbable choice for a ruler by human standards, yet selected by the inscrutable Yahweh and raised over more likely candidates' and '[h]is career reflects the development of the Israelites themselves: enjoyment of God's favor is interrupted by a fall from grace through

sin; repentance and sincere contrition effect a reconciliation with the Lord' (3), while '[f]or Christian audiences David is a type of Christ' (3). In the same essay collection, Charles Huttar elaborates upon the Christian significance of David. In *The Golden Legend*, Huttar notes, David is an example of the penitent sinner (39), and 'From the beginning to the end of the Middle Ages and on into the seventeenth century, if the evidence of English sermons is any indication, the role of David as a model of repentance was most prominent in the portrayal of this hero' (40). After charting some narrative variations in the medieval tradition of stories about David's sin and repentance, Huttar concludes that 'through all the changes remains the constant theme that the repentant and restored David, now spiritually stronger than ever, stands as an encouragement and guide to ordinary sin-prone men and women' (54).

As the tradition of David as penitent grew, David's adultery with Bathsheba was often singled out as his most grievous sin, a fact reflected in Books of Hours. In her study of the illustrations accompanying Books of Hours, Clare Costley observes that, while medieval Books of Hours use a variety of images to illustrate the Penitential Psalms, in the sixteenth century the image that predominates is the image of David watching Bathsheba bathe in a fountain: 'Most sixteenth-century *Horae* use a single image [to illustrate the Penitential Psalms,] and that image typically represents David observing a naked, or nearly-naked, Bathsheba' (1261). This is, of course, the dramatic scenario with which the action of *David and Bathsheba* commences.

David as a model repentant sinner can be found in a broad spectrum of early modern English texts, from pamphlets and sermons to plays and poems. In the 'History of David' in Wynkyn De Worde's translation of *The Golden Legend* (1498), David's status as model penitent is confirmed by the story that David composed Psalm 51, the first Penitential Psalm, as a form of penance after having been confronted by Nathan. David buried himself in the earth up to the neck and remained interred until he could feel the worms eating his flesh, at which point he had himself disinterred, composed a verse of the psalm (there are twenty), then had himself buried again (fol. xxxviii–xxxix). In Antony Munday's *The Mirror of Mutability* (1579), David exemplifies the sin of lechery but in his complaint offers himself to the reader as an example of both spiritual overconfidence and genuine repentance: 'Be warned by me', David exhorts the reader, and '[s]ee how I fell that never

thought to fall; / God's mercy yet received me at last, / And sorrowing tears did make amends for all' (sig. C2v). In *David's Faith and Repentance* (1589), Henry Holland divides David's life into three parts: 'The first before his fall: the second in his fall: the third after his fall' (6). His great fall, of course, is Bathsheba, with whom he commits adultery and for whom he commits murder (36). Adapting David to the Protestant context of Elizabethan England, Holland contends that 'It was not in David's power to prescribe unto himself a time of repentance' (48). None the less, David's exemplary status remains: 'And thus by God's good assistance', Holland writes, 'I will lay open unto thee (good Reader) by David's example, what constant faith, what unfeigned repentance, what pure religion, what grievous temptations, what great frailty God's children have, and how notwithstanding by God's good providence they are upholden unto their lives' end' (7). 'David's example', Holland asserts, 'is a perfect precedent unto all good Christians of true repentance' (45).

David and Bathsheba would seem to concur with Holland's assessment of David's exemplarity. The play presents David as the model penitent, both in his words and his actions. Immediately after Nathan has applied his parable to David, turning David's guilty verdict upon the rich man back on to David, David exclaims

> Nathan, I have against the Lord, I have
> Sinned, oh, sinned grievously, and, lo,
> From heaven's throne doth David throw himself
> And groan and grovel to the gates of hell!
>
> (6.55–8)

The stage directions state that '*He* [David] *falls down*' (6.59 SD). David displays similar gestures of self-humiliation throughout the play. In scene 10, driven from Jerusalem by Absalom's rebellion, David declares the rebellion 'a plague on David's sin' (11) and several lines later '*lies down, and all the rest after him*' (19 SD). Even as one by one his companions rise, he lies prostrate for the rest of the lengthy scene, telling those gathered round him that 'Here lie I armed with a humble heart / T'embrace the pains that anger shall impose / And kiss the sword my Lord shall kill me with' (91–3). Only at the scene's conclusion, after Hushai has urged David to 'rise, referring the success to heaven' (132), does David stand.

Two scenes later David passively acquiesces to Shimei's verbal abuse and stone-throwing 'Because the Lord hath sent him to

reprove / The sins of David' (12.42–3), refusing to allow Abishai 'to take away his head' (38) or Joab to 'Send hence the dog with sorrow to his grave' (66). Like the guilt-ridden Redcross Knight's tempter Despair in Book I of *The Faerie Queene*, Shimei urges David to commit suicide:

> If, then, thy conscience tell thee thou hast sinned
> And that thy life is odious to the world,
> Command thy followers to shun thy face,
> And by thyself here make away thy soul,
> That I may stand and glory in thy shame.
>
> (46–50)

As model penitent, however, David needs no Una to help him formulate the appropriate response:

> I am not desperate, Shimei, like thyself,
> But trust unto the covenant of my God,
> Founded on mercy, with repentance built,
> And finished with the glory of my soul.
>
> (51–4)

Unlike Marlowe's Doctor Faustus, David does not give in to the unpardonable sin of despair and consequently provides an example of true penitence for the play's Protestant Elizabethan audience. Chorus 1 signals this exemplarity to the audience with its question, 'If Holy David so shook hands with sin, / What shall our baser spirits glory in?' (15–16).

The moralising commentary of the play's choruses does not wholly capture the complexity of the play's representation of David and his sexual engagement with Bathsheba, however. In its representation of the affair, the play is significantly influenced by the classical as well as the biblical tradition. Demonstrating 'the close connection of *David and Bathsheba*, not only in *language*, but also in *situation* and *theme*, with the poetry of the Elizabethan Ovidian tradition' ('Love', 58), Inga-Stina Ewbank argues that in *David and Bathsheba* 'Peele explores, and fuses with his biblical stuff, the Ovidian-mythological tradition' (58–9). Ewbank concludes that 'Peele is not merely out to give us a *de casibus* play on David's sins of the flesh and the divine punishment for them, nor just to chronicle a Bible story' (61–2) but 'is also out, in the Ovidian fashion, to show us the beauty of the flesh and of the senses' (62).

The scene of David watching Bathsheba bathe is the point at which the Ovidian influence on the biblical tradition is registered most intensely. In European and English Renaissance literature the scene could evoke two responses, Ewbank argues in a later article, one biblical and the other classicising: Bathsheba as Eve; Bathsheba as Venus. Peele avoids the classicism of transforming Bathsheba into Venus: 'though his bathing scene is steeped in beauty, his imagery is taken from the Bible, especially from the Song of Songs, rather than from classical myth' ('House', 12). None the less, the scene's classical emphasis on sensuous beauty remains, even if it is later placed within the framework of the biblical tradition's moralising: 'Like the illustrators of the Penitential Psalms, Peele is having his cake and eating it too', Ewbank concludes, 'for, after using the first scene to celebrate the beauties of the flesh and the senses, he moves on to a strictly moral structure for the rest of the scenes dealing with the love story' (14). Recently, Michelle Ephraim has argued that the play's fusion of sensuousness and salvation is much more intimate than the serial progression that Ewbank posits. 'Bethsabe guides' David, Ephraim argues, 'to read her body correctly and to reject his voyeuristic ways: she directs him away from his rebellious son Absolom and towards their second child, Solomon, a symbol of David's inward illumination' (70). The positive force of Bathsheba's sensuousness is arguably more powerful in the play's final scene than in the first scene. It is the 'sweet sight' (17) of Bathsheba that acts as a 'sacred balm / To cheer' David 'past all earthly joys' (18), the joys of his reign and the joys he found in his beautiful but rebellious son Absalom, and to prompt him to tutor his son and new heir Solomon in the transcendental joys of divine contemplation and to accept Absalom's death. In Peele's complex representation of David as an exemplary penitent, then, Bathsheba's sensuousness may, as Holland insists, be the cause of David's great fall. More significantly, though, that sensuousness works throughout the play to redeem David.

The play's refusal to reduce David to a two-dimensional figure of sin and repentance is registered more widely in its incorporation of two other common early modern figurations of David: David as poet, and David as prophet. David was frequently invoked as a divine poet. In *The Defence of Poesy*, Philip Sidney bolsters his argument for poetry by noting that 'the holy David's Psalms are a divine poem' (133) which 'imitate the unconceivable excellencies of God'

(224–5). In the opening eight lines of 'David and Goliah' in *The Muses' Elizium* (1630), Michael Drayton figures David as a divine poet, musician, and prophet:

> Our sacred Muse of Israel's singer sings,
> That heavenly harper whose harmonious strings
> Expelled that evil spirit which Saul possessed
> And of his torments often him released;
> That princely prophet David whose high lays,
> Immortal God, are trumpets of thy praise,
> Thou Lord of Hosts be helping then to me,
> To sing of him who hath so sung of thee.

Finding its echo in the lines from Drayton quoted above, *David and Bathsheba*'s Prologue introduces David not as a penitent but as a poet, as 'Israel's sweetest singer' (1), 'Whose muse was dipped in that inspiring dew / Archangels stillèd from the breath of Jove' (3–4). Arguably, it is David's poetic sensibility that permits Bathsheba's physical beauty to be such a transformative force in David's spiritual journey over the course of the play.

David figures equally prominently as a prophet in early modern English literature. 'No prophet ever reigned on earth more greater than was I' (sig. C2v), David himself declares in Richard Lloyd's *A Brief Discourse of the Most Renowned Acts and Right Valiant Conquests of Those Puissant Princes Called the Nine Worthies* (1584). Chorus 1 of Peele's play adds this role to its characterisation of David by explicitly calling him 'the prophet' (23). At the play's conclusion, David fully assumes the role of prophet as he educates his son Solomon, advising him to depend not on 'frail conjectures of inferior signs' (17.95) or 'the figures of some hidden art' (97) for his divine knowledge but rather to implore God to

> ravish my earthly sprite,
> That for the time a more than human skill
> May feed the organons of all my sense,
> That, when I think, Thy thoughts may be my guide
> And, when I speak, I may be made by choice
> The perfect echo of Thy heavenly voice.
>
> (110–15)

In these lines David adopts the Christlike role of mediator between God and Solomon, teaching his son how to pray. The projected prophetic ecstasy will shortly become Solomon's, but as David

speaks these lines it is his 'sprite' that is ravished as he fuses the roles of poet and prophet and becomes 'The perfect echo of Thy heavenly voice'.

DAVID AND BATHSHEBA, ELIZABETHAN POLITICS, AND MARLOWE

In the early modern period David was used not only as a religious and poetic example, however. From the reign of Henry VIII to the Civil War and the Restoration, David was commonly used to support various political arguments (Frontain and Wojcik, 5–6). As Robert Kilgore has recently observed, discussion of 'the tyranny of kings' ('Politics', 419) was one such sphere of political discourse in which the figure of David was employed. Focusing on David's refusal to kill King Saul even when he had the opportunity, the Elizabethan government in 'The Second Part of the Sermon on Obedience' and 'An Homily against Disobedience and Wilful Rebellion' cites David in support of its argument that even tyrants should not be resisted by their subjects. It is not lawful to rebel against the authorities, the writers of the 'Second Part of the Sermon on Obedience' assert: 'David also teaches us a good lesson in this behalf, who was many times most cruelly and wrongfully persecuted of King Saul, and many times also put in jeopardy and danger of his life by King Saul and his people, yet he neither withstood, neither used any force or violence against King Saul his mortal and deadly enemy, but did ever to his liege and master King Saul most true, most diligent, and most faithful service' (sig. S3r).

The 'Homily against Disobedience and Wilful Rebellion' elaborates upon this lesson by quoting David: 'The Lord keep me (saith David) from doing that thing, and from laying hands upon my Lord God's anointed, for who can lay his hand upon the Lord's anointed and be guiltless?' (sig. Mm4v). Conversely, David's son Absalom becomes the paradigmatic rebel whose end exemplifies God's judgement upon all who attempt to lay hands on the Lord's anointed. 'The example of Absalom is notable', states the writer of the 'Homily', and his fate 'give[s] an eternal document that neither comeliness of personage, neither nobility, nor favour of the people, no nor the favour of the king himself, can save a rebel from due punishment' (sig. O01r). Peele's play echoes even if it does not fully endorse the homily's representation of Absalom: 'Oh, dreadful precedent of His just doom' (1), Chorus 2 declaims immediately

following the scene of Absalom's defeat and death at the hands of David's brutal general Joab.

The play's representation of David is also in keeping with Elizabethan political orthodoxy in so far as from beginning to end it insists on David's sacred status as the Lord's anointed King of Israel. David is 'Elected to the heart of Israel's God' (1.80) and 'the Lord's anointed' (4.122). When He rebukes David through Nathan, God reminds him that 'I thee anointed king in Israel / And saved thee from the tyranny of Saul' (6.35–6). In the play's final scene we witness the smooth transfer of power from father to son as David affirms as heir his son Solomon, 'Whom God in naming hath anointed king' (17.49). Yet the play's insistence upon the rhetoric of divine anointment paradoxically calls it into question. As Kilgore observes, 'What becomes painfully clear throughout Peele's play is that David has lost control personally, domestically, and politically in the manner that kings often lose control in tragic-historical plays' ('Politics', 420). Before he became king David may have offered the supreme example of the subject's proper response to tyranny, but as the play represents him in all his weakness he himself conforms to the pattern of the tyrant as set by Saul. David Bevington argues that 'Superficially orthodox in its depiction of David's suppression of the revolt of his son, and in its use of truisms about divine right, the play nevertheless offers comfort to the disaffected by its disparaging view of kingship' (219), adding that 'David's human frailty strikes at the divinity of monarchs. Whether or not Peele condones rebellion, he is at least sympathetic to its motives. The question of what to do about an inadequate monarch remains unanswered. Absalom's rebellion cannot succeed, yet David is unfit to govern' (220).

The ambivalence that Bevington perceives in the play's representation of David as a monarch can fully be seen when the play is compared to one of its major intertexts, Marlowe's *Tamburlaine* plays. Although Marlowe's influence on Peele's drama has often been noted, critical discussion of Marlowe's influence on the drama of his contemporaries and successors has most frequently focused on the complex and generative relationships among Marlowe's plays and those of Shakespeare and Jonson. In the literary critical narratives that emerge out of such studies as James Shapiro's *Rival Playwrights: Marlowe, Jonson, Shakespeare* (1991) and Robert Logan's *Shakespeare's Marlowe: The Influence of Christopher Marlowe on Shakespeare's Artistry* (2007), Marlowe's plays provide Shakespeare and Jonson with both obstacles that must be creatively overcome

and strikingly new patterns upon which they can exercise their own dramatic genius.

When discussion has turned to the dramatic works of Marlowe's lesser known contemporaries, however, such as Robert Greene and George Peele, Marlowe's influence has typically been considered to be dominating, even stifling. This is especially so in regard to the influence of what were perhaps Marlowe's two most popular plays, *Tamburlaine the Great Part One and Part Two*. As Peter Berek (1982) observes, the *Tamburlaine* plays spawned a multitude of imitations, such as Greene's *Selimus* and Peele's *Battle of Alcazar* and *The Troublesome Reign of John, King of England*, featuring martial heroes modelled on Tamburlaine and declaiming Tamburlainian 'high astounding terms' (*1 Tamburlaine*, Prologue 5) at every available opportunity. Indeed, Peele's *Troublesome Reign* explicitly positions itself in competition with Marlowe's *Tamburlaine* plays. As Scott McMillin and Sally-Beth MacLean observe, the play's first printing as a two-part play in 1591 'was obviously intended to do battle with *Tamburlaine* on the bookstalls' (156). Moreover, the play's Prologue invites its audience, who 'Have entertained the Scythian Tamburlaine, / And given applause unto an infidel' (2–3), to 'Vouchsafe to welcome with the like courtesy / A warlike Christian and your countryman' (4–5) who 'For Christ's true faith endured … many a storm' (6). Berek labels these plays the 'weak sons' of *Tamburlaine*, arguing that 'the early imitations of *Tamburlaine* suggest that Marlowe's audience, and therefore his imitators, wanted to be entertained by his splendid rhetoric and glamorous stage effects without having to yield to the discomfort of unconventional ideas' (59). Wolfgang Clemen (1961) concludes that 'The various derivatives of *Tamburlaine* that appeared within the next few years show how ill the highly original genius manifested in Marlowe's dramatic first-fruits lent itself to imitation' (130; qtd Rutter 27).

Recent criticism, however, has modified this conclusion, at least in relation to Peele. Tom Rutter, for example, contends that Peele's use of Marlowe in the *Battle of Alcazar* is often, though not always, 'inventive and original' (30); according to Judith Weil, *David and Bathsheba* is 'one of the most thorough-going and serious' (63) dramatic responses to the *Tamburlaine* plays. However derivative Peele's *Battle of Alcazar* may be, *David and Bathsheba* represents an intelligent but far from comforting Protestant humanist response to Marlowe. As Annaliese Connolly has detailed, the influence of the *Tamburlaine* plays on *David and Bathsheba* is obvious and

pervasive: 'Peele deliberately replicates aspects of stage spectacle from Marlowe's *Tamburlaine*, including scenes of siege warfare with vaunting between characters upon city walls, together with the hanging of characters either from walls or, in the case of Absalon, from a tree'; moreover, 'Peele's king shares a surprising number of qualities with Marlowe's Scythian, and David's status as God's anointed warrior allows the play to recall Tamburlaine's epithet as "The Scourge of God" with its Old Testament origins' (10). But David is pointedly not Tamburlaine. In almost every respect David is weak where Tamburlaine is strong, and Peele's play is a sustained, consistent examination of this weakness as a Protestant alternative or answer to the bloody, hypermasculine ethos of the *Tamburlaine* plays. David's weakness leads initially to humiliation and doubt but ultimately to a confident assertion of divine election even more powerful than Tamburlaine's precisely because it is rooted in human weakness.

Peele's response is not an intellectual retreat into orthodoxy, though. David's weakness is every bit as disturbing as Tamburlaine's brutal strength. Indeed, David's weakness is crucial to Peele's critique of Marlowe's Tamburlainian aesthetics. If, as Weil contends, the play 'denies the *Tamburlaine* hypothesis' (63), it does so most forcefully by confronting the audience or reader with the paradox of election as it plays itself out in the realm of the political, a paradox that brings to light a submerged but necessary connection between David's tyranny and his penitence. Kilgore argues that 'English writers turned to this [the regal] David to talk either of the tyranny of kings or of how even such a man as David can sin, and yet through poetry and penance, be restored' ('Politics', 419). No one, according to Protestant theology, not even David, can be worthy of or merit being chosen or elected by God and given His grace, whether that be the private grace of the individual believer or the political grace bestowed upon the divinely appointed ruler. Unlike Tamburlaine, Peele's David is obviously unworthy of his election, and the consequences of David's unworthiness are adultery, murder, and civil war. Yet because of his unworthiness David is also the model penitent; his penitence only confirms his status as God's chosen king. *David and Bathsheba* does not resolve this uncomfortable disjunction between election and worth, unlike the *Tamburlaine* plays, which to the extent that they glorify Tamburlaine embody a fantasy avoidance of the problem. From Peele's perspective, for all its high astounding terms, the *Tamburlaine* aesthetic is intellectual cowardice. *David and Bathsheba*, then, demonstrates

that even among his lesser contemporaries Marlowe's influence could be generative and, conversely, that even such lesser figures as Peele could respond to Marlowe's innovative drama in thoughtful and creative ways that warrant serious critical attention.

Peele's juxtaposition of the biblical king David with the late medieval Central Asian conqueror Tamburlaine is not in itself surprising. Early modern English culture placed the two figures in similar categories. Both were considered to be 'Worthies', historical figures whose outstanding military accomplishments made them exemplars of heroic virtue. Lloyd defines the Worthies as 'the greatest and mightiest conquerors and Worthies of the world, / As well for their courageousness as magnanimities, / Their valiantness, their wisdoms rare, and princely policies' (sig. A2v), and he intends to narrate 'How God exalted them on high to earthly dignity, / And gave them kings and kingdoms by triumphant victory, / Appointing them to be his scourge, the wicked to confound / And their unrighteous seed unroot with sword from of the ground' (sig. A2v). David was one of Lloyd's three Old Testament Worthies, along with Joshua and Judas Maccabeus. Lloyd's representation of David highlights another of David's major attributes, his status as a figure of social mobility. '[D]oughty David, in whom God did delight', Lloyd tells us, 'From shepherd being made a King, was righteous in God's sight' (sig. A2v). David was 'Promoted up to regal room, though come but of mean race' (sig. C2v). Echoing Lloyd in the context of a Jacobean Lord Mayor's pageant, *The Triumphs of Integrity* (1623), Thomas Middleton calls David 'The Prince of Prophets' who 'being a King anointed, did not scorn, / To be a shepherd after' (sig. A4v).

Later writers offered updated lists of modern figures. Thus, Robert Vaughan's *The Portraitures at Large of Nine Modern Worthies of the World* (1622) begins with an engraving of Tamburlaine, followed by images of Ottoman Emperors Mehmed II and Suleiman the Great, then Holy Roman Emperor Charles V, George Scanderbeg, the Black Prince, Henry V, Henri IV, and, rounding out the list, William of Orange. As well as being Worthies, both David and Tamburlaine are shepherds who become kings (Connolly, 13). Middleton combines the idea of worthiness and the upward social trajectory in *The Triumphs of Integrity* when he links the two figures as Worthies who 'were born / Shepherds and rise to kings, took their ascending / From the strong hand of Virtue, never ending' (28–30).

Marlowe and Peele both emphasise the shepherd origins of their protagonists. In 1.2 of *1 Tamburlaine*, for example, Tamburlaine

declares to the captured Zenocrate that 'I am a lord, for so my deeds shall prove, / And yet a shepherd by my parentage' (34–5). In the second scene of *David and Bathsheba*, Hanun king of the Ammonites dismisses the Israelite army that is besieging his city Rabbah with the contemptuous question, 'What would the shepherd's dogs of Israel / Snatch from the mighty issue of King Ammon?' (31–2). Indeed, both Tamburlaine and David are repeatedly taunted with their ignoble origins by enemies they later defeat. David, then, might seem to be the ideal character through which Peele could accomplish the goal at which he aimed in *The Troublesome Reign of John, King of England*: offering his audience a Christian, or Christianised, version of Tamburlaine that will out-Tamburlaine Tamburlaine.

David and Bathsheba reproduces Tamburlainian rhetoric and echoes the *Tamburlaine* plays at various points in its staging, however, only in order to foreground the differences between David and Tamburlaine. As David parades in triumph after conquering Rabbah, for example, his generals Joab and Abishai glorify him in the hyperbolic terms that saturate descriptions of Tamburlaine. 'Beauteous and bright is he among the tribes' (9.11), declaims Joab,

> As when the sun attired in glist'ring robe
> Comes dancing from his oriental gate
> And bridegroom-like hurls through the gloomy air
> His radiant beams, such doth King David show,
> Crowned with the honour of his enemy's town.
> Shining in riches like the firmament,
> The starry vault that overhangs the earth,
> So looketh David King of Israel.
>
> (12–19)

'Joab, why doth not David mount his throne' (20), Abishai continues, 'Whom heaven hath beautified with Hanun's crown?' (21). If David follows Abishai's suggestion at this point, the scene would recall 4.2 of *1 Tamburlaine*, in which Tamburlaine steps to his throne on the back of the defeated Bajazeth and then proclaims:

> Now clear the triple region of the air
> And let the majesty of heaven behold
> Their scourge and terror tread on emperors.
> Smile, stars that reigned at my nativity,
> And dim the brightness of their neighbour lamps.
>
> (30–4)

Significantly, however, it is Joab and Abishai, and not David himself, who produce the Tamburlainian description.

Moreover, Peele undercuts the Tamburlainian pomposity of the stage echo: immediately after David has mounted his throne, Jonadab enters to announce that Absalom has murdered David's first-born son, Amnon. David then laments,

> Ay me, how soon are David's triumphs dashed,
> How suddenly declineth David's pride!
> As doth the daylight settle in the west,
> So dim is David's glory and his gite.
>
> (9.32–5)

This moment typifies Peele's redeployment of the elements of Marlowe's Tamburlaine aesthetics. Throughout *David and Bathsheba*, characters other than David use Tamburlainian rhetoric because they want David to be a Tamburlainian figure, but the play, and David, continually disappoint. It is Absalom, with his desire to 'glut his longing soul / With sole fruition of his father's crown' (11.139–40), who most closely self-identifies with Tamburlaine, and even at the end of the play, after Joab has defeated Absalom's rebel forces for him, David refuses to be Tamburlaine. Instead, broken by the news of Absalom's death, he sulks in his pavilion and must be threatened by Joab before he assumes the comportment appropriate to a conqueror:

> Advance thee from thy melancholy den,
> And deck thy body with thy blissful robes,
> Or by the Lord that sways the heaven I swear
> I'll lead thine armies to another king.
>
> (17.238–41)

After further threats David does leave his tent, but the play tellingly concludes not with a rousing speech from David but with Joab's verbal slap on David's back, 'Bravely resolved, and spoken like a king! / Now may old Israel and his daughters sing' (279–80).

David and Bathsheba's ironic deployment of Tamburlainian rhetoric is not accompanied by a representation of David as a more positive political leader than Tamburlaine. On the contrary, like Tamburlaine, David becomes a tyrant, and his tyranny is not a new form of hypermasculine virtue but effeminising sin. Both Tamburlaine and David are usurpers, but Marlowe represents Tamburlaine's various usurpations as victories of the deserving hero over effeminate, pompous,

and weak opponents. 'Your births shall be no blemish to your fame' (4.4.125), Tamburlaine tells his companions during the banquet of crowns in 4.4 of *1 Tamburlaine*, 'For virtue is the fount whence honour springs, / And they are worthy she investeth kings' (126–7). In contrast, although the play for the most part is silent about David's usurpation of the throne of Israel from Saul, when the matter does surface in Shimei's accusations in scene 12, David does not attempt to refute the charge. Shimei calls David 'The man of Israel that hath ruled as king / Or rather as the tyrant of the land, / Bolstering his hateful head upon the throne / That God unworthily hath blessed him with' (1–4), asserting that 'The Lord hath brought upon thy cursèd head / The guiltless blood of Saul and all his sons, / Whose royal throne thy baseness hath usurped' (26–8). When Abishai responds to Shimei's outburst by asking David to 'Let me alone to take away his head' (38), David surprisingly replies:

> Why meddleth thus the son of Zeruiah
> To interrupt the action of our God?
> Shimei useth me with this reproach
> Because the Lord hath sent him to reprove
> The sins of David, printed in his brows.
>
> (39–43)

David's sins include, of course, not merely usurpation but other crimes characteristic of tyrants, such as the violation of the sexual and property rights of his subjects and murder. In the play's first scene, David observes Bathsheba bathing and immediately commands her sexual compliance to his desire through his intermediary Hushai; when Bathsheba becomes pregnant, he sends her husband Uriah off to the front lines of his war against the Ammonites in order to be killed, thus allowing him to claim Bathsheba as his own wife. In unequivocal terms the play's first chorus condemns David's tyrannous actions as the 'proud revolt of a presumptuous man' (1) and an example of unbridled 'lust' (17) whose 'sequel' (18) will be 'greater ill' (18): the death of Bathsheba's child, the rape of Tamar, the murder of Amnon, and, finally, Absalom's rebellion. The play's opening scenario and its consequences stand in marked contrast to the opening scenario of *1 Tamburlaine*: Tamburlaine captures Zenocrate in 1.2, but this rape only becomes Tamburlaine's opportunity to demonstrate his masculine virtue and self-control by, on the one hand, preserving Zenocrate from 'all blot of foul unchastity' (5.2.422) and, on the other, resisting the emotional assault of her

pleas for her native Damascus. By 'thus conceiving and subduing' (5.2.120) the 'thoughts effeminate and faint' (114) about Zenocrate that would, were they to conquer him, lead to his own effeminisation, Tamburlaine 'Shall give the world to note, for all my birth, / That virtue solely is the sum of glory / And fashions men with true nobility' (125–7). David, in contrast, is subdued by his own lust (this is the Platonic definition of a tyrant (Bushnell, 9)) and consequently destroys his glory with his sins.

The contrast between the two leaders extends to their use of the rhetoric of divine election. Tamburlaine frequently invokes the rhetoric of divine election. In 1.2, for example, he tells Theridamas that 'sooner shall the sun fall from his sphere / Than Tamburlaine be slain or overcome' (176–7), that, should Theridamas attempt to assault him, 'Jove himself will stretch his hand from heaven / To ward the blow' (180–1), and that 'as a sure and grounded argument / That I shall be the monarch of the East, / He sends this Sultan's daughter', Zenocrate, 'To be my queen' (184–7). In 3.3 he calls himself 'the Scourge and Wrath of God' (44), a phrase he repeats in *2 Tamburlaine* after murdering his son Calyphas for cowardice. The captive Natolian king Orcanes denounces the murder as 'this thy barbarous, damnèd tyranny' (4.1.137), to which Tamburlaine replies:

> Villains, these terrors and these tyrannies,
> If tyrannies war's justice ye repute,
> I execute, enjoined me from above,
> To scourge the pride of such as heaven abhors.
>
> (144–7)

Since 'I exercise a greater name, / The Scourge of God and Terror of the World, / I must apply myself to fit those terms' (151–3), Tamburlaine asserts. Significantly, Tamburlaine here declares his status as God's chosen but also asserts that he must be (and, presumably, is) worthy of such election.

With its emphasis on David's sinfulness, however, *David and Bathsheba* makes it clear that David is not worthy his election, and the play highlights the ways in which various characters manipulate the rhetoric of election for ends that are less than godly. Juxtaposed with its emphasis on David's tyranny and sinfulness, the play's equally emphatic insistence on David's status as God's anointed or chosen ruler often appears to be highly cynical. The rhetoric of election is the tool by which Hushai enforces Bathsheba's compliance to David's sexual demands in the play's opening scene: 'David, thou

knowst, fair dame, is wise and just, / Elected to the heart of Israel's God' (79–80), he tells Bathsheba to silence her protests, 'Then do not thou expostulate with him / For any action that contents his soul' (81–2). It is the rhetoric that fuels the religious fanaticism of Joab and his army: 'Ye fight the holy battles of Jehovah, / King David's God, and ours and Jacob's God' (2.7–8), Joab tells his troops at the siege of Rabbah. It is the rhetoric that Joab will invoke to defeat Absalom's rebel army ideologically after he has defeated them in battle: 'Error hath masked your much too forward minds' (16.12), he tells the defeated rebels, 'And you have sinned against the chosen state, / Against his life for whom your lives are blessed' (13–14), but

> Joab pities your disordered souls
> And therefore offers pardon, peace, and love
> To all that will be friendly reconciled
> To Israel's weal, to David, and to heaven.
>
> (17–20)

Throughout the play, David and those around him exploit the rhetoric of election to further David's tyranny and warfare, only further supporting Shimei's accusation that 'God unworthily hath blessed' (12.4) David with the throne of Israel.

David's unworthiness, however, is essential to the play's characterisation of David as the model penitential sinner, a characterisation that does not subvert but disturbingly reaffirms the rhetoric of election that David's followers seem so cynically to manipulate. As was outlined earlier in the introduction, in medieval and early modern Christianity David was the paradigmatic biblical penitent, and Peele's play similarly frames David as the exemplary sinner. 'If holy David so shook hands with sin, / What shall our baser spirits glory in?' (15–16), Chorus 1 asks, making the basic theological point that 'all have sinned and are deprived of the glory of God' (Rom., 3:23). Through David's unworthiness and penitence, however, the play also insists upon the point made by the verse that follows and completes Romans. 3:23, 'and are justified freely by his grace'.

Over the course of the play David ostentatiously repents of his sins numerous times – and is forgiven. The most revealing example occurs in the middle of Absalom's rebellion, when Shimei tempts David to despair over his sins. 'If then thy conscience tell thee thou hast sinned, / And that thy life is odious to the world' (12.46–7), Shimei tells David, 'Command thy followers to shun thy face, / And

by thy self here make away thy soul' (48–9). For Shimei, David's unworthiness should be grounds for his spiritual and political rejection by God. David's reply, however, turns his sinfulness into the foundation of his spiritual and political strength. He has shaken hands with sin and is stronger for it: 'I am not desperate' (51), he tells Shimei, 'But trust unto the covenant of my God, / Founded on mercy, with repentance built, / And finished with the glory of my soul' (52–3). David's penitence does not cancel out his unworthiness; indeed, it depends upon it. Were David, like Tamburlaine, worthy of his divine election, that election would not be the result of God's grace. God is not an 'accepter of persons' (*Institution* fol. 397r), Jean Calvin writes. God elects some and rejects others for no inherent quality or virtue. Here we can locate the overarching difference between Marlowe's *Tamburlaine* plays and Peele's response. By foregrounding David's unworthiness, Peele's play directly confronts its audience with the disturbing political consequences of the logic of the Protestant doctrine of election rather than attempting to construct a fantasy figure in whom election and worth coincide. David is indeed, in Shimei's words, 'murderer, thou shame to Israel, / Foul lecher, drunkard, plague to heaven and earth' (60–1). But he is also God's penitent anointed king, and consequently quite literally gets away with murder fully confident that 'my God is spotless in His vows / And that these hairs shall greet my grave in peace' (10.51–2).

DAVID AND BATHSHEBA, QUEEN ELIZABETH, AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE

The impact of the play's critique of the orthodox political position David was commonly conscripted to serve was no doubt heightened by the extensive links constructed in the period between David and the reigning monarch, Queen Elizabeth. Many Elizabethan writers compared Elizabeth to David and Elizabethan England to Davidic Israel. Speaking in the immediate aftermath of the defeat of the Spanish Armada and thirty years after Elizabeth's accession to the throne, for example, John Prime in his 1588 Accession Day sermon *The Consolations of David, Briefly Applied to Queen Elizabeth* declares that '[T]he happy 17. Day of November, 1558 cometh, and God maketh it manifest to all the world, that himself was with her in all these tempests, and then the platform was broken up and the snare taken away, and a daughter of David had as great deliverances as ever David had' (sig. B2v). Prime later asserts God's providential

protection of Elizabeth and England: 'Truly, the deliverances of David were but a taste of those which we feed on' (sig. C1r). Peele draws the comparison himself in *Anglorum Feriae*, a poem written to celebrate the 1595 Accession Day. 'London's shepherd' (108), presumably Peele, 'Praiseth the Mighty One of Israel, / And with the strings of his unfeigned heart / Tunes his true joy for all those days of peace' (109–11) that the English have enjoyed under Elizabeth, 'Whom Jacob's God hath many ways preserved / … / From Pharaoh's rod and from the sword of Saul' (149, 152).

The general comparison between the two figures led to application to specific historical details of Elizabeth's reign, such as Elizabeth's relationship with Mary Queen of Scots, who was figured as Absalom to Elizabeth's David (Bevington, 219), and the succession crisis as it became apparent that Elizabeth would not leave behind her any natural heirs. Imprisoned in the Tower for his refusal to be silent on the issue of Elizabeth's succession, for example, the combative member of parliament Peter Wentworth wrote *A Pithy Exhortation to Her Majesty for Establishing her Successor to the Crown* (1598), which uses David as an example of a monarch who appointed his successor during his lifetime and thereby ensured his kingdom's stability: 'Wherefore as the state of Israel then moved David to make his successor known, so now the state of England ought to move you' (14). Although unlike Wentworth's treatise it avoids making the comparison between David and Elizabeth explicit, *David and Bathsheba*, according to Carolyn Whitney-Brown, none the less addresses the fears involved in the succession crisis: the death of David and Bathsheba's first son, followed by the false news of the slaughter of all of David's sons, 'raises the anxiety of no succession, the anxiety of the monarch's, and indeed society's, dependence upon the worthy female womb' (190).

David and Bathsheba directs attention to the female womb, and to female sexuality generally, not only through its representation of the anxieties of succession but also through its representations of sexual violence, which have received less attention than they deserve in the literary criticism on the play. The representation of rape in early modern English literature has been the subject of a number of recent full-length scholarly studies, such as Jocelyn Catty's *Writing Rape, Writing Women in Early Modern England* (1999), Karen Bamford's *Sexual Violence on the Jacobean Stage* (2000), Barbara Baines's *Representing Rape in the English Early Modern Period* (2003), and Kim Solga's *Violence Against Women in Early Modern Performance*

(2009). Curiously, however, in their discussions of early modern English drama these studies largely ignore *David and Bathsheba*, although it contains more instances of sexual coercion and rape than any other Elizabethan drama of which I am aware. In fact, as Catty observes, among Elizabethan plays only *Titus Andronicus* (now held to have been co-authored by Peele and Shakespeare) and *David and Bathsheba* 'actually present violent rapes' (91). *Titus Andronicus* presents the shocking single instance of Lavinia's appalling rape and mutilation. Peele's play begins with the sexual coercion of Bathsheba, which is followed shortly thereafter by Amnon's rape of his half-sister Tamar; later in the play, Absalom attempts to secure his grip on his father's throne by publicly raping his father's concubines; the stated goal of David's final assault on the Philistine city Rabbah is to '[s]ubdue the daughters of the gentiles' tribes' (8.13).

David and Bathsheba dramatises the tumultuous history of David's reign as a history driven by sexual violence and its consequences. Yet Peele's play has had little impact on modern critical investigations of the development of representations of sexual violence in the drama. Catty, for example, merely mentions the play, and Baines, although she discusses at length the rape of Tamar as it is found in the Old Testament narrative (34–48), does not mention the play at all. This lacuna, which might be the result of the absence of a readily available modernised edition of the play, is unfortunate, for *David and Bathsheba*'s representations of rape problematise in a number of ways the classical and Old Testament rape paradigm upon which critics argue dramatists from Shakespeare to Fletcher based their representations of rape. *David and Bathsheba* critiques sexual violence against women through its representation of rape not only as criminal but also as the sanctified mode by which unlimited patriarchal sovereignty reproduces itself.

In the classical and Old Testament rape paradigm generally, the male violation of the female body is sharply distinguished from the female body's lawful possession by the appropriate male. Rape is a criminal act committed against a male or group of males through the female body. When the perpetrator possesses sovereign authority, the act renders him a tyrant whose deposition is lawful and necessary for justice to be restored. 'The rape or attempted rape is exploited in the interests of political action' (21), Catty states, and 'the idea of sexual violence as a woman's traumatic experience is written out of the narrative in favour of its "greater" political significance' (21). The rape of Lucretia is, according to Catty, the

paradigmatic classical rape narrative and 'exemplifies the attitudes of early modern writers towards rape and its victims' (12). The Argument with which Shakespeare's 'Rape of Lucrece' begins provides a condensed version of the paradigm. Having been raped by Tarquinius Superbus, Lucretia convokes a council of her male relations, in which her rape is transformed from an act of violence against Lucretia (Tarquin 'violently ravished her' (31–2) in the privacy of her 'chamber' (31)) into the grounds for revolutionary political action, the abolition of the Roman monarchy, and the establishment of the Roman Republic:

> She, first taking an oath of them for her revenge, revealed the actor and whole manner of his dealing, and withal suddenly stabbed herself. Which done, with one consent they [Lucretia's male relations] all vowed to root out the whole hated family of the Tarquins; and bearing the dead body to Rome, Brutus acquainted the people with the doer and manner of the vile deed, with a bitter invective against the tyranny of the King, wherewith the people were so moved that with one consent and a general acclamation the Tarquins were all exiled and the state government changed from kings to consuls. (39–52)

This pattern is repeated in Shakespeare and Peele's *Titus Andronicus*, already noted as the only Elizabethan play other than *David and Bathsheba* to stage violent rape. In 3.1 Marcus presents the raped and mutilated Lavinia to her father Titus as a 'deer' (89) found 'straying in the park, / Seeking to hide herself' (88–9), to which Titus replies 'It was my dear, and he that wounded her / Hath hurt me more than had he killed me dead' (91–2). The violence committed against her by her rapists, the sons of the former Queen of the Goths and now the reigning Roman Emperor's consort, silences Lavinia. She, like Lucretia, then becomes the grounds for political action by her male relations, Marcus, Titus, and Lucius. After bidding 'Farewell' to 'proud Rome' (290) at the end of the scene, Lucius bids 'Farewell, Lavinia' (292) and vows to her that

> If Lucius live, he will requite your wrongs
> And make proud Saturnine and his empress
> Beg at the gates, like Tarquin and his queen.
> Now will I to the Goths and raise a power
> To be revenged on Rome and Saturnine.
>
> (296–300)

The complete subordination of Lavinia's trauma to her male relations' concerns ultimately demands Lavinia's silencing through

further violence against her. In the play's final scene Titus kills Lavinia while proclaiming, 'Die, die Lavinia, and thy shame with thee, / And with thy shame thy father's sorrow die!' (5.3.46–7), thus simultaneously asserting his ownership of his daughter and attempting to efface her traumatic experience, her 'shame'.

As Baines observes, Old Testament rape narratives, including the narrative of Tamar's rape in 2 Samuel, adhere to a similar pattern. 'The Old Testament, like the classical texts of Ovid and Livy, contributed to an ideology of rape as a means of founding nations and governments; both the classical and biblical traditions reveal a patriarchal structure that necessitated the containment and objectification of women' (8), Baines writes, adding that in Old Testament rape narratives 'power relations and rivalry among men are as important or more important than lust in defining the motives of the rapists, and revenge is the consequence of rape' (35). In the case of Tamar's rape, the revenge takes the form of Absalom's murder of the rapist, Amnon, who is King David's heir, and Absalom's subsequent rebellion against David. Baines quotes theologian Bruce Birch's verdict that 'Tamar's rape sets in motion a course of events that eventually eliminates the two leading contenders for the Davidic throne. Tamar is an event rather than a person in history' (qtd Baines 35). In the classical and Old Testament paradigm, then, rape and the response to rape delimit the bounds of sovereignty and lead to its redistribution among male subjects as the right to the exclusive possession of the bodies of women, playing out in the realm of secular political history Freud's Darwinian myth of the primal horde.

In contrast, *David and Bathsheba* represents rape as the mode by which sovereignty reproduces itself as unlimited. The play dramatises rape as self-contradictorily criminal and sanctified, the instantiation of a divinely appointed sovereignty above the law and ultimately beyond the reach of the political consequences of that law's violation. The play's dramatisation of Tamar's rape falls in line with the biblical narrative, placing the emphasis on the criminal aspect of the rape and its function as grounds for subsequent political action. Amnon is explicitly represented as a type of tyrant, a 'prince, whose power may command' (3.38) but who cannot quell 'the rebel passions of his love' (39) for Tamar. Lacking self-control, he rapes his half-sister and then abandons her, acts which delegitimate his status as a political figure and as a man. As she is being thrust out of Amnon's house, Tamar denounces him as 'Unkind, unprincely,

and unmanly Amnon, / To force and then refuse thy sister's love' (4.3), labelling the rape an 'offence' (5). Vowing revenge for his sister's rape, Absalom calls Amnon a 'Traitor to heaven, traitor to David's throne, / Traitor to Absalom and Israel' (43–4). Upon hearing of the rape from Absalom, David consolidates the process of delegitimation by disinheriting Amnon: 'I'll thrust the flattering tyrant from his throne' (85), he decrees. David then transforms Tamar's rape into an issue of the legitimate exercise of sovereign power: 'revenge not thou this sin' (88), he admonishes Absalom, 'Leave it to me, and I will chasten him' (89). 'To God alone belongs revenge' (9.98), the Widow of Tekoa tells David later in the play, but David here is making clear to Absalom that he, David, as God's appointed king alone has the right to punish Amnon's infringement of his sovereignty.

David fails to follow through on his promise to punish Amnon, however, and Absalom sees this failure as warrant to take matters into his own hands, first usurping David's particular prerogative by slaughtering Amnon at the sheep-shearing feast in scene 7 and then, in scene 9, after receiving David's pardon for the murder, resolving to usurp David's sovereign prerogative in general. Were he 'honoured / Of tribes and elders and the mightiest ones' (9.147–8), Absalom muses, he would act so that 'everyone that hath a cause to plead / Might come to Absalom and call for right' (151–2). He would assert the sovereign prerogative that David signally fails to assert throughout the play:

> Then in the gates of Zion would I sit
> And publish laws in great Jerusalem,
> And not a man should live in all the land
> But Absalom would do him reason's due.
>
> (153–6)

The rest of the play dramatises the consequences of Absalom's resolution: his rebellion, his defeat and death, and David's proclamation of Solomon as his new heir.

If, however, the play's representation of Tamar's rape and its consequences follows the classical and Old Testament paradigm in its representation of the rape as a crime against legitimate male sovereignty or a call for legitimate male political action against tyranny, other acts of sexual violence in the play problematise this representation. The most prominent of these acts is David's sexual coercion of Bathsheba at the play's beginning, an act that Stephen Guy-Bray

contends is a 'proleptic version' (143) of Tamar's rape. The play makes the element of coercion involved in the relationship clear both when Bathsheba protests against Hushai's initial solicitations on David's behalf and, later, when she mourns for her sick newborn whose death the prophet Nathan will pronounce to be punishment for the liaison. Bathsheba, in Whitney-Brown's words, 'is more than a sight or site of David's transgression, more than the silent object of desire. She is a fully speaking subject, exposing and criticizing the contradiction between David's lecherous behavior and the ideology of the godly king' (185). 'What is Bathsheba to please the King', she asks Hushai when he first approaches her, 'Or what is David, that he should desire / For fickle beauty's sake his servant's wife?' (1.76–8), later adding that 'I hate incontinence' (85). 'Oh, what is it to serve the lust of kings?' (5.24), she asks herself as she laments over her sick child, 'How lion-like thy rage when we resist!' (25). Hushai's response to Bathsheba's protests is chilling:

> David, thou knowst, fair dame, is wise and just,
> Elected to the heart of Israel's God;
> Then do not thou expostulate with him
> For any action that contents his soul.
>
> (79–82)

As God's appointed king, David's demands, including the demand for sexual compliance, must be obeyed, and 'do not thou expostulate with him'. Sexual coercion, then, in this instance is not a crime against sovereignty but rather sovereignty's manifestation.

It might be tempting to consider Hushai's lines as merely the cynical rhetoric of a consummate courtier dedicated entirely to satisfying his sovereign's desires. Moreover, the prophet Nathan's parable of the poor man's lamb emphatically presents David's acts as criminal, as David's own judgement upon the parable's villain, the wealthy man who appropriates the poor man's lamb, confirms:

> Now, as the Lord doth live, this wicked man
> Is judged and shall become the child of death.
> Fourfold to the poor man shall he restore
> That without mercy took his lamb away.
>
> (6.29–32)

Significantly, however, it is David who condemns his own assertions of sovereignty, paradoxically but necessarily so: only the divinely

appointed sovereign has the right to criminalise his own behaviour, and that is precisely what Nathan shrewdly prompts David to do through the parable. None the less, even if it requires a double movement, David's sexual coercion of Bathsheba ultimately confirms his sovereignty rather than undermining it.

In the play, though, such dialectical thinking is not always required for rape to be considered an assertion of sovereignty. Indeed, immediately after confronting David with the parable and eliciting from him his self-condemnatory judgement, Nathan ventriloquises God and declaims,

> 'I thee anointed King in Israel
> And saved thee from the tyranny of Saul;
> Thy master's house I gave thee to possess;
> His wives into thy bosom did I give,
> And Judah and Jerusalem withal,
> And might, thou knowst, if this had been too small,
> Have given thee more.'
>
> (6.35–41)

God reminds David that he legitimated David's rule with, among other things, the divinely sanctioned rape of Saul's 'wives'. David's crime, then, is not rape but greed: his sexual coercion of Bathsheba implies that what God gave him was insufficient, 'too small'.

Absalom, or more precisely his adviser Ahithophel, is fully aware of and attempts to appropriate rape's function as a sign of sovereignty. He is, as Whitney-Brown observes, 'a contradictory figure who both acts for female interests in the play yet at other times may seek to identify himself as sovereign by royal subjugation and violation of women' (197). Fulfilling Nathan's prophecy to David that God 'before thy face will take thy wives / And give them to thy neighbour to possess' (6.51–2), Absalom follows Ahithophel's counsel and publicly rapes the ten concubines whom David leaves behind in his palace when he flees Jerusalem during Absalom's revolt. The play does not stage this mass rape, but the biblical narrative relates that 'Ahithophel said unto Absalom, Go in to thy father's concubines, which he hath left to keep the house … So they spread Absalom a tent upon the top of the house, and Absalom went in to his father's concubines in the sight of all Israel' (2 Samuel, 16:21–2). The play picks up the narrative immediately after the rapes, as Absalom addresses the concubines in an effort rhetorically

to convert the rapes into signs of the transference of sovereignty from David to himself:

> Now you that were my father's concubines,
> Liquor to his unchaste and lustful fire,
> Have seen his honour shaken in his house,
> Which I possess in sight of all the world.
> I bring ye forth as foils to my renown
> And to eclipse the glory of your king.
>
> (11.1–6)

The concubines bravely resist Absalom's rhetoric: the first Concubine tells Absalom that the rapes will 'cry for vengeance to the host of heaven' (11.19), who 'will dart plagues at thy aspiring head / For doing this disgrace to David's throne' (11.21–2), and the second Concubine follows this up with a warning that Absalom should not hope to escape the 'thumping beaks' (11.30) and 'commanding wings' (11.31) of God's angels. Their resistance, however, only places them in the jeopardy of further violence: Absalom's general Amasa declares that 'These concubines should buy their taunts with blood' (11.45). Absalom does not act on Amasa's advice only because he considers the rapes to have done damage enough: 'let these foolish women 'scape our hands / To recompense the shame they have sustained' (11.48–9). Indeed, rape and mass murder interpenetrate throughout this play in the rhetoric of divinely appointed sovereignty. At the beginning of scene 8, for example, David's fanatical general Joab threatens the Ammonite king Hanun with the genocidal destruction of the inhabitants of Rabbah, the city that the Israelite army is besieging. 'Hanun, the God of Israel hath said, / David the King shall wear that crown of thine' (8.35–6), Joab trumpets, and

> Israel shall hale thy people hence
> And turn them to the tile-kiln, man and child,
> And put them under harrows made of iron,
> And hew their bones with axes, and their limbs
> With iron swords divide and tear in twain.
>
> (39–43)

This is how Israel will, in Joab's earlier words, 'Subdue the daughters of the gentiles' tribes' (13).

David and Bathsheba leaves us in no doubt about the criminality of rape, either David's sexual coercion of Bathsheba, Amnon's

rape of Tamar, or Absalom's rape of David's concubines. In each instance, moreover, the play affords the rape victims voices with which to protest against the violence enacted upon their bodies, even though these protests are finally subordinated to the purportedly larger political concerns of the play's male characters. If in these regards the play conforms to the classical and Old Testament rape paradigm reproduced in works like 'The Rape of Lucrece' and *Titus Andronicus*, however, the play interrogatively departs from it by locating rape as foundational to sovereignty in general and David's divine sovereignty in particular. The David who is a rapist and murderer is no less God's favourite, and it is in precisely this paradox that the play locates the essence of David's sovereignty. Bruce Boehrer suggests that the play thus advances a conservative ideological agenda: the play's 'emphasis upon sexual pollution' functions 'to rescue the monarch and his dynasty from the consequences of his own criminal behavior' (62). I would argue in contrast that the play mobilises its critique precisely by foregrounding the sanctified as well as the criminal or polluted aspect of sexual violence. By representing rape in such starkly contradictory terms the play calls into question the distinction upon which the classical paradigm founds legitimate political and patriarchal authority, the distinction between the criminal violation of female bodies and their lawful possession. Through this critique of the foundations of patriarchal authority, *David and Bathsheba* draws attention to the plight of women in a world in which, legitimately or illegitimately, political power is asserted through their bodies in ways that appropriate their trauma and negate their agency.

The play not only draws attention to the process by which male political power asserts itself through the negation of women's trauma and agency, however. Its critique gains force because it places sustained attention on the trauma experienced by Tamar, Bathsheba, and the concubines and does not allow them to be wholly subsumed by the imperatives of male political concerns. One of the important questions Solga asks at the beginning of her study of the ways in which women's trauma and agency have been erased from modern as well as early modern performance and critical discourse is, 'Can we rehearse the (often indeed spectacular) disappearance of violence against women in early modern performance without reproducing it?' (1). Peele's play, I want to suggest, prevents the disappearance of the trauma of sexual violence from both its initial audience's attention and the attention of the modern critic. If elsewhere the

play follows the biblical narrative closely, in its representations of the sexual coercion of Bathsheba and the rapes of Tamar and the concubines the play departs from that narrative, and the rape paradigm embedded in it, to give the traumatised women voices with which they express the trauma of their experiences. 'Whither shall I fly, / With folded arms and all-amazèd soul' (4.14–15), cries Tamar as she is ejected from Amnon's residence. She expresses her trauma as a fall from the 'glorious soil' (16) of paradise and exile 'To bare and barren vales with floods made waste, / To desert woods and hills with lightning scorched' (19–21) where she will 'With death, with shame, with hell, with horror sit' (21). Her 'heart is rent / With inward fury of a thousand griefs' (30–1), and in her distress she imagines 'rend[ing] my bloody side' with 'a rusty weapon' (26, 27). She is prevented from suicide by the arrival of Absalom, who vows revenge before urging her to 'Go in, my sister, rest thee in my house, / And God in time shall take this shame from thee' (56–7). Tamar resists Absalom's attempt to incorporate her trauma into the providential narrative in which he sees himself as the central figure, however: 'Nor God nor time will do that good for me' (58), she replies.

Bathsheba similarly resists the erasure of the trauma of her sexual coercion. She may ultimately acquiesce to David's demands, and, as we have seen, the play converts Bathsheba's coerced sexuality into a force working for David's redemption. Moreover, as she works with the prophet Nathan in scene 17 to secure the throne for her son Solomon, she exhibits an agency that goes beyond protest to result in effective and divinely approved political action. None the less, Bathsheba initially voices her objections to David's coercive sexual demands, and she makes it clear that her concerns are not identical with David's and that she is the one who suffers the consequences of David's violence, in however much lyricism he may attempt to disguise that violence. When David greets Bathsheba in the opening scene, he explains to her why he summoned her: 'since thy beauty scorched my conquered soul, / I called thee nearer for my nearer cure' (111–12). Bathsheba does not entirely accept David's strategy of blaming the victim, though: 'One medicine cannot heal our different harms' (124), she later tells him, 'but rather make both rankle at the bone' (125). Bathsheba's harm, her trauma, in this affair is distinct from whatever 'hurt' (122) the smitten David might be feeling, and Bathsheba resists the conflation of the two. In scene 5, as the 'harm' of the affair begins to manifest itself in the illness of David

and Bathsheba's child, Bathsheba's lament elaborates on her sense of the separateness of her concerns from David's. 'Mourn, Bathsheba', the lament begins, and 'bewail thy foolishness, / Thy sin, thy shame, the sorrow of thy soul' (1–2). She finds 'No comfort from the ten-stringed instrument, / The twinkling cymbal, or the ivory lute' (6–7) and, tellingly, 'Nor doth the sound of David's kingly harp / Make glad the broken heart of Bathsheba' (8–9). Indeed, having protested against 'the lust of kings' (24), she closes the lament by reposing trust not in David but in 'The grace that God will to His handmaid send' (27).

In the play's representation of the concubines, the trauma of rape is much less visible than in the play's representation of the sexual violence done to Tamar and Bathsheba. As we have seen, the concubines defy their rapist primarily by resisting his appropriation of their rape as symbols of his sovereignty. None the less, the first Concubine makes it clear at the beginning of her denunciation of Absalom that it is not just 'Thy father's honour' (11.17) but also 'ours thus beaten with thy violent arms' (18) that 'Will cry for vengeance to the host of heaven' (19). In a world in which, legitimately or illegitimately, political power is asserted through women's bodies in ways that appropriate their trauma and negate their agency, *David and Bathsheba* does not allow its audiences or its modern readers to forget the trauma of women's experiences of sexual violence.

SOURCES

The Bible is *David and Bathsheba*'s major source. In his introduction to the Yale edition of the play Blistein remarks that 'while we are unable to determine which version of the Bible Peele used as his source, we are sure he used the Bible' (148). Blistein's verdict may err too far on the side of caution. Exactly which English version or versions of the Bible Peele employed cannot be determined with complete certainty, but close analysis indicates that it is most likely that Peele consulted both the Geneva Bible and the Bishops' Bible heavily while occasionally turning to other versions such as the Great Bible. The most extended analysis of the issue remains Arthur Sampley's 1928 article, 'The Version of the Bible Used by Peele in the Composition of "David and Bethsabe"'. Sampley compares the play to the six major sixteenth-century English

translations of the Bible – the Coverdale Bible (1535), Mathew's Bible (1537), the Great Bible (1539), Taverner's Bible (1539), the Geneva Bible (1560), and the Bishops' Bible (1568) (79) – along with a sixteenth-century edition of the Vulgate, and concludes that 'it seems to me in the highest degree probable that Peele made use of the Bishops' Bible in the composition of *David and Bethsabe*' (87) and that 'he used some contemporary version of the Latin Vulgate' (87). According to Sampley, a comparison of the spelling of the biblical characters' names in the play to their spelling in the bibles reveals that for the most part Peele took his spellings from the Bishops' Bible, while the Geneva Bible spellings seem the furthest removed from Peele's (80–1). Sampley consequently eliminates the Geneva Bible from further analysis as a possible source, focusing the remainder of his analysis on a comparison of twelve select passages from Peele's play to passages from the Bishops' Bible, the Great Bible, and the Vulgate. The passages from Peele's play were chosen because they echo one version or another of the Bible particularly closely.

Sampley's decision to rule out the Geneva Bible from this comparative analysis, however, is logically flawed and has unfortunate results. From the fact that Peele does not follow the Geneva Bible in the spelling of his characters' names, it in no way follows that Peele did not follow it in other matters, and a reinsertion of the Geneva Bible into Sampley's subsequent analysis strongly suggests that he did. For nine of Sampley's twelve selected passages, the Geneva and Bishops' translations are virtually identical. In one instance, the two versions differ significantly in a way that suggests that Peele is in this passage echoing the Bishops' rather than the Geneva rendering: Peele's 'And leave nor name nor issue on the earth' (9.84) is clearly closer to the Bishops' 'and shall not leave to my husband neither name nor issue upon the earth' (2 Samuel, 14:7) than to the Geneva's 'and shall not leave to mine husband neither name nor posterity upon the earth' (2 Samuel, 14:7). In two instances, however, Peele has clearly conflated the two versions. 2 Samuel, 12:4 reads 'And he spared to take of his own sheep' in the Bishops' version, 'who refused to take of his own sheep' in the Geneva version. Peele combines them into 'And he refused and spared to take his own' (6.24). Similarly, the Bishops' version of 2 Samuel, 17:8 reads 'Thy father is a man also practised in war and will not lodge with the people', while the Geneva version of the same

verse has 'thy father is a valiant warrior, and will not lodge with the people'. Again, Peele combines the two:

> Besides, the King himself a valiant man,
> Trained up in feats and stratagems of war,
> And will not, for prevention of the worst,
> Lodge with the common soldiers in the field.
>
> (11.106–9)

In nine of Sampley's twelve passages, then, comparison shows that Peele could be echoing either the Bishop's version or the Geneva; in only one passage does a comparison indicate that Peele was echoing the Bishops' version rather than the Geneva; in two passages, comparison strongly suggests that Peele was echoing the Bishops's version *and* the Geneva. In only three instances is Peele closer to the Great Bible than to either the Bishops' version or the Geneva. Following Blistein's analysis, one might also add to this list the Coverdale version, between which and the play Blistein detected four unique parallels, one more than the number of unique parallels he detected between the play and the Geneva version (145).

As the foregoing discussion would indicate, *David and Bathsheba* follows its biblical sources very closely, in both the events it dramatises and in its language. The Old Testament contains two accounts of David's reign, the first found in 2 Samuel and the second in 1 Chronicles. The two accounts, however, emphasise different events – 1 Chronicles does not mention Bathsheba, for example – and for the vast majority of his play Peele draws upon 2 Samuel, specifically chapters 11 through 19, supplemented in the final scene with the first two chapters of 1 Kings, which recount the proclamation of Solomon as David's heir just before David's death. The exact amount of time covered by the play is difficult to determine, in part because the biblical narratives are not always temporally precise and in part because Peele frequently modifies the biblical narrative's chronology for the sake of dramatic compression. 2 Samuel, 5:4–5 informs us that 'David was thirty years old when he began to reign, and he reigned forty years. / In Hebron he reigned over Judah seven years, and six months, and in Jerusalem he reigned thirty and three years over all Israel and Judah.' The events with which the play begins – the siege of Rabbah and David's sexual coercion of Bathsheba – occur at some point early on in David's reign in Jerusalem, while the events with which the play concludes – the defeat of Absalom's rebellion and the declaration of Solomon

as David's heir – are temporally disparate, separated by a lengthy but indeterminate stretch of time during which David faced two further rebellions, the first by a man named Sheba (2 Samuel, 20) and the second by Absalom's younger brother Adonijah (1 Kings, 1). According to the biblical narrative, David declares Solomon to be his heir after Adonijah's, not Absalom's, rebellion. Perhaps to avoid the repetition of what are very similar events, however, Peele has compressed the two rebellions into one.

Peele is not afraid to bend or break the laws of linear time in his effort to compress time, as in scene 3, when Tamar enters to visit Amnon immediately after Jonadab has suggested to him that he request David to send her, or in scene 9, when Joab is able to make Absalom, supposedly in exile at Geshur, appear in David's presence within nine lines of being commanded by David to 'Go fetch my son, that he may live with me' (118). Peele also condenses time by placing in parallel events that happen serially in the biblical narrative. Scene 4 provides a good example of this technique, which Ruth Blackburn has called 'cinematic' (172). The scene reorders and splices together three distinct episodes in the biblical narrative: David's frustrated attempt to cover up his adultery by getting Uriah to sleep with the pregnant Bathsheba (2 Samuel, 11:7–15); Amnon's rejection of Tamar (2 Samuel, 13:15–22); Absalom's request that David and his lords and sons attend Absalom's sheep-shearing feast (2 Samuel, 13:23–27). In the biblical chronology, the cover-up attempt comes before the final siege of Rabbah, the rape of Tamar and her rejection after it, and Absalom's request and the feast itself two years after Tamar's rape. What the biblical narrative chooses to narrate in serial fashion, Peele has chosen instead to dramatise as simultaneously occurring and complexly interrelated sequences of events. Ashley has described *David and Bathsheba* as 'a Biblical chronicle history' (*Peele*, 144) that 'lacks unity' (148). On the contrary, through dramatic compression of various types Peele is able to fashion from the episodic biblical narrative the well unified action of his play. The conclusion of one of the play's earliest students, P.H. Cheffaud, retains its validity: 'les premiers incidents et les derniers se trouvent dans la double relation de cause à effet, et de péché à chatiment [the first incidents and the last are found in the double relation of cause and effect, and sin and punishment]' (137); consequently, 'l'histoire de David, telle que Peele nous la raconte, est un veritable theme à la Senèque où l'on voit une maison royale vouée à la ruine par les crimes de son chef [the history of David, such as

Peele recounts it to us, is a truly Senecan theme in which one sees a royal house dedicated to ruin by the crimes of its head]' (142–3).

David and Bathsheba both amplifies and qualifies its Senecan tragic theme through its use of its second major source, Guilliaume de Saluste du Bartas's *Semaines* or, as they are better known through Joshua Sylvester's translation, *Divine Weeks*. The first *Semaine*, which recounts the Creation, was first published in 1578; the first two days of *La Seconde Semaine*, beginning with Adam and narrating various aspects of Old Testament history before Abraham, followed in 1584. Five other books of the next two days of *La Seconde Semaine* were published after Du Bartas's death in 1590 but before Peele's death in 1596: 'The Fathers', 'Jonah', 'Trophies', and 'Magnificence' in 1591, and 'The Law' in 1593 (Prescott, *French Poets*, 169–72). Du Bartas's work is an encyclopedic religious epic (Auger, 626) stemming from what Lily Campbell has described as 'a movement to substitute divine poetry for the secular poetry which was coming off the presses in the sixteenth century, a movement to substitute Biblical story for secular story, to substitute Christian mythology for a pagan mythology, as well as to substitute prayer and praise of the Christian God for poetry addressed to an unkind mistress' (5). Anne Lake Prescott observes that 'In England Du Bartas was probably the most admired of contemporary European writers, if one excludes Erasmus and the chief figures of the Reformation, and his lengthy descriptions of the creation and history of the world received an adulation seldom given to far better poetry' ('Reception', 144).

English translators of the *Semaines* include such luminaries as Sir Philip Sidney and James VI (Auger, 625), but, although Sylvester began publishing his translation in 1592 (Sykes, 349), no English translations of the passages on which Peele drew for his play were published before 1594, the date of the play's entry into the Stationers' Register. Moreover, as H. Dugdale Sykes argued in 1924, 'a comparison of his [Peele's] play with the original text of *La Seconde Semaine* and with Sylvester's translation makes it clear that he borrowed direct from Du Bartas' (349). *David and Bathsheba* contains very close translations of 115 lines from *La Seconde Semaine*, taken from three of the books first published in 1584: 'Eden', 'The Ark', and 'The Artifices'. These lines are reproduced either in the commentary notes or, in the case of more extended passages, in the Appendix. All the English translations of these lines are mine. The play's first scene contains translations of 14 lines of Du Bartas's description of Paradise in 'Eden'; another

line from the same description is found in scene 4. The one borrowing from 'The Ark', noted by Alexander Dyce in 1861, occurs in Chorus 1. The remaining hundred lines are taken from 'The Artifices', mostly from the conversation between Adam and Seth, and, apart from four lines in scene 12 and three lines in the cancelled fragment after Chorus 2, are all found in the play's concluding scene. Assessing the causes of the English enthusiasm for the *Semaines*, Robert Cummings argues that the books 'were read not for doctrine but for their detachable "beauties" (uncomplicatedly and abundantly represented in Robert Allot's collection of poetical commonplaces, *Englands Parnassus* [1600])' (176). According to Cummings, Allot's anthology contains 112 passages from *La Seconde Semaine*, 110 from Sylvester's translation (190). To this we can add two of the three passages from *David and Bathsheba* reproduced in the anthology: Chorus 1.4–11, and 17.87–9.

Although early modern English readers may have read Du Bartas for isolated poetic passages, Peele's borrowings are deployed to create in *David and Bathsheba* an underlying archetypal pattern that both reinforces and subsumes the play's tragic theme. In the first scene, they emphatically connect David and Bathsheba to Adam and Eve in Eden, implying that their fall repeats the fall of humanity's first parents. Peele draws on lines 40–108 of Du Bartas's *Eden*, a description of Eden itself, in Bathsheba's opening speech and, more extensively, in David's lyrical flight of fancy as he observes Bathsheba bathing. In lines that mark the difference as well as the similarities between the two events, David declaims

> What tunes, what words, what looks, what wonders pierce
> My soul, incensèd with a sudden fire?
> What tree, what shade, what spring, what paradise
> Enjoys the beauty of so fair a dame?
> Fair Eva placed in perfect happiness,
> Lending her praise-notes to the liberal heavens,
> Struck with the accents of archangels' tunes,
> Wrought not more pleasure to her husband's thoughts
> Than this fair woman's words and notes to mine.
>
> (1.26–34)

Bathsheba may be Eve, the grove in which she is bathing may strike David as Paradise, and David's own sexual desire may incite him to identify with Adam, to want to occupy the position of Adam, but he precisely is not Adam, not 'her husband' (33), a point of which Hushai does not hesitate to remind David in this scene and

elsewhere in the play. David's fall from his paradise is precipitated by his illicit longing for Paradise. He repeats the Fall by acting on his forbidden longings to return to what he tropes, with the help of Du Bartas, as prelapsarian sexual bliss.

The play also presents Tamar's rape as a repetition of the primal biblical tragedy: 'Whither, alas, ah, whither shall I fly, / With folded arms and all-amazèd soul' (4.14–15), Tamar cries as she is expelled from Amnon's palace, 'Cast as was Eva from that glorious soil / Where all delights sat bating, winged with thoughts, / Ready to nestle in her naked breasts?' (16–18). The explicit allusions to Eve and Eden are reinforced by line 17's echo of Du Bartas's description of Eden's trees, in whose branches 'cent sortes d'oiseaux jour et nuict s'esbatoient [a hundred kinds of birds day and night frolicked]' (*Eden*, 83). Peele borrows from Du Bartas to extend the archetypal pattern throughout the play.

If David and Bathsheba are linked to Adam and Eve, then Amnon, Absalom, and Solomon are linked to Cain, Abel, and Seth. The cancelled fragment following Chorus 2 points the way. In this fragment Absalom seems to be protesting against what he perceives to be the undeserved favour shown to one of his half-brothers, presumably Amnon: '"What boots it, Absalom, unhappy Absalom?" / Sighing, I say "What boots it, Absalom, / To have disclosed a far more worthy womb?"' The lines echo closely Cain's angry musings on Abel in Du Bartas after God has accepted Abel's sacrifice and rejected Cain's: 'Que te sert-il, Caïn? ô Caïn, que te sert / (Dit-il en souspirant) d'avoir premier ouvert / Le fecond amarry de la premiere mere [What use is it, Cain? O Cain, what use is it / (He says sighing) to have first opened / The fertile womb of the first mother]' (*Les Artifices*, 267–9). Absalom's murder of Amnon, then, repeats, with a difference, Cain's murder of Abel: although Absalom is the younger of the two sons of David – in fact, precisely because Absalom is the younger of the two – he, like Cain, is envious of the favour shown his brother, David's eldest son and royal heir, favour most notably manifested in the play in David's failure to punish Amnon for his rape of Absalom's sister.

Within this paradigm Peele's borrowings from Du Bartas in scene 17 reveal their function. Taken primarily from Du Bartas's narration in 'The Artifices' of Adam's lessons to his third son Seth after Cain has been banished for murdering Abel, the borrowings tightly identify Solomon with Seth. When Nathan urges David to 'Let Solomon be made thy staff of age, / Fair Israel's rest, and honour

of thy race' (55–6), he is transferring on to Solomon Du Bartas's description of Seth, 'qui tient de sainct Abel la place, / Baston de sa viellesse, et gloire de sa race [who holds of holy Abel the place, / Staff of his [Adam's] old age, and glory of his race]' (*Les Artifices*, 517–18). The ensuing conversation between David and Solomon substantiates the connection between David's new heir and Adam's only remaining son by translating 53 lines from Adam's conversation with Seth in Du Bartas. Cheffaud may be correct to perceive a Senecan pattern in the tragic consequences that issue from David and Bathsheba's initial adultery, but that pattern is subsumed within the larger biblical paradigm that Peele establishes through his use of Du Bartas, a pattern that goes beyond the utter destruction of the family with which the Senecan pattern concludes and offers in the form of the Seth-like Solomon a collective hope that parallels the personal grace that the penitent David ultimately receives in spite of his sinfulness. *David and Bathsheba* is, in Campbell's words, 'a divine play conscious of its place in divine literature and aware of the traditions and practices of the poets who were writing divine poems' (260), even if Peele's treatment of those traditions and practices does not hesitate to confront their less comfortable elements, such as the political implications of David's status as paradigmatic penitent and sexual violence against women.

DAVID AND BATHSHEBA, BIBLICAL DRAMA, AND PERFORMANCE PROVENANCE

The biblical subject matter of Peele's 'divine drama' makes it unusual for a play written for the Elizabethan professional stage. Although the figure of David was common in early modern European culture in general and Elizabethan literature in particular, and although there are many Continental dramas about David in the period, *David and Bathsheba* is the only extant David play and one of only thirteen or fourteen plays on biblical subjects known to have been written for the early modern English professional stage. Of these plays, *David and Bathsheba* is only one of two to survive the depredations of time and contingency, the other being Thomas Lodge and Robert Greene's Jonah play, *Looking Glass for London and England* (1594). Biblical history was frequently the subject matter of earlier English drama, varying in kind from John Bale's *A Tragedy or Enterlude Manifesting the Chief Promises of God unto Man* (1538) to the great medieval mystery cycles. Murray Roston summarises that

'the most popular themes in the biblical drama of this period were Joseph, Adam, David, Esther, and Susannah' and that 'In each, the good are seen to be vindicated and the guilty to be duly punished' (58). In the middle of the Henrician Reformation, Thomas Watson (consecrated Bishop of Lincoln in 1557) wrote a Latin play entitled *Absalom* (1534–44); the editor of the only surviving manuscript of Watson's play, John Hazel Smith, also notes that in 1562 the Stationers' Register records a play entitled *The Two Sins of David*, now lost (Smith, *Humanist's*, 31).

Scholars have frequently asserted that considerable continuity exists between the earlier drama and the newly developing professional stage of the Elizabethan period. The direct dramatization of biblical history, however, seems to have been one area of discontinuity. According to Blackburn, no Protestant English biblical drama is recorded between 1568 and 1587 (155). Several competing reasons have been suggested for the discontinuity. Suggesting that English writers between 1568 and 1587 might have felt biblical subject matter to be unsafe for dramatic treatment given the Elizabethan government's attempts to suppress the mystery cycles (159), Blackburn attributes the decline of biblical drama by the end of the sixteenth century to increasing Puritan opposition to the theatre (194). In contrast, Roston attributes the end of scriptural drama not to laws or to the Puritan attacks on the theatre but to a rise in the perceived sanctity of the Old Testament. Dramatists, Roston argues, felt increasing scruples about using Old Testament narratives for dramatic purposes and switched instead to exploiting narratives from the Apocrypha and Josephus. 'It was the fear of sacrilege', Roston concludes, that 'brought an end to biblical drama at the close of the sixteenth century' (120).

According to Connolly, however, before biblical drama disappeared from the stage at the end of the sixteenth century, between 1590 and 1602, thirteen biblical dramas are known to have been written for the English professional stage (4). Most of these, Connolly claims, can be assigned to the Admiral's Men: 'After 1594 when the Chamberlain's Men and the Admiral's Men emerged as the two dominant companies, biblical plays become associated almost exclusively with the repertory of the Admiral's Men' (8). Connolly accounts for this concentration through reference to the Admiral's Men's repertorial strategies. Following Knutson's argument that 'one of the strategies employed by the companies which owned Marlowe's plays was to build "a complementary repertory

that duplicated, exploited, or exaggerated certain of their features" [Knutson 2002, 25]' (9), Connolly states that 'The biblical plays staged by the Admiral's Men at the Rose and Fortune theatres replicated the themes and motifs of older plays in their collection, particularly the most popular of Marlowe's plays such as *Tamburlaine* and *The Jew of Malta*. The eponymously titled plays are therefore characterised by accounts of soldier kings or conquering prophets whose campaigns are set against an ancient and exotic backdrop' (20). We have one possible early modern performance record for *David and Bathsheba*, an undated entry in Henslowe's diary between 3 and 11 October for payment to workers for the construction of a gallows by which to hang Absalom by the hair (Foakes, 217). Although, as Connolly notes, this entry could refer to another play and does not, therefore, permit us indisputably to assign *David and Bathsheba* to the Admiral's Men, none the less it concurs generally with the play's fit with the Admiral's Men's repertorial strategies, 'which makes it possible to suggest that *David and Bethsabe* was written for the Admiral's Men, and that like the biblical plays of his contemporaries, Peele's play was destined for performance at the Rose, with Alleyn in the title role' (8). I am aware of only one modern stage performance of the play, William Poel's 1932 production, which is briefly described in Robert Speaight's *William Poel and the Elizabethan Revival* (266–8).

THE TEXT

If we assume that Peele is echoing Marlowe's *1 Tamburlaine* rather than the other way around in passages such as Absalom's declamation of his desire to 'glut his longing soul / With sole fruition of his father's crown' (11.139–40), then Peele wrote *David and Bathsheba* between 1587, when Marlowe's play was first performed, and 14 May 1594, when a 'booke called the booke of David and Bethsaba' was entered into the Stationers' Register along with *Friar Bacon*, *King Leir*, *John of Gaunt*, and *Robin Hood and Little John* (Greg, 261) As Blistein remarks, there is no external or internal evidence that would allow us to date the play with complete certainty more precisely than that (142–3). The five plays entered on 14 May were initially entered to Adam Islip, whose name was then cancelled out and replaced by Edward White (Greg, 261). Blistein suggests that 'The wardens or clerk who made the entry probably assumed that Islip was entering them for himself, and so indicated in the Register

until corrected later by Islip or White' but adds that 'no definite reason for the cancellation can be ascertained' (153). W.W. Greg speculates that the play might have been printed in 1594 (261), but no copy of a 1594 edition survives.

When the play was printed in 1599, only Islip's and not White's name appeared on the title page. Three passages from the play were reprinted in *England's Parnassus* (1600), a poetry anthology edited by Robert Allott. There are only three substantive variants between the play and the passages reproduced by Allott. They are recorded in this edition's collation notes. On 29 June 1624 the Stationers' Register records the transfer of 'Salomon and Bersheba' from the widow of Edward White (son of the Edward White to whom the play was initially entered [Blistein, 154–5]) to Edward Alde (Greg, 262). No early edition subsequent to the 1599 quarto is extant, however. Consequently, this edition takes the 1599 quarto as its copy text. Although Greg was aware of only twelve, the ESTC lists fourteen witnesses of the 1599 Q in libraries in North America and the United Kingdom. For this edition I have collated all fourteen, which are housed at the following institutions: the Bodleian Library; the British Library (2); the Folger Shakespeare Library; the Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas at Austin; Harvard University; Haverford College; the Huntington Library; Magdalene College, Cambridge; the National Library of Scotland; National Trust Collections, Petworth House; the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign; the Victoria and Albert Museum, Dyce Collection; Worcester College, Oxford (this copy begins at C1).

My collation discovered 23 stop-press variants, all of which are recorded in the collation notes. The play collates A2, B–H, I2. From B1v to G4v, Q's running title alternates regularly between '*Dauid and Bethsabe*' in the inner form and '*Dauid and Bersabe*' in the outer form. In H, the order is reversed, and I1r and I1v both have '*Dauid and Bersabe*' as their running title. There are three discernible spacing variants in the running titles amongst the fourteen quartos. In the Bodleian, University of Illinois, Harvard, and Magdalene College copies of Q, the C1v running title is '*Beth_sabe*'. In all but the Haverford College and Petworth House copies, the D1v running title is '*Bet_hsabe*'. In the Folger, University of Illinois, Harvard, National Library of Scotland, Worcester College, and Magdalene College copies, the H2v running title is '*Bet_hsabe*'. The running title of all copies (excluding the Worcester College copy) at B4v

is '*Bersahe*'. The next edition of the play after the 1599 edition is found in volume two of Thomas Hawkins' *The Origin of the English Drama* (1773). Along with Hawkins, the following nineteenth- and twentieth-century editions were consulted in the preparation of this edition and are referred to in the collation notes: Dyce 2 (1829), Dyce 3 (1861), Keltie (1873), Morley (1887), Bullen (1888), Manly (1897), Thorndike (1910), Greg (1912 [1913]), Blistein (1970), and Rabkin (1976).

The 1599 quarto contains some obvious textual problems, which Sampley summarises in five points ('Text', 669). First, in the scene of Tamar's rape (scene 3), Tamar's entrance is temporally perplexing, given that there seems to be insufficient time for her to have been commanded by David to attend her brother Ammon. Moreover, scene 3's opening stage directions list a character, Amnon's page, who 'appears without any business to perform' (669). Second, although in scene 4 Absalom proposes to host the sheep-shearing feast at which he will later kill Amnon, in scene 7 the feast is hosted by Amnon himself. Third, in scene 9 the Widow of Tekoa seems to speak of Absalom as banished, although at no point earlier in the play has David banished him. Fourth and fifth, G4v of the quarto contains a '5. Chorus' that seems to conclude the play, but the chorus (only the second in the play) is followed by a few lines spoken by an already-dead Absalom, the catchword 'Then', and, on H1r, the stage direction '*Trumpets sound* …', after which follow another two scenes. Sampley explains these textual anomalies as the results of a complex process of abridgement and revision in which the play began as 'a five-act play dealing with the love of David and Bethsabe and the tragedy of Absolon' (669), 'was considerably shortened for reasons connected with the staging of the play' (670), and then was expanded again when 'it was finally thought necessary to execute a revision which would fill out the play to a more desirable length' (670).

Later editors and critics such as Blistein (177–81), Ewbank ('House', 7), and Paul Werstine (246–8) have broadly concurred with Sampley's explanation that the quarto represents some sort of theatrical abridgement and revision of the play. As both Blistein and Ewbank contend, however, there are other ways of explaining the temporal anomalies of Tamar's unexpected entrance and the Widow of Tekoa's reference to banishment than textual corruption, such as Peele's desire to compress events to make a dramatic point. None the less, the difficulties surrounding the '5. Chorus' and the

immediately following lines by Absalom remain. While its misnumbering strongly suggests that the text has been abridged, it is not necessarily misplaced, and I retain it in my edition where it is in the quarto. The lines attributed to Absalom following the chorus seem to me to be clearly erroneous, the product perhaps of the compositor's failure to notice a cancelled passage in his manuscript copy or of a stray manuscript leaf from the unabridged version of the play, and in my edition I move them from the main text to the collation notes, accompanied by a full commentary note. Apart from these textual problems, the 1599 quarto is fairly straightforward.

Although it contains a prologue and two choruses, the 1599 quarto is undivided into acts or scenes. This edition follows Greg's 1912 [1913] facsimile edition's division of the play into 17 scenes. To indicate their editorial provenance, the scene divisions, along with additions to stage directions and speech prefixes, have been placed in square brackets in the text. Speech prefixes abbreviated in the quarto have been silently expanded in the text but collated. The quarto's spelling and punctuation have been silently modernised, but instances in which the modernisation required editorial selection among competing alternatives have been collated and explained in the commentary notes. Although, as Sampley demonstrates, the quarto's spellings of character and place names are closer to the spellings found in the Bishop's Bible than the Geneva Bible, the spellings are irregular and do not conform wholly to any version of the Bible to which Sampley compares the play ('Version', 80–1). 'Absalom', for example, is spelled both 'Absalon' and 'Absolon', while 'Bathsheba' is spelled 'Bethsabe' approximately two-thirds of the time and 'Bersabe' about one-third. 'Abishai' has four different variants in the quarto. The play's character and place names have therefore been modernised and regularised in accordance with their spelling in the New King James version of the Bible. The first instances of the modernisations have been recorded in the collation notes. In most cases the modernisation has entailed only minor alteration: 'Uriah' for 'Vrias', for example, or 'Tamar' for 'Thamar'. The most noticeable change is 'Hushai' for the quarto's 'Cusay' or 'Cusai' (The Bishops' Bible alternates between 'Hushai' and 'Chusi', while the Geneva Bible alternates between 'Hushai' and 'Cushi' (Sampley, 'Version', 80)). I have kept substantive emendations to a minimum (a total of 18), preferring to retain the quarto's reading when it made sense, even when the conjectural emendations of previous editors seemed to 'improve' the text.

CONCLUSION

The misplaced fragment and the various textual lacunae discussed in the previous section tantalise us with the glimpse of a fuller version of the play that would represent more clearly than the extant quarto Peele's artistic designs. None the less, even as it stands, *David and Bathsheba* is an aesthetically sophisticated and culturally complex play that challenges its audiences and readers to probe the political, theological, and sexual problems and paradoxes of its biblical subject matter. The play's representation of David as poet, prophet, and, foremost, penitent explores the paradoxical political implications of one of the central problems of the Protestant Reformation, God's grace. Disturbingly, David's strength as God's anointed is not undermined but reinforced by his sinfulness. David is not Tamburlaine, and is better off for that. The play further examines the sinister side of David's divine sovereignty in its representation of sexual violence against women. The play dramatises its chosen slice of David's reign as driven by sexual coercion and violence and their consequences, as a sequence of tragic sexual crimes that are, darkly, the divinely sanctified forms by which patriarchal sovereignty reproduces itself as unlimited. The play may ultimately subsume this 'Senecan' sexual violence in a salvific plan that culminates in Solomon's proclamation as David's heir, but it also gives the victims of sovereign sexual violence the opportunity to voice their traumatic experiences and protest against their victimisation. *David and Bathsheba* is only one of two surviving biblical dramas written for the Elizabethan professional stage and only one of thirteen or fourteen biblical dramas known to have been written for that stage. The play cannot be taken as representative of this lost body of plays, but its intellectual complexity and aesthetic quality demonstrate that Elizabethan playwrights could turn sacred as well as secular history into forceful, engaging contemporary drama.