

## ХУДОЖЕСТВЕННЫЙ ТЕКСТ НА ПЕРЕСЕЧЕНИИ КУЛЬТУР

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### BIBLICAL ALLUSIONS AND THEIR FUNCTIONS IN THE WORKS OF WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

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The study examines the functioning of biblical allusions or biblicisms as precedent units of biblical etymology in the works of William Shakespeare. Biblicisms are heterogeneous and include such groups as biblical names, phraseological units of biblical origin, biblical quotations and sayings, as well as allusions implicitly referring to the Bible, etc. Allusions connected to the Bible are an integral part of various types of classical and modern English texts. The use of biblical allusions in the text creates additional expressiveness and figurativeness and establishes a special contact with readers who have sufficient background knowledge and are able to 'trace back' the connection between the allusions used and their source. The works of the great English playwright are saturated with biblical references which have different functions. The purpose of the study is to identify multiple biblical references, namely allusions, in the texts of Shakespearean plays and chronicles, to analyze contexts containing biblicisms from the semantic and stylistic points of view, with regard to the primary sources of biblicisms and their original meanings. The material of the research is the works of W. Shakespeare. The research methods are the contextual method and the method of intertextual analysis. The object of the study is biblical allusions, the subject is their semantics and the specificity of their functioning in the literary pieces of W. Shakespeare. The results of the study show that in Shakespeare's plays the Bible acts as a precedent text, the regular use of references to which helps the author to encode information with the purpose to draw the audience's attention to various social misdemeanors, vices, and political crimes in a unique way, and helps the reader to fully perceive the author's ideas and messages.

**Key words:** Bible; biblicism; precedent text; biblical name; biblical allusion; Shakespeare.

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## Библейские аллюзии через призму шекспировского наследия

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Настоящее исследование освещает актуальную проблему функционирования библеизмов как прецедентных единиц библейской этимологии в произведениях У. Шекспира. Библеизмы неоднородны и включают такие группы, как библейские имена, фразеологические единицы, источником происхождения которых является библейский текст или сюжет, библейские цитаты и изречения, а также библейские аллюзии, неявным образом отсылающие к Библии и т. п. Библейские аллюзии являются неотъемлемой частью произведений различных видов классического и современного английского дискурса. Введение в текст библеизмов создает дополнительную выразительность и фигуральность, устанавливает особенный контакт с кругом читателей, обладающих фоновыми знаниями и способных отследить связь используемых аллюзий с их источником. Произведения великого английского драматурга насыщены библеизмами, которые выполняют разные функции. Цель исследования — выявить многочисленные библейские отсылки, а именно аллюзии, в текстах шекспировских пьес и хроник, проанализировать контексты, содержащие библеизмы, с семантической и стилистической точек зрения, с учетом анализа первоисточников библеизмов, и их первоначальные значения. Материалом исследования послужили некоторые произведения У. Шекспира. В качестве методов исследования выступают контекстологический метод и метод интертекстуального анализа. Объектом исследования выступают библейские аллюзии, предметом — их семантика и специфика функционирования в литературных произведениях У. Шекспира. Результаты исследования показывают, что в пьесах Шекспира Библия выступает в качестве прецедентного текста, регулярное использование ссылок на который помогает автору закодировать информацию, чтобы привлечь внимание аудитории к различным социальным проступкам и порокам, убийствам и политическим преступлениям, а читателю — в полной мере воспринять идеи и замысел великого автора.

**Ключевые слова:** Библия; библеизм; прецедентный текст; библейское имя; библейская аллюзия; Шекспир.

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### 1. Introduction

In a constantly changing and dynamically developing world, people can't help looking for a solid foundation, something true and eternal. Thus, for an increasing number of people, the faith of their ancestors with its everlasting moral values is becoming really significant. This is probably why there is a worldwide growing interest in the Christian Holy Scriptures. The Bible is not just a book but a whole collection of ancient wisdom, contained in texts written and composed by many people throughout many centuries. The Bible quotes over a dozen unknown works. Many of the works that were once part of the Bible have not

reached us, thus the sacred book is definitely worthy of special linguo-stylistic research (Fedulenkova 2016: 9).

William Shakespeare is rightfully considered to be an outstanding poet and playwright, not only in Great Britain, but throughout the world. It is generally accepted that his works are an encyclopedia of human relationships, a mirror in which people's true nature is reflected, a treasury of profound meanings, ideas and truths which masterfully represent the human essence in all its diversity. Reading Shakespearean plays and chronicles, we constantly come across multiple references and allusions to biblical texts, the distinctive characteristic of which is *intertextuality*, along with metaphorical richness, symbolism, and the diversity of the cultural and historical context (see also: [Kabanova 2016; Fedulenkova 2019a: 238]).

The *relevance* of this study is determined by the avid and increasing interest in Biblical studies around the world especially in terms of the *cognitive* approach with due attention to the *pragmatic* potential and functions of phraseological units (Fedulenkova 2019b, 2019c, 2020a: 117, 2021), as well as the growing attention to biblicisms as markers of biblical precedence (Golubeva 2013; Vajc 2013). Being a text of exceptional cultural significance, the Bible acts as a *megaprecedent* text and requires thorough scholarly attention. Biblical texts, unique in terms of their origin, existence, and impact on all spheres of culture, never lose their precedent value and live on in the minds of millions of people and a large number of cultures, which, in its turn leads to their constant *dynamic variation* (see also: [Fedulenkova 2020b: 83]). Phraseological units of biblical origin are characterized by mobility; they are able to easily adapt to various linguistic conditions and to develop new variants (lexical, grammatical, mixed, etc.) while obeying specific linguistic laws. Occasional transformations of biblical phraseological units are also quite frequent, which leads to significant semantic enrichment of vocabulary (Mendel'son 2002: 156; Naciscione 2010: 55–56; Fedulenkova 2020a). The Bible is acknowledged “to be the richest source of English idioms, followed by the works of Shakespeare. Most of the biblical expressions have been so assimilated into the English language that they are not always associated with the Bible” (Klyukina 2003: 2).

This study's *goal* is to substantiate the hypothesis that biblicisms, namely biblical allusions, in the works of William Shakespeare act as precedent units of biblical origin of special significance, and the ability to identify and understand them gives readers a deeper insight into the author's artistic intention.

## 2. Material and Methods

The *methods* used in the research are the contextual method (see also: [Amosova 1963: 76; Kunin 1971: 2–14; Komarova 1998: 564]) and the method

of intertextual analysis (see also: [Fedulenkova 2020a: 30]). The study analyzes various biblical allusions contained in seventy two extracts from the tragedy “Hamlet,” the comedy “Twelfth Night,” and the chronicles: “Richard II” and “Henry IV”.

### **3. Results and Discussions**

#### ***3.1. The Notion of “Biblical Allusion”***

Textual allusions carry hidden meanings that enable the author to characterize the subject of communication through the prism of a situation or event that was described earlier in a precedent text known to a wide range of people (Kibizova, Bakina 2020: 102).

I. R. Galperin interprets the concept of allusion as a reference to historical, literary, mythological, biblical, and everyday facts and notes that allusion, as a stylistic device, is not accompanied by an indication of its source (Galperin 1958: 176). In his view, structurally, an allusion is a word or a word-combination, or a phrase. According to V. P. Moskvina, a textual allusion is a fragmentary and imprecisely reproduced part of a text; it consists of a word or a series of one-word units that do not reflect the lexical and grammatical structure of the original text fragment (Moskvina 2014: 41). It is a complex, intertextually enriched sign which necessarily has certain associative support.

Moreover, it may involve both “reliance on the pre-text,” when the reader is referred to a previous fragment of the same text, and “reliance on a precedent text,” when there is a reference to another text, hypothetically familiar to the reader. In addition to their literal meaning, statements containing an allusion have a second plane of content, forcing the reader to turn to certain memories, sensations, and associations. The text, as it were, acquires a second dimension (Naumova 2011).

The specificity of the semantics of biblical allusive units is largely determined by the ambiguity and complexity of these units themselves, since they are supposed to refer us to the texts of Scripture, which means that in the secondary context of their use they will always retain some additional semantic components that they received from the original text. The retained connotations are enriched with additional contextual meanings in the recipient text (Kibizova, Bakina 2020: 104).

#### ***3.2. Shakespeare and the Bible***

Notwithstanding the fact that almost in every piece of his writing W. Shakespeare refers to biblical texts and ideas, one cannot deny that there is more to it than just blunt or partly implicit citations.

As V. P. Komarova points out, there is a very controversial relationship between Shakespeare and biblical texts. The comparison of Shakespeare’s texts

with those passages of biblical books in which commentators see allusions make us conclude that in many cases Shakespeare opposed the ideas of the Bible and displayed a different attitude to life. In particular, the few parallels between the judgments of Hamlet and the texts of Ecclesiastes or the Book of Job do not allow us to talk about the influence of biblical ideology on the playwright, but rather suggest the influence of the Renaissance culture and the numerous quotations from the works of ancient poets and philosophers cited in the plays (Komarova 1998). The linguist claims that, for the most part, “the allusions are introduced into the language of those heroes who believe in religious truths and in the power to influence the course of events with the help of the Bible. But in many cases the personages use the quotations from the Scripture as a kind of weapon in the political struggle” (Komarova 1998).

According to Peter Milward, Shakespeare’s plays “conceal an undercurrent of religious meaning which belongs to their deepest essence” (Milward 1973: 102). He “shows the universal relevance of the Bible both to the reality of human life ‘in this harsh world’ and to its ideal in the heart of God” (Milward 1987: 207). Steven Marx assumes that “a thorough familiarity with the Scriptures” is a prerequisite to understanding the Biblical references in the plays, and that the plays’ references to the Bible “illuminate fresh and surprising meanings in the biblical text” (Marx 2000: 13).

One more researcher, Dr. Naseeb Shaheen, claims that initially there were no biblical allusions in Shakespeare, though “he [Shakespeare] sought to demonstrate God’s providence towards England, and repeatedly points out that those who commit evil will sooner or later be punished... Inspired by Hall’s theme of divine retribution, Shakespeare adds biblical references that reflect that theme” (Shaheen 1999: 90).

Finally, Harold Fisch in his comparative study devoted to the problem of biblical presence in the works of “the three poets”: W. Shakespeare, J. Milton and W. Blake, asserts in the Preface to his study: “I shall be concerned primarily with the way my chosen authors incorporate biblical paradigms in their work. This will be taken not as an example of influence in the narrow sense but as a key to their poetic practice — a claim that will be more readily granted in reference to Milton and Blake than to Shakespeare. However, I will argue that Shakespeare draws on biblical sources to an extent not generally recognized” (Fisch 1999: vii).

We do not mean to reject or accept the opinions mentioned above blindly, without critical analysis. What matters here is that Shakespeare’s plays and chronicles abound in numerous explicit and implicit references to the Bible plots and texts, “The Tempest,” “King Lear,” “Measure for Measure,” “Henry VI,”

“Richard II,” and “The Merchant of Venice” being the most vivid and illustrative examples.

### **3.3. *Biblical Allusions in the Chronicle “Richard II”***

(1) In Act I, Scene 2 in response to the Duchess’ exclamation: “Where then, alas, may I complain myself?” John of Gaunt, the brother of the woman’s murdered husband, replies: “To God, the widow’s champion and defense”, which is associated with the content of the Gospel: “As he approached the town gate, a dead person was being carried out — the only son of his mother, and she was a widow. And a large crowd from the town was with her. When the Lord saw her, his heart went out to her and he said, “Don’t cry.” Then he went up and touched the bier they were carrying him on, and the bearers stood still. He said, “Young man, I say to you, get up!” The dead man sat up and began to talk, and Jesus gave him back to his mother” (Luke 7:12-15). Thus, Gaunt, who is unable to commit the act of retribution himself, tries to console his brother’s widow, reminding her of God as the protector of the widows. Obviously, in a broader sense, Shakespeare wants to make it clear: where a person is helpless, God can assist.

(2) In Act III, Scene 2, King Richard, outraged by his alleged betrayal by his three favorites, exclaims: “Three Judases, each one thrice worse than Judas!”, thereby emphasizing the highest degree of treachery of people on whose loyalty he had the right to rely?). It is well known that one of the twelve disciples of Christ betrayed him to the high priests and thereby condemned him to a martyr’s death on the cross. “Then one of the Twelve — the one called Judas Iscariot — went to the chief priests and asked, ‘What are you willing to give me if I deliver him over to you?’ So they counted out for him thirty pieces of silver. From then on Judas watched for an opportunity to hand him over” (Matthew 26:14-16). The biblical name Judas has become synonymous with despicable betrayal. To heighten the impression, Shakespeare stresses that each of the three alleged traitors is not just Judas, but “thrice worse than Judas.”

(3) The image of Judas and the twelve apostles is also mentioned in Act IV, Scene 1, in King Richard’s monologue: “The favors of these men: were they not mine? Did they not sometime cry, ‘all hail!’ to me? So Judas did to Christ: but he, in twelve, Found truth in all but one: I, in twelve thousand, none.”

(4) Act III, Scene 2 mentions dust in the mouth of the same King Richard: “Make dust our paper and with rainy eyes Write sorrow on the bosom of the earth.” The word “dust” is found more than once in the Bible. In this case, we can assume that Shakespeare is referring to Genesis 3:19: “By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return.” As Richard discusses his inevitable imminent death and that he “owns a pitiful pinch of clay that

serves as a shell for bones.” The mention of a pinch of clay evokes references to the prophecies of Isaiah: “Woe to those who quarrel with their Maker, those who are nothing but potsherds among the potsherds on the ground. Does the clay say to the potter, ‘What are you making?’ Does your work say, ‘The potter has no hands’?” (Isaiah 45:9) and “Yet you, Lord, are our Father. We are the clay, you are the potter; we are all the work of your hand” (Isaiah 64: 8) as well as Jeremiah 18:6: “He said, Can I not do with you, Israel, as this potter does?” declares the Lord. “Like clay in the hand of the potter, so are you in my hand, Israel.” In the face of death, Richard involuntarily turns to biblical stories, probably trying to find at least some consolation in them.

Furthermore, Shakespeare could not but refer to the notorious Pontius Pilate, the procurator of Judea, whose name, like the name of Judas, became a household name.

(5) In Act IV, Scene 1, King Richard laments: “Though some of you with Pilate wash your hands Showing an outward pity; yet you Pilates Have here deliver’d me to my sour cross, And water cannot wash away your sin”. The great playwright makes a reference to the famous Gospel scene in which the procurator, in order to please the crowd, sends Jesus to execution, although in his soul he understands that Christ is innocent. “When Pilate saw that he was getting nowhere, but that instead an uproar was starting, he took water and washed his hands in front of the crowd. ‘I am innocent of this man’s blood,’ he said. ‘It is your responsibility!’ All the people answered, ‘His blood is on us and on our children!’ Then he released Barabbas to them. But he had Jesus flogged, and handed him over to be crucified” (Matthew 27: 24-26).

(6) At the end of the play, in the last remark addressed to Exton, Bolingbroke says: “With Cain go wander through shades of night, And never show thy head by day nor light”. Here Shakespeare refers the reader to Genesis 4:12, the Lord’s words to Cain, guilty of fratricide: “When you work the ground, it will no longer yield its crops for you. You will be a restless wanderer on the earth”. The name Cain became a household name as a symbol of treachery, the absence of any moral principles.

#### ***3.4. Biblical Allusions in the Chronicle “Henry IV”***

One of the main characters of the chronicle Sir John Falstaff in his remarks often refers to biblical plots. Despite the fact that by nature Falstaff can be classified, rather, as a comic character, his statements often have a profound meaning. Shakespeare uses biblical stories in a non-religious context, hoping that the audience will be able to recognize the source of allusions.

(7) In Part I, Act I, Scene 2, Falstaff ironically tells Prince Harry that he is ready to receive the dress “from the shoulders of the executed.” If we turn to the scene of the crucifixion of Christ in the Gospel, we read: “When they had cruci-

fied him, they divided up his clothes by casting lots” (Matthew 27:35). It may be assumed that Falstaff wants to remind the prince of this Gospel passage and in a playful manner to convince the prince of the need be merciful. Indeed, in the preceding remarks Sir John encourages his friend to abolish the “barbaric custom of hanging” in England, once he accedes to the throne.

(8) In the same scene, again in an ironic manner, Prince Harry (this time he portrays the king, his father) tells Falstaff, who plays the role of the prince: “The complaints I hear of thee are grievous.” This remark of the prince evokes associations with the Book of Genesis: “Then the Lord said, “The outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is so great and their sin so grievous...” (Genesis 18:20) and “...because we are going to destroy this place. The outcry to the Lord against its people is so great that he has sent us to destroy it” (Genesis 19:13).

(9) In Part I, Act II, Scene 4, depicting the king, Falstaff says to the prince: “If then the tree may be known by the fruit, as the fruit by the tree, then, peremptorily I speak it, there is virtue in that Falstaff ...”. Saying this phrase, Sir John again refers the Gospel of Matthew 7:16-18: “By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thorn bushes, or figs from thistles? Likewise, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit.”

(10) In part I, Act III, Scene 3, Falstaff says to his servant Bardolph: “I never see thy face but I think upon hellfire and Dives that lived in purple, for there he is in his robes, burning, burning.” This guides us to the famous parable of the rich man and Lazarus in the Gospel of Luke 16:19-26. Lazarus is a beggar who waited for “crumbs falling from the rich man’s table,” while the rich man “dressed in purple and fine linen and feasted brilliantly every day.” When the beggar and the rich man died, the first went to heaven, and the second to hell.

(11) Shakespeare makes a reference to the same parable in Falstaff’s remark in Act IV, Scene 2: “... now my whole charge consists of ancients, corporals, lieutenants, gentlemen of companies, slaves as ragged as Lazarus in the painted cloth, where the glutton’s dogs licked his sores.” Interestingly, in the continuation of this remark there is another biblical allusion associated with the parable of the prodigal son: “...you would think that I had a hundred and fifty tattered prodigals lately come from swine-keeping, from eating draff and husks.” This parable is set out in Luke 15 and tells the story of the prodigal son, who, though ruined through his own stupidity, returns to his father and receives forgiveness. Falstaff uses both allusions to give a detailed and meaningful description of the recruits’ appearance.

(12) In part II, Act I, Scene 1, the Earl of Northumberland, the enemy of King Henry IV, upon learning of the death of his own son, exclaims:

*Keep the wild flood confined! let order die!*

*And let this world no longer be a stage  
To feed contention in a lingering act;  
But let one spirit of the first-born Cain  
Reign in all bosoms, that, each heart being set  
On bloody courses, the rude scene may end.*

For a better understanding of the grief-stricken father's feelings, Shakespeare refers the reader to Genesis 7:11-12: "In the six hundredth year of Noah's life, on the seventeenth day of the second month — on that day all the springs of the great deep burst forth, and the floodgates of the heavens were opened. And rain fell on the earth forty days and forty nights" and Genesis 4:8: "Now Cain said to his brother Abel, 'Let's go out to the field.' While they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him." According to V. P. Komarova, "the chronicle plays 'King Henry IV' and 'King Henry V' are almost free from biblical allusions; here political arguments prevail, and the leaders allude to 'time' as the power that justifies their actions. Even the archbishop in 'Henry V' recollects the Book of Numbers with the practical goal: to convince Henry V that he has 'rights' to the French crown, while the motive of the prelate is egotistical: the war must help to save the church property from the attacks of the parliament" (Komarova 1998). "The most interesting Biblical allusions occur in the language of sir John Falstaff in both parts of 'Henry IV.' His allusions are introduced to make a comical effect: the well-known sayings and precepts are paraphrased or changed so as to make the audience laugh or to attract attention to some painful facts of the English life at the time when the plays were staged" (Komarova 1998).

### ***3.5. Biblical Allusions in "Twelfth Night"***

(13) In Act I, Scene 5, the jester addressing Olivia says: "Anything that's mended is but patched: virtue that transgresses is but patched with sin; and sin that amends is but patched with virtue". It is probably appropriate here to recall the Gospel of Matthew 9:16: "No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment, for the patch will pull away from the garment, making the tear worse." This allusion can be interpreted as follows: until the internal problems are resolved, external benefits will not help in any way.

(14) In Act II, Scene 5, Sir Andrew, outraged by Malvolio's plans to marry Olivia and become an Earl, exclaims ironically: "Fie on him, Jezebel!" The reference to the Third Book of Kings 21:25 is most evident: "There was never anyone like Ahab, who sold himself to do evil in the eyes of the Lord, urged on by Jezebel his wife". According to the 21<sup>st</sup> chapter of the Third Book of Kings, Jezebel, the wife of Samaria's king Ahab, ordered to stone Naboth, who had refused to give Ahab his vineyard, "the inheritance of his fathers," even for silver

or for another vineyard. The biblical name Jezebel has become a household name for a vain, shameless person.

#### 4. Conclusion

The results of the study allow us to conclude that the works of W. Shakespeare contain frequent references to biblical plots and texts, without identification and analysis of which it is difficult or even impossible to achieve a complete understanding of the message of the plays. The analysis of the selected samples clearly demonstrates that the favorite biblicisms of W. Shakespeare are precedent biblical names (Judas, Pontius Pilate, Cain, Lazarus, Noah, etc.). In the tragedy “Hamlet,” references to the Bible, especially spoken by the Prince of Denmark himself, make the reader “plunge headlong” into the maelstrom of the protagonist’s suffering. In the comedy “Twelfth Night,” biblicisms are used in a special hyperbolized ironic manner (and Shakespeare’s irony definitely deserves most thorough and detailed research). Biblical allusions serve as markers of biblical precedence and appear to prove the idea of biblical omnipresence and significance. Biblicisms in the literary masterpieces of W. Shakespeare enhance their overall semantic complexity since they are interpreted and used by the author in a highly individual and unique manner.

Thus in Shakespeare’s plays that were the subject of this study the Bible acts as a key precedent text, and the author’s use of biblicisms makes it possible to convey implicit meanings to the audience and the reader as well as to make the perception of his plays more lively and emotionally compelling due to the presence of the vertical context.

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