



Introduction

Creative Critical Shakespeares

Rob Conkie and Scott Maisano

Here is a beginning of *Shakespeare and Creative Criticism*:

The range of creative responses to Shakespeare has expanded recently to include critical writing that is evocative, affective, and performative. This seminar invites papers—on any Shakespeare-related topic—that integrate creative and critical modes of writing. The aim is to examine how creative modes of writing might facilitate new or different types of critical engagement with Shakespeare. What kinds of critical insights are made possible only or especially via creative strategies? And, indeed, how do critical perspectives impel creative (re) engagement with Shakespeare?

I (Rob) say *a* beginning because there are multiple origin stories to this overall story. To begin (I hesitate) with, the abstract (above) for the seminar I convened at the 2014 Shakespeare Association of America conference in St Louis, went through several drafts. The Trustees, perhaps quite sensibly, didn't quite trust that there were enough scholars out there quite as out there as I was. They wanted me to run a seminar which included critical accounts of creative

Notes for this section begin on page 19.

work and not necessarily the integrated/both kinds of approaches I was hoping to solicit. After considerable back and forth they relented and the seminar papers responding to the call above perhaps both confirmed and dispelled the Trustees' initial uncertainty. Some contributors wrote fine critical essays about creative responses to Shakespeare (they are not included here). Some planned very interesting creative critical pieces but were thwarted by the creative practice – through failure to obtain theatre performance rights and through the non-running of a creative writing graduate class – they were depending upon not, at last, materialising (also not included). But some answered the call I made in ways that still delight and intrigue me (more on them below).

One of those seminarians was me (Scott) and I eventually contributed what I called a 'fragment from a fictional future Arden edition.' But it took some time to get from my initial impulse to that final idea. I'd long been mulling over Elizabeth King's account of how the sixteenth-century Court Clock Master to the Holy Roman Emperor engraved his astronomical clock with an inscription reading: 'QVI. SIM. SCIES. SI. PAR. OPVS. FACERE. CONABERIS.' (or in King's translation 'You will know who I am if you try and make this')¹ and wondering how that challenge might apply to our scholarly attempts to understand and appreciate Shakespeare. For Rob's seminar, I first proposed getting to know Shakespeare by 'writing Shakespeare' (as distinct from 'writing *about* Shakespeare') and making bold to produce one or two scenes that he 'could have' – which is not to say 'would have' or 'should have' – written. I started writing my first scene about a middle-aged nurse *cum* nun in an early modern hospital *cum* monastery. Quickly, I realized that I knew precious little about nurses or hospitals in Shakespeare's time. I wondered whether Shakespeare himself knew any more than I did. When did the word 'nurse' become associated with today's modern medical profession? Consulting the *Oxford English Dictionary*, I was a bit surprised (and a bit sceptical) to find Shakespeare credited with the first use of 'nurse' in this sense. What about the word 'hospital'? How often – and in what contexts – did Shakespeare use it? That was when I realized that Shakespeare concluded *Love's Labour's Lost* with Berowne agreeing to 'jest a twelvemonth in an hospital.' Here was something Shakespeare *could have* written: *Enter Nurse*, the long-lost sequel to *Love's Labour's Lost* and, as it turned out, the porny but poignant prequel to *Romeo and Juliet*.

Following Rob's lead, I proposed my own seminar, 'Shakespearean Scene-Writing,' for SAA 2015, which met with universal euphoria from that year's Trustees, with one caveat: I was advised 'this should probably be a workshop because the things produced are not standard scholarly product.' Here's a description of the workshop – newly imprinted and enlarged to almost as much again as it was, according to the true and perfect coppie – as it appeared in the June 2014 Bulletin:

Are there limits – and alternatives – to what criticism and commentary can teach us about Shakespeare? What if knowing *why* Shakespeare made use of adaptations, allusions, asides, backstory, characters, costume, cued parts, dancing, dialogue, disguise, duels, dumbshows, eavesdropping, ekphrasis, entrances and exits, flora and fauna, foreshadowing, ghosts, hendiadyses, insults, irony, letters & messengers, midline switches, music, noise, pacing, parody, plays-within-plays, plots, props, prose, proverbs, short lines, silence (or implied pauses), songs, time schemes, even lacunae and cruces as he did depended on learning *how* (or at least trying) to do it ourselves? Drawing on humanist methods of *imitatio* and early modern 'maker's knowledge traditions,' this workshop will require participants to create new 'Shakespearean' scenes with period-specific diction, grammar, and iambic pentameter. Finally since Shakespeare wrote in collaboration with other playwrights, participants should feel free either to write alone or to form groups of two or more 'hands.' Responses may include scholarly notes, readings, performances.

What I got in response to this call for papers were indeed 'not standard scholarly product,' but instead an embarrassment of riches, the most creative set of abstracts I had seen in my dozen years of attending the SAA.

This was creative writing informed by literary criticism – *literary creaticism*? – and the possibilities got me very excited. I doubted that any members of the workshop would be interested in writing more than a scene or two – after all, we all had 'real work' to do – but I decided to share with them my ultimate fantasy: I imagined having a team of twelve scholars (and/or playwrights) agree to write three plays each – a comedy, a history, and a tragedy – over the course of the next several years so that we would have 36 new plays, a new Folio, to be published in 2023 to mark the 400th anniversary of the First Folio. Imagine that: Shakespeare scholarship producing a monumental tome that is not of an age but for all time...

So Scott, now that our Special Issue, *Creative Critical Shakespeare* is being tweaked and republished as *Shakespeare and Creative Criticism*, I figure we need to flesh out this Introduction somewhat. How about a conversation in which we reflect on some of what we have learned since that publication and on how the fantasies are playing out? I'm interested, for example, in what you have learned through the process of writing *Enter Nurse...* going back to the clock inscription – 'You will know who I am if you try and make this' – I am struck (no pun intended) by a few thoughts. One, there is a warning that the attempt will prove fiendishly difficult, perhaps impossible. But two, it's the attempt at making and not necessarily its successful completion, that will lead to understanding. Some questions for you, then, in no particular order: what have you learned about Shakespeare (that you might not have been able to learn via traditional modes of scholarship) through the process of attempting to imitate him? What have you learned about creative labour? How fiendishly difficult has it been and how do you judge your success thus far?

NOSOPONUS: Rob, I like what you've done here. The conversation, I mean. But as long as we're having a conversation could we frame it as a dialogue? A fiction? Like this: you will note I've adopted a persona as well as a speech prefix. For some odd reason, I've lately been reading from Erasmus's *Ciceronianus* (1528), in which Bulephorus, a fictional spokesperson for Erasmus himself, engages in conversation with Nosoponus, a pedant who, after seven years vainly spent trying to master the style of Cicero, has physically wasted away, his complexion gone sallow. He has contracted the disease of Ciceronianism. Bulephorus, taking pity on this scholar whose studies have taken such a toll on him, intends to heal his old friend by pretending to have the same disease, that is, an overzealous reverence for – and a corresponding compulsion to imitate – the writings of Cicero. Then in a Socratic tour de force, Bulephorus peppers poor Nosoponus with questions that encourage the latter to divulge how for seven whole years he has read nothing but Cicero, read and reread to the point of memorizing every word Cicero wrote, compiled those words in a two-volume alphabetical lexicon, in which the entry for each word spans several pages (because Nosoponus diligently records where it occurred in a given work, and whether it appears at the beginning, middle, or end of a sentence), hung portraits of Cicero all around his residence, worn a pendant of Cicero about his neck, forgone a

wife, children, friends, civic commitments, and anything else that might intrude on his cherished communion with the Latin god of eloquence. Only then does Bulephorus point out that, of course, Cicero did none of these things. Cicero had a life. He wrote about the world as it existed, using words which were current, in his own time. Anyone fool enough to imitate the style of Cicero (or, I might add, Shakespeare) centuries after that style – and the world that gave rise to it – has crumbled to oblivion will find they have imitated a finished product but, in doing so, have neglected the vital, rapid, unconscious, and inimitable processes of living, loving, and thinking that make inventive and imaginative writing possible, and desirable, in the first place. It took me a while but I *think* I've heeded that lesson. For a long time, I'd try Nosoponus-like to write even my roughest of rough drafts in Elizabethan English and iambic pentameter. Eventually I realized that not only does that result in very slow composition but also in a relatively lifeless imitation: the verse often lacked ellipsis and surprise (*viz.* a certain comic flight and errancy). It was lyric to the point of lacking action. Admittedly, of what appears in this book, which is what appeared in the journal a couple of years ago, one could say, as Dover Wilson said of *The Murder of Gonzago* in Hamlet, 'It is not a play; it is not even a scene; it is a piece of a scene [or in my case pieces of scenes], terminated... at the very moment when the only action which occurs in it is about to take place.'²

More recently, I've started writing earlier in the mornings, when I am barely conscious, and in 'plain-everyday-unvarnished English.' In the classes I teach, I'm constantly asking my students to give me their best approximation of what a Shakespearean character says in this kind of language [1. Sorry to interrupt, mate, but I feel like Salanio waiting for his 'my bond' cue in *The Merchant of Venice* 3.3.4–19;³ I don't want to interrupt so I'm just going to insert these internal notes that will, from now on, appear at the end of your oration. Carry on]. Now, for my play, I'm just doing the reverse. I'm getting an abundance of half-thoughts, nascent ideas, and instinctive language on paper first and only then taking the time to experiment until I find the nearest Shakespearean approximation. There's action now and scenes. Soon there will be a whole play – and for me that's exciting, even if no one cares to read or stage it [2].

What I've learned about creative labour (can we call that 'play'?) is that it makes one feel alive. And based on how alive I've felt every hour spent working on this play – and on the fact that I've spent more

hours working on it than I care to imagine, let alone admit – I'd call it the greatest success I've ever known. We wrote a bit in the Introduction to the special issue, which is now going to follow this bit, about how important pleasure is to creative critical work; equally important, perhaps, is pain. That is, I think what Renaissance rhetoricians called 'energia' and what William Hazlitt dubbed 'gusto' in any kind of writing comes from the stuff that gets you out of bed in the morning and the stuff that keeps you awake at night. There's an element of the personal, the private, the unconscious and the subjective in writing that leaps off the page and captures our attention. It may not be explicit – more likely, it is implicit, folded into the writing until it's barely noticeable, even to the author – but it is there nonetheless. The approach Nosoponus takes to imitation in Erasmus's *Ciceronianus* (he effectively amputates his personal life and sees any peculiarities from his private thoughts as distractions from or intrusions upon an objective ideal of Ciceronian style) precludes this vital element from entering into and animating his imitations. Some approaches to Shakespeare criticism have sought (in vain) to eliminate it too.

Indeed, what I find interesting about your request to 'judge [my] success,' especially in light of how our title has been tweaked, from *Creative Critical Shakespeare* to *Shakespeare and Creative Criticism*, is the reminder that historically 'criticism' has not been aligned with creativity but, instead, with judgement. Exactly 100 years ago, in 1919, T.S. Eliot began his essay 'Hamlet and His Problems' with a warning about 'that most dangerous type of critic: the critic with a mind which is naturally of the creative order, but which through some weakness in creative power exercises itself in criticism instead.' Eliot warns of 'Goethe, who made of Hamlet a Werther' and 'Coleridge, who made of Hamlet a Coleridge.'⁴ What makes their creative criticism 'dangerous' is twofold: first, they remake Shakespeare's character in their own image; second, the writing they produce persuades readers to see the character that way too. Now, obviously, what makes Shakespeare's characters unique is that he writes them in such a way as to invite, if not demand, readers, actors, directors, and, yes, critics to inhabit them. Stephen Greenblatt writes about 'the excision of motive' – that is, how Shakespeare does not explain or make explicit why, for example, Hamlet has to 'put an antic disposition on' – which leaves audiences to speculate, guess, imagine and infer their own motives.⁵ But I digress: the point is that Eliot, in his role as critic, 'judges' *Hamlet*. 'Qua work of art,' Eliot writes, 'the work of art

cannot be interpreted; there is nothing to interpret; we can only criticize it according to standards, in comparison to other works of art.' In his criticism of *Hamlet*, Eliot pulls no punches: 'there are unexplained scenes – the Polonius-Laertes and the Polonius-Reynaldo scenes – for which there is little excuse... So far from being Shakespeare's masterpiece, the play is most certainly an artistic failure.'⁶ Unlike Goethe and Coleridge before him, Eliot refuses to fill in the gaps of Hamlet's psyche; nor will he exercise his own imagination in an attempt to explain – make sense of – the play's unexplained scenes. The hardest thing to imitate in Shakespeare, I've found, is precisely this ability to leave room for readers, actors, and audience members to become collaborators in the fiction. Some readers, like T.S. Eliot, dismiss this ability as mere inscrutability; others, like Keats, celebrate it as Shakespeare's 'negative capability.'⁷

Now, having divorced creativity from slavish imitation – and aligned myself with humanists, like Erasmus, and Romantics, like Keats – let me say a few words in favour of imitation at its most slavish: transcription. I have made a habit of writing a thousand words a day but there are days when I'm stuck and cannot seem to get any of my own words onto the page. On those days, I transcribe scenes from Shakespeare. Typing every single word, including speech prefixes and stage directions, of a scene not only gives one the sense of creating Shakespeare effortlessly, without ever blotting a line [3], but also slows each scene down [4], allowing one to notice things that might have been overlooked in even the closest of close readings. For example, this morning I was transcribing Act 2, Scene 1 of *Troilus and Cressida* which begins with Ajax apparently trying to get his servant Thersites' attention. But what is Thersites doing in the meantime?

AJAX

Thersites.

THERSITES

Agamemnon—how if he had boils, full, all over, generally?

AJAX

Thersites.

THERSITES

And those boils did run? Say so, did not the General run then?

Were not that a botchy core?

AJAX

Dog.

THERSITES

Then there would come some matter from him. I see none now.

At this point Ajax, having failed to snap Thersites from his reverie, resorts to striking him. Websites created to help students make sense of what is happening in Shakespeare's plays prove pretty unhelpful in this case. According to Sparknotes, 'Ajax summons his slave, Thersites, and orders him to find out the nature of the proclamation that has just been posted.'⁸ This makes it sound as though Ajax entered first and then called for Thersites who entered in answer to his master's summons. Clearly, that's not the case. Shmoop, as usual, offers a better summary than Sparknotes: 'Ajax yells at his slave Thersites, who ignores him and talks smack about what it would be like if Agamemnon had a bunch of nasty, oozing boils and skin ulcers.'⁹ This answers the question: Thersites does talk smack about Agamemnon. But why? And more importantly, to whom? Agamemnon is not present; Ajax is not listening; that leaves only Thersites himself and perhaps an imagined audience [5]. Thersites, moreover, is rapt, completely immersed in the jokes he makes about Agamemnon, to the point that he does not notice Ajax. Thersites here is not unlike Hamlet, who, in his most famous soliloquy, fails to see (or pretends to fail to see), until the end, that Ophelia is onstage. But Hamlet was either weighing the pros and cons of suicide or else performing suicidal ideation for two more onstage (though concealed) characters, Claudius and Polonius; either of these activities would seem more intense and important than Thersites' roasting of Agamemnon. Unless, of course, Thersites is rehearsing material, going over potential jokes, sifting ideas and playing with phrasing, in anticipation of a future performance. We know from Ulysses that Patroclus 'pageants' and parodies both Agamemnon and Nestor for the private entertainment of Achilles (but how does Ulysses know this? Has he been in attendance at a performance? He never says). Perhaps Thersites is working on a bit. Jerry Seinfeld in an interview with *The New York Times* says 'comedy writing is something you don't see people doing; it's a secretive thing,' adding that he takes anywhere from two days to two years working on a single bit. Not only does Seinfeld consider each word in a joke but, as he puts it, 'you'll shave letters off of words, you'll count syllables, you know, to get it just – it's more like songwriting.' Of the punchline to a bit, Seinfeld explains: 'that [line] took a long time. I know it sounds like nothing.'¹⁰ Thersites, like Seinfeld (or like Shakespeare), is *absolutely* working on a bit. Indeed, a few lines later, Thersites insults Ajax by saying 'I think thy horse will sooner con an oration than thou learn

a prayer without a book.' Who better to make this otherwise odd, if not inexplicable, insult than someone who has just been working on his own oration of sorts, a standup routine, and conning his lines, that is, committing them to memory, before being interrupted by a 'beef-witted lord' oblivious to how difficult comedy writing can be?

Sorry. That was a long example [7]. And, for a dialogue, I'm not giving you much chance to speak [8]. Perhaps readers have begun to wonder what your character is doing during my interminable monologue. But I can see what you've done, Rob, and am choosing to ignore it [9]. That Thersites labours in advance over quips that in performance probably look improvised reminds me of transcribing a couple of Shakespeare's own one-liners. While typing Hamlet's final soliloquy, well the final soliloquy in Q2 (it gets cut from the Folio), I paused at Hamlet's asking himself 'Why yet I live to say "This thing's to do;" / Sith [Since] I have cause and will and strength and means / To do't.' As you might have guessed, the line that got me wondering is the one with three 'ands,' an excess of conjunctions that Greek rhetoricians called *polysyndeton*. Does Shakespeare not know about commas? Of course he does. Just a few lines later, Hamlet describes Fortinbras and his soldiers as 'Exposing what is mortal and unsure / To all that fortune, death and danger dare.' So what keeps Hamlet (or Shakespeare) from using a couple of commas – e.g. 'Since I have cause, will, strength, and means to do't' – to achieve a satisfyingly end-stopped, albeit metrically irregular, line? The answer comes proleptically in the preceding sentence, which thus far I've only quoted the tail end of:

...Now, whether it be
 Bestial oblivion, or some craven scruple
 Of thinking too precisely on the event,
 A thought which, quarter'd, hath but one part wisdom
 And ever three parts coward, I do not know
 Why yet I live to say 'This thing's to do;'

Hamlet wonders if his delay is due to not thinking enough about his revenge, a kind of forgetfulness about his father, which is what he accuses his mother of in Act 1 ('...a beast, that wants discourse of reason, / Would have mourn'd longer'), or if, to the contrary, he is 'thinking too precisely' on his revenge, in a way that leads to each thought being 'quarter'd,' as in 'drawn and quartered,' and broken down into its constituent parts. What the use of *polysyndeton* in that puzzling line does – beyond maintaining an iambic rhythm and not

coming to a firm conclusion or full-stop till the next line, where it creates an awkward caesura or hesitation – is to *show* us Hamlet dividing his thought into quarters: ‘cause and will and strength and means.’ Most people are not going to catch this irony in performance; most readers are not going to make the connection even if they study this speech in isolation; nor can Hamlet be aware of it. Like Seinfeld, Shakespeare had to ‘shave letters off of words [and] count syllables’ to get that line just right: it must have taken a long time even though in the end it sounds like nothing (again, the Folio omits it).

The other example of a one-liner that comes to mind when I think of Thersites laboring in advance over his seemingly spontaneous quips is King Lear’s perfectly iambic, albeit with feminine ending, pentameter line: ‘I am a man more sinn’d against than sinning.’ I recently saw Ian McKellen as Lear in the National Theatre Live broadcast and, although I was completely immersed in the fiction, when he spoke this line I thought to myself, ‘What an amazing stand-alone line. I wonder if it emerged organically as part of this speech or if Shakespeare had it and finally found a place to use it.’ In other words, I couldn’t help but think to myself that Shakespeare while writing, especially in blank verse, must have had moments, away from the page, when a line of blank verse would come to him and, not knowing what to do with it but not wanting to forget it, he would jot it down. That line, in particular, feels as though it could be spoken by any number of characters (men or women in disguise as men) in this play or a number of others. One great thing about having a free-floating, detachable line of blank verse is that it enables the writer to experiment: if Shakespeare always intended the line to be Lear’s, he might have played around with where (which speech? at what point in the drama? spoken to whom?) to place it. Or, if the line came to him without a character or situation firmly attached, then he might have experimented with a variety of characters, situations, and even plays: seeing what would happen to the line itself and to the character speaking it as a result. I guess what I’m saying is that an individual line of blank verse, in this case one that is end-stopped, implies a speaker and a scenario. You might hold onto the line until a scene demands it or you might build a speech, a speaker, and eventually an entire scene around it. As it turns out, most modern editions of *King Lear*, following the Folio, split what I keep referring to as a singular and perfect pentameter line across

two lines, the second of which forms the first half of a shared line with Kent. Seeing that, I was dumbfounded and thought maybe I'd only heard the line as a discrete unit when in fact it was always just the natural conclusion to that speech. Curious, I went and looked at the Quarto editions on the British Library's website: there, as I suspected, the line was neither split nor shared but intact and complete unto itself, the culmination of a speech that is every bit as coherent, if not as cogent, without it.

But as you can see I'm still talking about lines, lines, lines. What is missing from everything I've said thus far is theatre, the stage itself. Shakespeare knew the actors who would play his characters and speak his lines, knew them intimately; he wrote with them in mind. His characters, I am certain, are conceived from first to last with particular bodies, voices, faces, and mannerisms in mind. This is an essential – probably the essential – element of Shakespeare's style and of his own original practices, which brings me to 'Othello, Original Practices: A Photographic Essay.' You focus on roughness as an antidote to 'orthodox practices of Shakespearean production which enshrine polish, precision, and psychological nuance.' And roughness is another indispensable quality of Shakespeare's style. Your essay also references an Ian McKellen performance, in Trevor Nunn's 1989 RSC *Othello*, where, as you note, McKellen attends to the accident of dropping a bunch of matches on stage by picking them up *in character* as Iago. This points up an obvious oversight in my own thinking above: even if we allow for Thersites as a sort of standup comedian working on his shtick with all the obsessiveness of Jerry Seinfeld, Shakespeare knew he would not be performing or giving life to his own lines. Again, I think it helped that he knew the actors who would be portraying his characters almost as if they were extensions of himself but, even so, once a play had made it to the stage Shakespeare would have found himself in your position: a helpless bystander witnessing the inevitable 'cock-ups' and yet thinking all the while 'This falls out better than I could devise.' I must say your written account of the performance bristles with what must be the same energy that was in the room that night. Each time I read it, I'm a little anxious and on edge. There is also the added thrill of *ekphrasis*, capturing the sights, sounds, smells, and sensations of live theatre not only in words but in photos. There is one moment in the essay, however, where, for me, as a reader, one photo goes off script, as it were, and seems not to perform its role as written: I'm thinking

thinking of Illustration 9.10. The essay tells us ‘Othello, with one especially marked smudge right on his nose, looked like a clown,’ adding ‘The audience laughed a lot.’ I think it’s the expression on Tom Considine’s face at the moment the photo was taken – or it may be something as simple as a loss of digital resolution in the printing of the photo – but the photo makes me wince. I do see a clown but it reminds me of Emil Jannings at the end of *The Blue Angel* (1930): abject, pathetic, and humiliated. I’m wondering ‘is it just me?’ Or can you, unhearing the laughter of that night, look at the photo and see it this way too? [10] I’m also wondering whether you’ve done more with original practices – and/or with photographic essays – since the journal’s publication [11]. If so, what else have you learned about either or both in the interim? Oh and one more thing: what I love about the roughness of your original practices performance is that it perfectly combines the creative and the critical. As you explain, leaving inconsistencies of tone in place not only approximates an early modern experience but serves to ‘critique’ the smooth as silk productions audiences have come to expect and to hold up as standards. That kind of critique can then lead to the creation of new standards, new expectations, or, better yet, no expectations, which is tremendously exciting. And long overdue.

Well played, sir, well played. You have taken the ball and run with it, right out of the stadium, and then kicked it into the trees. Don’t worry, I have fetched it back with these notes.

[1] I was first prompted to interrupt on the notion of paraphrasing, of you asking your students to give [you] their best approximation of what a Shakespearean character says in plain unvarnished English. Lucy Bailey, director of multiple productions at Shakespeare’s Globe and the Royal Shakespeare Company, does ‘a lot of paraphrasing as an exercise in rehearsal’¹¹ so I figure if it’s good enough for the RSC I shouldn’t begrudge my students the occasional use, and critical creation, of parallel editions (the use of which you return to).

[2] I have promised you to stage the finished play.

[3] I wonder if this exercise would offer a different quality if you handwrote those transcriptions, especially as you refer to not blotting a line. When I write with my LAMY Joy™ I feel like I

understand Hélène Cixous's notion that 'It is in the contact with the sheet of paper that sentences emerge.'¹²

- [4] Writes Harry Berger Jr. of slowing a scene down through 'imaginary audition': 'Decelerated microanalysis thus enlarges and emblematically fixes features not discernible in the normal rhythm of communication.'¹³ I think this is what you are doing.
- [5] An imagined audience? But there is an audience. You make me reach for Bridget Escolme's *Talking to the Audience: Shakespeare, performance, self*. Her chapter on *Troilus and Cressida* is entitled 'Bits and Bitterness'. And she has much to say on Thersites:

There is no sense in which he has to 'come out of character' to talk to us; he appears not to know which is the world of the fiction, which the world of the play... he can get carried away with this duality, forgetting there is a plot to get on with in his desire to make us laugh. Thersites has this meta-theatrical job in *Troilus and Cressida*.¹⁴

None of this invalidates your argument, of course. I just think it means that Thersites perhaps refines – spoiler alert – his comic routine in conjunction with his actual auditors.

- [7] That was a great example.
- [8] It's ok, I've found this way to chip in.
- [9] I'm choosing to subvert you deliberately ignoring me. I've been reading (and writing) about collaborative writing. In one 17-author article I read, one particular seventeenth of the authorship suggests that 'friendship as a basis for working together recovers writing from the ambit of work, from conventions, from the obligation of a certain type of outcome, from the critical self-consciousness that informs the attitude that one gives to a good performance, to a career.'¹⁵ You find it very difficult, I think, to suspend 'critical self-consciousness', but I love the way your writing has obliged an outcome I couldn't have foreseen (and there's more of that below). And, our friendship, and others formed with contributors here, has been perhaps the most valuable part of the project.
- [10] Yes. I can absolutely see/read the photograph like that.
- [11] And Yes. I have done more with illustrated essays (and originalish and other practices).

Glad you asked (we didn't plan this).

In 2017 I directed *King Lear* with students in the middle of winter in an outdoors, promenade production. An essay on that production has just come out in a special issue of *Shakespeare Bulletin* on Eco-Shakespeare in Performance and I'm sending off a brief film for Katie Brocaw's eco-Shakespeare panel discussion at the 2019 Shakespeare Theatre Association (STA) conference in Prague. You've also prompted me to re-visit my 2014 production of *Bartholomew Fair*, also outdoors, and beautifully photographed. But in 2016 I directed *The Merry Wives of Windsor* with trained actors, and Bernard Caleo, with whom I collaborated on 'Graphic Shakespeare', sketched during the rehearsals. You think Tom Considine looks abject, pathetic, and humiliated as Othello? He does, but look at these Falstaff drawings.

I call this series, and there are lots more (for another publication), Falstaff Down Under. He's an Australian Falstaff, of course, and the earliest evidence we have for a production of Shakespeare in Australia is a playbill from 1800 for *Henry IV, Part 1*.¹⁶ This first image is of down under the costume, with the fat suit on display, but I think you can already see, in the downward glance, the melancholy that exists down under this particular Falstaff. The next one is more metaphorical. Falstaff is falling down under the Thames – sans buckbasket – but the waters towards which he plummets are more like hellish flames.

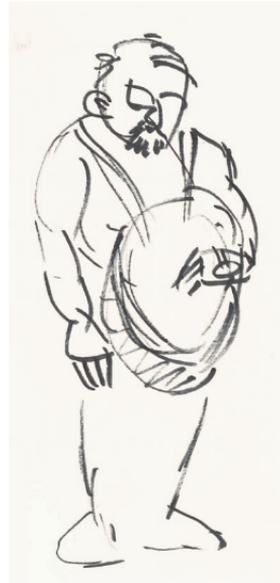


Illustration 0.1:
Falstaff's fat suit.
© Bernard Caleo.



Illustration 0.2: An alacrity in sinking. © Bernard Caleo.

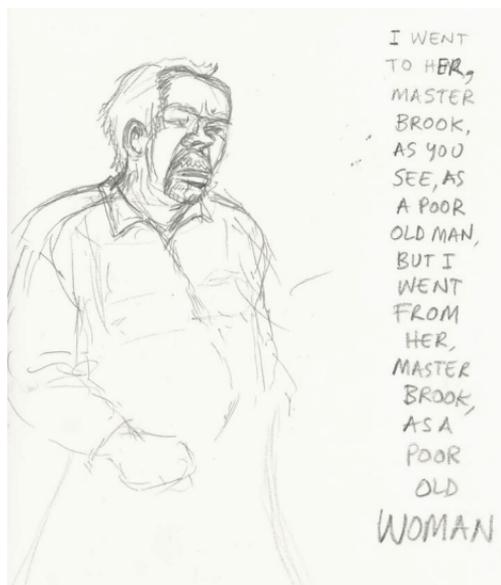


Illustration 0.3: A poor old woman.

© Bernard Caleo.

He's gruff, explosive and thrilling to watch.¹⁷ We were lucky, I think, that Philippa Kelly saw the production in an early run and offered me the note that Falstaff should bounce up like a rubber ball from his every trouncing. The beauty of a fine actor embodying Shakespeare, their form of creative criticism, is that they can balance and play with the abject and the explosive almost simultaneously. What beauty, too, and equally subtle creative criticism, Bernard's images offer: of the play; of the character; of acting; of what is down under (Falstaff, drawn and quartered).

In what ways, then, are the Shakespeare-inspired creative essays, stories and plays contained in this volume also critical? And what kinds of critique do they offer? Another way of approaching these questions is to imagine alternative titles for this collection. Almost all of the contributions here might, for example, be gathered under the more general heading of 'Shakespeare and Adaptation'. All of the contributions consider, with varying degrees of depth or 'fidelity', a Shakespearean source and adapt it into a new form. Like Djanet Sears's *Harlem Duet* and Paula Vogel's *Desdemona: A Play About a Handkerchief*, both included in Daniel Fischlin and Mark Fortier's *Adaptations of Shakespeare*,¹⁸ the subheading of which

But what about this last Willy Loman image? From down under the disguise of the Mad Woman of Brainford and the retributive blows administered by Ford's cricket bat, Falstaff returns as if suffering PTSD. And yet, this comment was typical of the reviews of the production: 'Considine is a barrelling and bright-eyed force of nature. He plays the deluded knight as a rutting stag with a baggie of blue pills in his shirt pocket.

is a *critical anthology of plays from the seventeenth century to the present* (emphasis added), and both of which offer trenchant creative critiques of *Othello* and its afterlives, adaptations here offer similar ripostes to cultural constructions of identity propped up by Shakespeare's dated universalism. Jessica McCall and Kavita Mudan Finn, for example, who co-author an introduction to their respective fanfic pieces, aim their critical creative sights at normative representations of mainly sexuality and gender, but also of dis/ability and race.

'Shakespeare and Fanfiction' is another viable alternative title for this book. Not just these prose pieces just mentioned, set respectively in an American high school and in a CSI-like New York City, but also in the four dramatic contributions to the volume. With a fervour equal to that early fanfic author, Maurice Morgann, but with perhaps greater self-reflexivity, each of these play fragments draws much closer, assuming their hitherto separation, the worlds of fanfiction and academia. Peter Holland writes of these converging worlds:

Fan studies are often concerned to distinguish between the fan and the academic. But Henry Jenkins, a principal figure in the study of fans and of convergence culture, describes himself as an 'Aca-fan', 'a hybrid creature which is part fan and part academic', and sees his own writing ... as an attempt to bridge the two ... If the distinguishing features of fandom include attending conventions and accumulating souvenir materials, often, in the high-brow fan, materials that are offered as ironic commentary on the subject, then almost all Shakespeare scholars must be fans as well as academics, with the strict proviso that ... we do not dress up as characters in our beloved works.¹⁹

Beloved characters are dressed up in and through the dramatic fanfiction offered here, the creation of which generates its own souvenir material, lost and re-discovered fragments from an alternative Shakespearean universe.

A special critique these fanfic plays make is of the academy itself, of the seriousness with which it conducts, monitors and regulates itself, and particularly in terms of the demands of publication. Both Scott Maisano (this is Rob writing) and David Nicol take very funny and well-aimed sling shots at the Shakespearean editing Goliath: their pieces do not just re-create (and re-critique) Shakespearean drama, they also offer editorial, Arden 3-like, notes, and often to

hilarious effect. Indeed, the former's *Enter Nurse, or Love's Labour's Won*, contains a glossarial explication of its dramatis personae almost as long as the dramatic verse that follows it, and the latter's *A Tragedy of the Plantation of Virginia* (1623) is prefaced by an Eco-like introduction to its elusive textual status and the inclusion, in the marginalia, of disapproving and corrective notes from the Master of the Revels. These writings, and those by Mary Baine Campbell and Dan Moss, are funny. They are, we hope, a pleasure to read, even as they were a pleasure to write: and this writing-pleasure, we think, offers its own critique of academic endeavour, in particular, of publishing.

In the first (closest example to a conventional) chapter in this volume, 'Responses to Responses to Shakespeare's Sonnets: More Sonnets', Matthew Zarnowiecki describes his encounter with *The Sonnets: Translating and Rewriting Shakespeare*, 154 separate (broadly-defined) poetic replies to Shakespeare's *Sonnets* thus: 'the effect, in terms of my own reading activity, is double-booked'. Further, the effect of the double-booked effect, of having both books open and going back and forth between them, is that 'They both go both ways: each one deepens the other'. The contributions to this volume repeatedly offer the pleasures and rewards of double-booking: 'Pickled Red Herring' made me (Rob) wide-eyed with admiration for the economy of its (and Shakespeare's) plotting and structure and for its commentary on *Richard III*, its various histories – 1480s, 1590s, 2010s – and on the processes of literary adaptation. And the other submissions herein invite the reader into immersive, creative critical, and double-booked engagement with new Shakespearean worlds: ancient Egypt; Jacobean London; Greek myth mashed with fairy tale; and perhaps that most dangerous and foreign of all worlds, junior high.

In Mary Baine Campbell's *Echo and Narcissus*, Little Red, like the pair(s?) of lover(s?) she comments on, is at once 'a child "on the brink of adulthood"' and an archetype predating any proper author. Her interrogative 'Bow-wow' echoes Echo's ' – Ow-ow', with a reverb distortion effect that reminds us (as Echo does time and again) how easily semantics can slip off to reveal bare sound. In Dan Moss's *The Fair Maid*, 'The Persons of the Play' are nearly all notorious figures who bring their own 'instant backstory' to the drama. One can hardly wait to see what Shakespeare would do with Herodotus, Solon, Hermes Trismegistus, Callimachus, and Nefertiti. Will they

fulfil or subvert an audience's expectations? The notes included in David Nicol's *A Tragedy of the Plantation of Virginia*, like Will Summers' running commentary throughout *Summer's Last Will and Testament*, serve to (1) anticipate and forestall some of the audiences' or readers' questions and/or objections; (2) supply a refreshingly modern counterpoint to the early modern rhetorical fireworks; (3) meet the audience halfway between the fictional and real worlds; and (4) compete for attention with the play they alternately elucidate and obfuscate. These faux-Shakespearean dramas play games with history, with time-travel and anachronism, and so the last contribution, Rob Conkie's '*Othello*, Original Practices: a photo-essay', corresponds with Henry Jackson and with the 1610 Oxford production of *Othello* he describes.

We do not wish to suggest that here is the beginning of Shakespeare and Creative Criticism – it has multiple origin stories, too. We follow in the footsteps of series like *Shakespeare Now!*, we seek creative collisions and try to tell tales from Shakespeare like Graham Holderness,²⁰ and we aim to write performatively,²¹ with passion and with purpose. We continue the work in volume 25.3 of *Critical Survey*, which was intent on 'dismantling barriers ... between intellectual enquiry and imaginative recreation'²² and we look forward to future work in this playful field of Shakespeare and Creative Criticism.

Rob Conkie is Senior Lecturer in Theatre at La Trobe University. His teaching and research integrates practical and theoretical approaches to Shakespeare in performance. He is the author of *Writing Performative Shakespeares: New Forms for Performance Criticism* (Cambridge University Press, 2016), *The Globe Theatre Project: Shakespeare and Authenticity* (Edwin Mellen, 2006), and numerous journal articles and book chapters. He has twice (2013, 2016) been appointed Associate Investigator of the Australian Research Council Centre of Excellence for the History of Emotions, for which he has produced theatre productions and workshops and related symposia. He has directed about a third of the Shakespeare canon for the stage.

Scott Maisano is Associate Professor of English Literature at the University of Massachusetts Boston. His work on Shakespeare has been featured in *Lapham's Quarterly*, *Smithsonian Magazine*, *Scientific American*, *The Telegraph*, *Ideas with Paul Kennedy* (CBC Radio), and *The Science Show* (Australian Broadcasting Company). His publications include 'Shakespeare's Revolution: The Tempest as Scientific Romance,' about Prospero and particle physics in *The Tempest: A Critical Guide* (Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare); 'Now,' about Einsteinian spacetime in *The Winter's Tale, for Early Modern Theatricality* (Oxford University Press); and 'Rise of the Poet of the Apes,' about intelligent apes and monkeys in plays from the beginning to the end of Shakespeare's career, for *Shakespeare Studies*. He is coeditor of *Renaissance Posthumanism* (Fordham University Press) and is currently completing a new Shakespearean comedy entitled *Enter Nurse, or Love's Labour's Won*.

Notes

1. Elizabeth King, 'Perpetual Devotion: A Sixteenth-Century Machine That Prays,' in *Genesis Redux: Essays in the History and Philosophy of Artificial Life*, ed. Jessica Riskin (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 274.
2. John Dover Wilson, *What Happens in Hamlet, 1935*, Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press, 2009, 145.
3. Simon Palfrey and Tiffany Stern, *Shakespeare in Parts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 200–204.
4. T. S. Eliot, 'Hamlet and His Problems,' Bartleby.com, <https://www.bartleby.com/200/sw9.html>, Accessed December 17, 2018.
5. Stephen Greenblatt, 'The Death of Hamnet and the Making of *Hamlet*,' *The New York Review of Books*, October 21, 2004, <https://www.nybooks.com/articles/2004/10/21/the-death-of-hamnet-and-the-making-of-hamlet/>
6. Eliot, 'Hamlet and His Problems.'
7. John Keats, *Complete Poems and Selected Letters*, ed. Edward Hirsch (New York: The Modern Library, 2001), 492.
8. SparkNotes Editors. 'SparkNote on *Troilus and Cressida*.' SparkNotes.com. SparkNotes LLC. n.d.. Web. 17 Dec. 2018.
9. Shmoop Editorial Team. '*Troilus and Cressida* Act 2, Scene 1 Summary.' *Shmoop*. Shmoop University, Inc., 11 Nov. 2008. Web. 17 Dec. 2018.
10. Jerry Seinfeld, 'Jerry Seinfeld Interview: How to Write a Joke,' *The New York Times*, YouTube, December 20, 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=itWxXyCfW5s>.
11. Abigail Rokison-Woodall, 'Interviews with theatre practitioners about texts for performance', *Shakespeare Bulletin* 34.1 (2016), 47–68 (60).

12. Cited in Verena Andermatt Conley, 'making Sense from the Singular and Collective Touches', *SubStance*, 40.3 (2011), 79–88 (80). Conley goes on to write that 'Cixous claims to draw the sentences from her unconscious' (p. 80), another notion that resonates closely with those you have expressed.
13. Harry Berger, Jr., *Imaginary Audition: Shakespeare on Stage and Page* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 148.
14. Bridget Escolme, *Talking to the Audience: Shakespeare, performance, self* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006), p. 39.
15. Petar Jandrić, et al, 'Collective Writing: An Inquiry into Praxis', *Knowledge Cultures* 5.1 (2017), 85–109 (93).
16. John Golder and Richard Madelaine, "'To dote thus on such luggage": Appropriating Shakespeare in Australia', *O Brave New World: Two Centuries of Shakespeare on the Australian Stage* (Strawberry Hills: Currency Press, 2001), 1–16 (14).
17. Chris Boyd, 'Considine's Falstaff ensures a jolly knight', *The Australian*, 25 April 2016, Arts, 12.
18. Daniel Fischlin and Mark Fortier (eds), *Adaptations of Shakespeare: A critical anthology of plays from the seventeenth century to the present* (London: Routledge, 2000).
19. Peter Holland, 'Spinach and Tobacco: Making Shakespearian Unoriginals', *Shakespeare Survey* 68 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 197–209 (206).
20. Graham Holderness, *Tales from Shakespeare: Creative Collisions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).
21. Rob Conkie, *Writing Performative Shakespeares: New Forms for Performance Criticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016).
22. Graham Holderness, 'Introduction', *Critical Survey* 25.3 (2013), 1–3 (3).