

## **Shakespeare and the Novel**

Seminar Leader: Daniel Pollack-Pelzner (Linfield College)  
Shakespeare Association of America 2015

### **Ashes to Ashes, Dust to Dust**

Walter Cohen (University of Michigan)

Much of Shakespearean drama originates in prose fiction, it is usefully compared to prose fiction in its own time, and much of its impact in subsequent eras is on prose fiction. These claims are best substantiated by adopting not an English or even a Western European perspective, but a Eurasian and at times a global one. My focus will be on the first two of these three issues, with a brief look at the third in conclusion. Half of Shakespeare's plays are indebted to the novella tradition, which goes back to Boccaccio. Behind him are Arabic and Sanskrit versions of the frame-tale collection, rooted in ancient South Asian epic and oral narrative. A secondary influence, directly on Shakespeare and indirectly on him through the novella, is the novel of late Classical Antiquity. This literary background is central for the European novel, especially for Cervantes. Similarly, South Asian oral narrative, transmitted in this case by the Buddhist classics, plays an important role in the formation of East Asian drama and fiction alike. Because of the Greco-Roman legacy, we tend to think of drama in relation to epic. But here Western Europe is the outlier. In Early Modern Eurasia, drama characteristically is paired with prose fiction—which is to say that it is tied to modernization. Thereafter, Shakespeare is a consistent influence on prose fiction. One finds a heavy reliance on Shakespearean tragedy, in part to dignify the emergent genre or its appropriation by groups newly bidding for canonical status. The combination of Shakespeare and Cervantes in *Tristram Shandy*, moreover, though unimportant in subsequent English literature, provides the model for the most important alternative to realism in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries—in France, Germany, Russia, the U.S., Brazil, and perhaps the Netherlands and the Philippines as well.

### **Apostrophized Spirits: Elegy and Authorship in Sterne's *Sentimental Journey***

Shilo McGiff (Cornell University)

In this paper, I discuss some of the formal consequences of a pastoral mode in the narrative prose of Laurence Sterne. The argument is part of a larger project that addresses intersections of pastoral and authorship in not only Sterne's writing but also in the writing of William Shakespeare and Virginia Woolf. In so doing, the larger project traces a line from classical pastoral lyric to the novel, querying ways that the meta-theatrical drama of Shakespeare and the narrative reflexivity of Sterne and Woolf have been conditioned by each author's personal investment in pastoral literatures.

Here, I read Sterne's adoption of Yorick as authorial persona in *Sentimental Journey* as a pastoral practice that both participates in a lyric tradition of *prosopopoeia*, and also situates this adoption as part of a project of literary self-fashioning or authorial self-making native to pastoral poetry. In choosing Shakespeare's "Yorick" as a sign of this authorization, Sterne not only grafts himself onto Shakespeare's literary reputation but also explicitly recalls the site of poetic

mourning in *Hamlet* where Yorick makes his first appearance, thus engaging the structures of pastoral elegy latent in both Shakespeare's play and in Sterne's novel. In Yorick's impossible status as both twice-dead and alive-again, *Sentimental Journey* stages a reversal of Shakespeare's famous *memento mori*; instead of the inescapable terminus of death and the inconsequence of earthly life, Sterne's narrative instead foregrounds the particularity of individual experience in pursuit of sentimental commerce and produces a writer whose consolation may be found in an afterlife given by self-penned literary fame.

### **Shakespeare in pieces: the anthology and the eighteenth-century novel**

Kate Rumbold (University of Birmingham)

In the eighteenth-century novel, it can seem as if everybody talks Shakespeare. The playwright is the most widely quoted of all authors, invoked by all kinds of fictional character in letters, speeches and private conversations. This paper explores what it means, however, when even the most confident and flamboyant speech-makers among them, from Samuel Richardson's Robert Lovelace to Jane Austen's Henry Crawford, are revealed to get their Shakespeare second-hand, retailing lines that have already been excerpted for them in popular quotation books such as Bysse's *Art of English Poetry* (1702) and William Dodd's *Beauties of Shakespear* (1752). To analyse quotation as a function of character is something of a departure from existing criticism, which has tended instead to debate the extent of the novelists' own dependence on, or independence of, these intermediary literary sources, rather than to appreciate their critical and creative engagement with the fragmentary ways in which Shakespeare was then circulating in popular culture. What is the full extent of the relationship between the anthology and the eighteenth-century novel? How far do their selections from Shakespeare overlap? What different kinds of 'Shakespeare' -- from a stock of poetic 'beauties' to the moral advisor of multiple fictional characters -- do the anthology and the novel respectively construct, even through similar extracts? And crucially, in what ways do the anthology and the novel *collaborate* in the construction of Shakespeare's cultural authority, and their own, with lasting effect?

### **'I do not pledge myself for the authenticity of this anecdote':**

#### **Shakespeare and the Composition of *The Sketch-Book of Geoffrey Crayon***

Adam Kitzes (University of North Dakota)

Throughout his *Sketch-Book of Geoffrey Crayon*, Washington Irving made frequent use of William Shakespeare as a figure in order to engage with numerous questions regarding literary composition and history. Irving's particular interest in Shakespeare is significantly more complex than his public and critical reception has acknowledged. Publication records of the nineteenth century suggest that readers gave prominence to his "Stratford upon Avon," as they elevated Irving to the status of exemplary literary tourist. But over the course of several essays, Irving uses Shakespeare to illustrate the notion of literary history as a series of crucial problems regarding the very readability of a text. In corresponding manner, the design of the *Sketch-Book*, with its episodic and discontinuous approach to narrative development, represents a sustained

reevaluation of more contemporary literary traditions, which had used Shakespeare as the model for their own respective approaches.

### **Forgetting the Capulets:**

#### **Naming Conventions and Recapitulations of *Romeo and Juliet* in Popular Culture**

Bob Beshere (South University/High Point Campus)

Juliet's famous inquiry to the night sky at the opening of Act 2 reveals much more than an excited, adolescent girl's infatuation. It also expresses specific concern for an epic feud, the repercussions of which have tarnished two good families' names in a noble Italian city. It does not take much imaginative power to pretend she is speaking to us, the audience. She asks us to remember them without their surnames, just as she begs Romeo to forget "Montague" and "Capulet." Unfortunately, the audience learns that this play has very little room for the love and kinship that Juliet and her beloved wish to share. What follows is a "two hours' traffic" of mishearing, misunderstanding, and misnaming.

This model of two lovers coming so close to eternal bliss has been retold, remodeled, and repackaged innumerable times in popular culture. Many of these retellings unabashedly borrow Shakespeare's model of this story (noting that Shakespeare himself borrowed the basic narrative himself from earlier tales): Person from Group A wants to be with Person from Group B but cannot because Group A and Group B are diametrically opposed to one another. "Person" and "Group" vary wildly (even using vampires and werewolves as the respective groups), but the model stands as one associated with good storytelling. We're used to it. And we love it.

This paper will address these recapitulations of the Romeo and Juliet narrative in modern popular culture, namely young adult literature. Furthermore, it will examine the degree to which these retellings of the story include *naming* and *nomenclature* as both vital solutions to and problems for the couple(s)'s situation(s). Ultimately, do these novels have the guts to end the narrative as Shakespeare did? With the fated pair not only dying but *also not getting to say good-bye*? Romeo dies from the poison *before* Juliet wakes up. This is a feature of the play often ignored even in staged versions. This paper will address these questions and more to see just how close modern, young adult novels get to Shakespeare's own version.

### **Immortalizing Juliet, Demonizing Romeo: The Novels of Stacey Jay**

Jennifer Flaherty (Georgia College and State University)

My seminar paper is part of a larger project that explores recent novels that target teenage girls with Shakespeare appropriations, giving young adult readers an inside look into the behaviors and motivations of characters such as Ophelia and Juliet. Stacey Jay's *Juliet Immortal* and its sequel, *Romeo Redeemed*, transform Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* into a paranormal romance. In Jay's version of the story, both Romeo and Juliet are offered immortality after their tragic deaths if they join an eternal battle between the forces of light and darkness. They become enemies, with Juliet working with the forces of light to save the lives of soulmates while Romeo works for the forces of darkness to persuade soulmates to kill themselves or each other.

Jay's novels appeal to the target audience of teenage girls, while simultaneously encouraging them to look beyond their preconceived notions about the text. By liberating the character of Juliet from her Shakespearean play and giving her a literary (and literal) afterlife, Jay attempts to de-romanticize Romeo and Juliet's star-crossed love and its tragic consequences, unraveling the legacy of the play as the greatest love story ever told. Like other young adult novelizations of Shakespeare, these books address critical problems of girlhood by establishing connections between Shakespeare's female characters and the coming-of-age issues that dominate contemporary teen fiction.

**'I live dead that live to tell it now':**

**Shakespeare, Novel(ty), and the Zombie in Isaac Marion's *Warm Bodies***

Johnathan H. Pope (Memorial University of Newfoundland/Grenfell Campus)

In his 2011 novel *Warm Bodies*, Isaac Marion adapts *Romeo and Juliet* as a love story set many years after a zombie apocalypse has engulfed the world. A zombie, known only as R, falls in love with a human survivor, Julie. R's love affects significant change within him, fuelling his transformation from a zombie back into a human, a transformation that is fully realized at the conclusion of the narrative. I argue that Marion's non-canonical approach to the zombie functions as a meditation and commentary on adaptation and the status of the author in that process. Unlike the traditional mindless zombie, Marion's zombies are thinking, empathetic creatures trapped within an inarticulate, fleshy cage whose compulsions must be obeyed or else the zombie will die. In this sense, zombification and adaptation become analogous processes, ensuring the author's – in this case, Shakespeare's – survival and contemporary urgency but keeping him trapped in a prison over which he exerts little or no control. However, by applying this approach to an unconventional and 'happy ending' version of *Romeo and Juliet*, the novel posits an optimistic potential for adaptation during which the author can be revived, an optimism embodied by R as an analogue for both Romeo and Shakespeare.

**Shakespearean Fiction as Biographical Supplement**

Ken Jacobsen (Memorial University of Newfoundland/Grenfell Campus)

Despite the objections of purists, there is increasing scholarly recognition of the validity of both fictionalized biography (sometimes disparagingly called 'faction') and 'biofiction' as forms of life-writing. One potentially useful way to approach the nuanced relationship between biography and biofiction is the notion of the supplement, defined in a double sense by Derrida as a "surplus, a plenitude enriching another plenitude, the fullest *measure* of presence," but also as "[c]ompensatory" ... and vicarious, ... an adjunct, a subaltern instance which takes (the) place" (*Of Grammatology* 144-145). All biographers, whether they acknowledge it or not, supplement hard biographical 'fact' with fictional technique, while all writers of biofiction supplement fictional narrative with biographical data. As a whole, Shakespearean biofiction may be viewed as supplemental to biography in a double sense. On the one hand, it inevitably depends on academic biography for its content, presenting itself as a benign attempt to bring the biographical subject 'to life,' completing the biographer's work through gestures of complementarity. On the other

hand, biofiction functions as a critique of biographical scholarship, providing what biography cannot by filling in lacunae and supplying concrete details and definitive ‘answers’ in a manner forbidden to biographers, thus exposing biography’s limitations. Two recent novels about Shakespeare amply illustrate this tension, though they adopt contrasting narrative strategies: Robert Winder’s *The Final Act of Mr. Shakespeare* (2010) and Jude Morgan’s *The Secret Life of William Shakespeare* (2012). Winder’s novel fills in the alleged gap of Shakespeare’s dramatic output in 1613, supplying the full text of a ‘lost play’, “The True and Tragical History of Henry VII,” written to counteract the Tudor propaganda of his earlier history plays, as well as its abortive production history. In contrast, Morgan’s novel narrates the inner life of William and Anne Shakespeare, and Ben Jonson, offering its readers an alternative perspective on ‘received’ biographical data rather than a catalogue of lost or suppressed incidents and texts.