

Accidental Shakespeare

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Abstracts

Maurizio Calbi, "(Un)accidental Shakespeare. The 'knot intricate' of Shakespeare's Afterlives"

How accidental is the presence of Shakespeare in Alfredo Peyretti's *Moana* (2009), an Italian film about porn star Moana Pozzi? Or the insertion of a speech by Hamlet, and a skull, in Davide Ferrario's *Tutta colpa di Giuda* (2008) (*Blame It on Judas*), an Italian "comedy with music" set in a high-security prison in Turin that casts a mix of professional and non-professional actors? How random is the use of *Othello* in "Caged," a 2001 episode of *CSI*?

The paper explores these samples of Shakespeare's afterlife, and suggests that they belong to what Douglas Lanier calls the "netherworld," the realm of the "almost but not quite," what may also be called the domain of specters that come back to haunt "straight" Shakespeare. It argues that the haphazard manner in which these samples incorporate "Shakespeare" is not clearly separable from that sustained attention to the source / hypotext that defines adaptation (Hutcheon), and that the "problem" of "accidental Shakespeare" is inextricably bound with what Margaret Kidnie calls the "problem of adaptation," the on-going cultural process whereby "Shakespeare" becomes "Shakespeare," a ("proper"). The paper thus maintains that "accidental Shakespeare" is a kind of margin that marks and traverses the "interior" and is thus not simply situated on the outside border of a clearly identifiable (Shakespearean) corpus. The samples of Shakespeare's afterlife that the paper examines prompt reconsiderations of a number of discourses that are not, in any simple way, mere prosthetic additions to this corpus: the tradition of "prison Shakespeare" (*Blame It on Judas*); the endless recycling of Shakespearean plots, a process whereby "chance" meets "necessity" (*Moana*); the appropriation of Shakespeare as mediatized "ex-appropriation" (*CSI* episode).

Jim Casey, "*Romeo x Juliet*: Accidental and Substantial Shakespeares"

In this essay, I'm interested in the theoretical boundaries of what we call "Shakespeare." Gonzo Studio's anime *Romeo x Juliet*, directed by Fumitoshi Oizaki, is a text at the very edges of the territory. At first glance, the title and the randomly ubiquitous Shakespearean names seem to be the only things that bind the series to the early modern text. Yet the anime abounds with quotations, allusions, visual references, and analogues – it even has a playwright named Willy. More than simply a postmodern pastiche, what Jameson sees as a "blank parody" of the earlier text, *Romeo x Juliet* embodies both the iterative process of translation and the multiple voices of a "Shakespeare" that has become increasingly hyperreal.

Brandon Christopher, "Paratextual Shakespearings: Making Comics into Shakespeare"

My paper looks at ways in which a range of comic books are “elevated” to Shakespearean status through various paratextual apparatuses. Focusing mostly on cover images, jacket blurbs, and forewords, the paper looks at two distinct groups of comic books: one the one hand, more-or-less direct adaptations of Shakespeare’s plays, and, on the other, comics whose publishers, editors, artists, and authors use paratextual references to Shakespeare in order to make a claim for the literary/cultural value of their texts.

Charles Conaway, “Accidental, Post-Apocalyptic Shakespeare”

Hugh Howey's recent science fiction trilogy, the *Silo Saga*, includes a play-within-the-text that can help us address the question of when and how "(not) Shakespeare" becomes "Shakespeare" and vice versa. Readers of the trilogy recognize, for example, that *The Tragic Historye of Romeus and Juliette* – Howey’s play-within-the-text – is not quite Shakespeare even as they recognize it or identify it as a text that, at the very least, must be some kind of adaptation of Shakespeare. Drawing on recent theories of adaptation, I argue that Accidental Shakespeare emerges when texts take on a dual nature: they can be identified as individual texts that are either "Shakespeare" or "(not) Shakespeare" at the same time that they participate in the formation of an aggregate that tends to be labeled "Shakespeare."

Melissa Croteau, “Surfing with Juliet: Refracting Typologies of Teen Girls”

In the summer of 2013, The Disney Channel aired a new offering in the teen musical genre banally entitled *Teen Beach Movie* (dir. Jeffrey Hornaday). Despite the high concept approach to this film’s development – integrating several popular genres to tell a clichéd, simplistic story – Disney was not confident enough in the success of this venture to release it in the theatres. Following the incredibly lucrative *High School Musical* model, the Disney Channel opted to hedge their bets and release it straight to their television outlet. It paid off enormously. *Teen Beach Movie* (TBM) has become a phenomenon amongst its target audience, six to fourteen year old children. Kids are redecorating their bedrooms in *Teen Beach Movie* paraphernalia, singing TBM karaoke, and generally begging their parents for all things TBM. It is a marketing coup. One reason for its overwhelming popularity seems to be its obvious emulation of other popular filmed musicals from earlier generations. The writers of TBM, Vince Marcello and Mark Landry, have appropriated various types of narrative, visual, and aural material from *West Side Story* (dir. Jerome Robbins & Robert Wise 1961), *Beach Party* (dir. William Asher 1963), *Beach Blanket Bingo* (dir. William Asher 1965), and *Grease* (dir. Randal Kleiser 1978), exploiting the elements of teen drama, conflict, and, particularly, romance, as Shakespeare did more than four hundred years ago with *The Tragedy of Romeo and Juliet*. Self-reflexivity and self-mockery rule in the über-meta *Teen Beach Movie*, and one of the most interesting aspects of this pervasive element is the young female protagonist Mack’s rejection of and revulsion to the roles and expectations of women in 1962. As the Juliet, Maria, Annette Funicello-character of this musical within the film, Mack is presented as a model for the twenty-first century, enlightened and empowered teen girl. She has agency, a sarcastic wit, and a propensity to question and challenge. Conversely, Mack is still a “Disney girl” – she gets her Prince Charming in the end rather than meeting her untimely demise beside him – and the movie is fraught with conflicting

messages. My paper will examine the ways in which Shakespeare's Juliet is lost and found, both purposely and accidentally, in this Disney confection called *Teen Beach Movie*, or what you will.

Kristin Denslow, "Hamlet's Ghost Meme: Accidental Shakespeare as Repetition Compulsion in *Gossip Girl* and *Arrested Development*"

In this essay, I consider two twenty-first century television series – *Gossip Girl* and *Arrested Development* – as examples of accidental Shakespeare. Both series embed a *Hamlet*-like narrative, but this narrative does not function like an allusion, an appropriation, a reference, a citation, or a quotation of Shakespeare. Rather, the Shakespearean content goes completely unacknowledged, which is especially notable given that both series do maintain other webs of intertextual and Shakespearean references. In this paper, I refer to this unacknowledged "adaptation" as a meme, a term that alternately connotes a unit of cultural transmission or an Internet artifact. Through these two television examples, I consider broadly how Shakespeare can move in popular culture, arguing that memetic principles of circulation, doubling, and repackaging become a form of repetition compulsion. The *Hamlet* narrative keeps coming back in popular culture but as part of an endlessly circular process of uptake (both conscious and unconscious), repetition, and mutation.

Kirk Hendershott-Kraetzer, "Romeo Unbound"

The character of Romeo, both bounded and bound by convention, strives against that restraint. Within *Romeo and Juliet*, he contends with Petrarchan conventions, with familial and religious expectations, with the ideology of the Capulet-Montague feud, with his own and his beloved's notions of love and devotion, even with his own textual ancestors. Subsequent to the Renaissance, assumptions about Romeo have similarly hemmed in the character, generally via understandings of Romeo as the romantic (or Romantic) hero, the ladies' man, or the lover-boy. However, late-twentieth and early twenty-first century television, appropriations of Romeo reveal ways in which culture is pushing against the conceptions that envelop this foundational character in our shared understanding of the male lover. This analysis of accidental encounters with representations of the character in popular culture reveals Romeo as a hapless, even helpless would-be lover; as physical and emotional "damaged goods"; as a monstrously self-centered boy-man; and as a malevolent sexual predator. These representations show us a Romeo striving to be something other than convention "allows" him to be.

Jennifer Holl, "*YouShakespeare*: New Directions in Shakespearean Celebrity"

In "Verses, Drop't in Mr. Garrick's Temple of Shakespeare," eighteenth-century poet Paul Whitehead imagines a conversation between the famed Shakespearean actor David Garrick and his prized statue, Roubiliac's *Shakespeare*. In the poem, Shakespeare, a "marble God" (9), offers his profuse thanks to the actor who rescued him from literary and theatrical oblivion, proclaiming, "But now I rise, I breathe, I live/ In You – my Representative!" (19-20). When a humble Garrick protests, Phoebus intervenes, provides laurel wreaths for both statue and actor, and declares, "Each matchless, each the Palm shall bear/ In Heav'n the Bard, on Earth the Play'r" (37-38).

Whitehead's poem not only figures Garrick as a new human architecture housing Shakespeare's spectral self, but carefully distinguishes Shakespeare-as-divine-spirit from Shakespeare-as-

human-incarnation. If the mythologized abstraction understood as the “Bard” resides in heaven, his accessible human form, “the Play’r,” walks the Earth, and this paper similarly probes the epistemological divide between Bard and Player in Shakespeare’s enduring legacy. Building on the work of contemporary celebrity studies, I will argue that Shakespeare has, since Garrick’s day, similarly inhabited a number of bodies over the centuries, and that these Shakespearean celebrities provide an earthly and accessible counterpart, or Player, to Shakespeare’s putative status as English national poet, or Bard. Shakespearean celebrity, I argue, is a dialogic relationship through which live actors embody an established Shakespearean ethos, while reciprocally re-familiarizing audiences with the estranged presence of Shakespeare in a living, breathing body. As the Shakespearean celebrity reels Shakespeare’s legacy in from abstraction and re-popularizes him from otherwise elitist heights, Shakespearean celebrities from Garrick to Branagh, through their high visibility, have also come to redefine Shakespeare for their respective eras.

After theorizing the Shakespearean celebrity, I will examine what I believe to be the current direction of Shakespearean celebrity in new media. New media, according to celebrity theorist P. David Marshall, is rapidly redefining notions of celebrity: in traditional structures of celebrity, he argues, audiences used celebrities as a means of asserting cultural concerns and negotiating values; new media allows audiences to offer themselves up to broadcast such concerns and values (636-37). Applying Marshall’s model to my study of Shakespearean celebrity, I will explore the means by which transmedial appropriation – whether through social media, video games, or apps – allows the public to continuously and rapidly redefine Shakespeare and to insert itself into the ever-evolving body of Shakespearean celebrity. If Shakespeare’s celebrity is sustained through its persistent reincarnation in the new, live bodies of Shakespearians, then today’s most influential Shakespearean may be, in a sense, *you*. *YouShakespeare*, an unauthorized Shakespearean narrative in a perpetual state of play, allows anyone to become, as Whitehead mused of Garrick, Shakespeare’s “Representative” – not only to re-imagine his texts or embody his characters, but to embody Shakespeare’s personal narrative, ethos, and legacy as well. Today’s Shakespeare tweets, friends, and blogs, maintaining his cultural relevance and celebrity through the new bodies and new media he inhabits.

Scott Hollifield, "James Cagney in *Dirty Rats*, *Dead for a Ducat*: Shakespearean Accidents, Commonplaces, and Echoes"

The possibilities of cinema were narrowed, in the early decades of commercial film production, by a set of audience expectations defined by early modern English theatre. This "Shakespearean presence," which might be described as a feeling of *déjà vécu*, squeezes the skull when that thing James Cagney said right before he plugged that guy rings inexplicably Stratfordian. In the process of positioning cinema as the ultimate, populist form of narrative delivery, golden-age filmmakers elevated the genre film – with a special emphasis on gangster melodrama (*Scarface*, *The Roaring Twenties*, *White Heat*) – to Shakespearean altitudes. Howard Hawks, Raoul Walsh, et al, entered, perhaps without pretense, a fortuitous discourse with early modern audience response. Many of these potential connections, strongly dependent on an attuned audience, can be expressed in terms of Shakespearean “commonplaces” and “echoes”; the “accidents” may be another story entirely. Curiously prominent in the filmography of James Cagney, these phenomena are closely associated with representations of death, as dealt by or visited upon Cagney’s indelible characters.

Natalie Loper, "Finding Shakespeare in Baz Luhrmann's *The Great Gatsby*"

This essay argues that Baz Luhrmann's *The Great Gatsby*, although an adaptation of a wholly different literary masterpiece, comes to be "Shakespeare" because it deliberately recalls scenes, images, and themes from Luhrmann's earlier adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet*. As an adaptation of Fitzgerald's novel, any connections to Shakespeare appear accidental, evocative but unnecessary to one's understanding of both the film and the novel. But anyone familiar with Luhrmann's earlier work cannot ignore the Shakespearean echoes, particularly in the way the film frames and imagines its star, Leonardo DiCaprio, who played Romeo in Luhrmann's *William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet* (1996). From Luhrmann's choice of DiCaprio to play Jay Gatsby to particular shots, added sequences, and set pieces, the film prompts audiences to consider an afterlife for Shakespeare's young lovers. It points out how the themes of life and death, love and loss, star-crossed love and social strife belong simultaneously to Shakespeare, to Fitzgerald, and to us.

Caitlin McHugh, "Thou hast it now": One-on-Ones and the Online Community of Punchdrunk's *Sleep No More*

Punchdrunk's *Sleep No More* is an excellent test case for the question of "When and how does (not) Shakespeare become Shakespeare"? British theater company Punchdrunk's successful immersive theater project is a combination of *Macbeth* and Hitchcock's *Vertigo* and *Rebecca*, although a loose one with a plot that cycles three times per performance. The performance is art installation meets dance meets video game, with audience members free to wander anywhere, touch anything, as long as they do not speak and keep on an anonymous *Eyes Wide Shut*-style mask. This is *Macbeth* with a lot of liberties and no dialogue, resulting in a production that many viewers argue is most certainly not Shakespeare, indicating that for these viewers, *SNM* lacks the essential qualities of Shakespeare. Using the theoretical framework of Richard Burt, Douglas Lanier, and Kate Rumbold, I examine *SNM* as a logical extension of the development of Shakespeare's cultural capital in contemporary society. Although current consensus indicates that the production is not essentially "Shakespeare," the production follows in the trends of Shakespearean film adaptations of the 1990s, giving audiences a chance for personal access to the works of Shakespeare and Hitchcock that moves beyond the text. The production not only gives audiences access to the Bard but also affords them creative participation in his works. The production is a culmination of the drive to provide the active participation, sans Shakespearean dialogue, that now defines the cultural value of Shakespeare. The epitome of this trend is the elusive one-on-one experience: the moment when a performer can choose to take an audience member to a private space and the audience becomes a character of sorts in the story. Although *SNM* is consistent with these trends in Shakespearean adaptation and appropriation, the one-on-one interactions illustrate that in order for this production to take on some essence of Shakespeare, viewers long for the Shakespearean text and an emotional connection that they feel only Shakespeare can provide.

Douglas McQueen-Thomson, "*Hamlet* as Accidental Shakespeare"

Hamlet is a play that abounds in accidents, from improbable encounters to mistaken intentions and unintended deaths. My argument is that these features are not extraneous or inessential, but are fundamental to the position offered by the play: that *Hamlet* is a play of accident. I want to suggest that *Hamlet* is a play that thematizes accident, or events without purposive cause.

The play does more than simply use strange occurrences as devices for plot development, but instead presents a consistent engagement with the problem of cause without intention, of the failure of providentialism, and the ineluctable prevalence of accident. I will develop this interpretation with close reference to the episode where Hamlet encounters the pirates.

Allison Machlis Meyer, "Accidental" Erasure: Relocating Shakespeare's Royal Women

This paper examines Philippa Gregory's representations of Elizabeth Woodville Grey in her Cousins' War novel series and *The White Queen* television adaptation of her books as an aggregate work constructed by its author and critics as "not Shakespeare." While established by reviews and interviews with Gregory as anti-Shakespearean in their approaches to both royal and aristocratic women of the Wars of the Roses and to the historical figure of Richard III, these texts nevertheless function as "accidental" Shakespeare, recalling much of Shakespeare's stage plays and Shakespeare's own appropriations of his source texts, such as Thomas More's *History of King Richard the Third*. I explore the relationships amongst these representations to consider how and why Gregory's revisionist historical novels relocate Shakespeare's royal women in opposition to her redemptive alternative history of the vilified Richard III. Attitudes toward contemporary historical fiction break romanticized pop culture representations of women away from Shakespeare in spite of the "accidental" appropriations of Shakespeare's history plays and Renaissance historiography visible in the Cousins' Wars series and its television adaptation.

Daniel Pollack-Pelzner, "The Accidental *Shrew*"

My paper draws on my work as scholar-in-residence with the Portland Shakespeare Project, running audience education programs for its repertory productions of *The Taming of the Shrew* and *The Tamer Tamed* last summer. Our Kate delivered an ironic final speech, complete with a wink to the audience, and although she was well-reviewed, a popular sense persisted that this interpretation departed from Shakespeare's presumed intention, updating a misogynist show to make it palatable today. Rather than make the case that Shakespeare allowed for an untamed Kate, I would like to explore what counts as evidence to determine the interpretive possibilities of this vexed Shakespearean script. How might aspects of *Shrew* that have been deemed accidental, and hence disposable or emendable, shape what we consider to be the play's essence? How have these textual and performance conditions been constructed as "not" Shakespeare in order to enable a particular version of Shakespeare's *Shrew* to emerge in the popular imagination? I will consider three cases of the accidental *Shrew* (a seemingly incomplete stage direction from the end of the play, a seventeenth-century response play by John Fletcher, and an ambiguous exchange about same-sex courtship) to show the difficulty of taming the play to a stable patriarchal or heteronormative essence.