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Inventing Shakespeare, 1998-2008: A Consideration of Recent Fiction and  
Picture Books in Which Shakespeare the Man is a Character

A Thesis Presented

by

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Abstract of the Thesis

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Shakespearean scholars have been frustrated by the relative lack of indisputable information regarding the private life and personality of William Shakespeare for centuries. Partly as a result of it, contemporary scholars such as Gary Taylor (*Reinventing Shakespeare: A Cultural History, from the Restoration to the Present* [1989]) have argued that everything written about Shakespeare's works and every performance of one of his plays is a creature of its own day, revealing more about the era in which it was produced than it does about the historical playwright and his writings. With these facts in mind, I review twenty-seven of the thirty-five fiction titles published or republished from 1998 to 2008 in which Shakespeare the man is a character. By comparing these works and the Shakespeares they contain to each other, by listing and tabulating the fictional Shakespeares' predominant characteristics, and by drawing on the insights of scholars and of the works' authors, I attempt to address the following questions:

1. How has Shakespeare the man been depicted in current fiction?
2. Do the Shakespeares in fiction and picture books for young adults and children resemble those in works for adults? If not, how do they differ?
3. What, if anything, identifies the Shakespeares of recent fiction as products of contemporary culture?

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## List of Abbreviations Used in the Tables

### Table 1:

- Over = **Overall** impression of this Shakespeare's character. Is he (generally speaking) a positive character or a negative one; a "good" man or a "bad"; a man the author wants readers to like or dislike (i.e., +/-)? This category condenses such attributes as "friendly," "enthusiastic," and "cheerful" into a "+"; and "self-absorbed," "tending to approve revenge," and "grumpy/irritable" into a "-." Values in parentheses are qualified in some way—i.e., a score of "+ (-)" in this column indicates that the Shakespeare in question, though generally a positive character, is not without flaws. Where a qualified rating resulted from a specific trait or behavior (e.g., adultery; neglect of family), I have noted the behavior directly beneath the rating.
- Ext = **Extraordinary**, i.e., a genius or at least an extremely talented man. Can also indicate an "outsider" or a man unlike the men around him.
- Ord = **Ordinary**, i.e., a man afflicted with the same troubles and flaws as other men. Often in an oppositional relationship to "Enigmatic" and "Extraordinary." (i.e., The Shakespeare who is markedly like other men in terms of his problems is rarely also seen as a genius in these books.)
- Risk = **Risk**, i.e., a man placed in a risky or dangerous situation in the story
- Enig = **Enigmatic**, i.e., a man whose behavior is difficult for others to understand
- Negl = **Neglectful**, i.e., a man seen as neglectful of his wife and children as a consequence of his life away from them and immersion in his work
- Kind = **Kindly**, i.e., a notably kind man. Can also mean a notably fair-minded man
- Cou = **Courageous/Cowardly**, (i.e., +/-, with "+" indicating courage and "-" lack of it). Values in parentheses in this category indicate a mitigating factor. (For example, a score of "- (+)" indicates that, though this Shakespeare is generally not at all brave, he has nevertheless shown courage under certain circumstances in the story.)
- Wk = **Work**, i.e., an overworked man, or one under pressure to produce work
- Ad = **Adulterer**, i.e., a man who has had or may have had extramarital sexual relationships with women
- Hom = **Homosexual**, i.e., a man who has had or may have had a homosexual relationship or relationships

## List of Abbreviations Used in the Tables (contd.)

Bi = **Bisexual**, i.e., a man who has had or may have had a bisexual relationship or relationships

Ma = **Marriage**, i.e., an unhappily married man or one with marriage problems

### Table 2:

Hum = **Humor**, i.e., a man with a marked sense of humor

Intel = **Intelligence**, i.e., an intelligent man (separate from his being a “genius” or talented)

Intuit = **Intuition**, i.e., a man with a great deal of intuition about other people and even (sometimes) animals

Hwrk = **Hardworking**, i.e., a diligent worker (different from being “overworked”)

Cons = **Conservative**, i.e., a man who accepts the cultural dictates of his time (who does not concern himself with (for example) the injustice of women being barred from playing or the brutality of the Bear Garden)

L F = **Loving Father**, i.e., a man whose behavior demonstrates love for his children

Grief = **Grief-stricken**, i.e., a man grieving for his dead son

Guilt = **Guilt-ridden**, i.e., a man suffering guilt over either his neglect of his family, his absence from home at the time of his son’s death, or both. In the case of Grace Tiffany’s books, this category indicates guilt from a number of additional sources and is therefore marked with a double “X” in the table.

Prag = **Pragmatic**, i.e., an alert businessman concerned with the financial aspects of his work

Drin = **Drinker**, i.e., a man who drinks to the point of drunkenness on at least one occasion in the book

Mol = **Molester**, i.e., a molester of a boy player

DGP = **Disguised Girl Player**, i.e., A girl disguised as a boy player in Shakespeare’s company is a character in the story.

## Introduction

Despite ceaseless attempts to harry it to death, the subject of William Shakespeare has yet to be exhausted and finished off. In 1991, S. Schoenbaum wrote that he had “added a Recent Lives chapter appraising the work of the past two decades” to the revised edition of his Shakespeare’s Lives, “new information—and hypotheses—showing no sign of abatement after the passage of more than four centuries” (xi). A few years later, Dominic Shellard noted in his succinct life of the playwright, “As of April 1998 the catalogue of the British Library listed 17,099 books devoted to some aspect of the career of William Shakespeare” (6). To give some idea of just how stunning a number this is, Shellard meticulously added, “This compares with 958 for John Keats, 774 for Shakespeare’s theatrical rival and friend, Ben Jonson, and 522 for his early competitor, Christopher Marlowe” (6).

One can easily imagine how displeased the choleric Jonson would be that Shakespeare is crowding him off the Library’s shelves (Shellard points out that the number of Shakespeare books “probably increases every week” [6]). But Jonson is not around to complain about the situation any more than Marlowe is. Not that it would make a great deal of difference if they were, since (for a number of reasons both good and bad) Shakespeare and his works have long since become a literary juggernaut that flattens all competitors.

Among the worthier reasons Shellard adduces for this preeminence are “the breadth of Shakespeare’s intellect, the theatricality of his plays, the beauty of his poetry, the precision of his language and the perception of his insight” (6). More dubious ones include “the self-perpetuating nature of the Shakespeare industry, the dominant position

in the literary canon that successive generations of literary and dramatic critics have accorded him (to the possible exclusion of other valuable work) and the malleability of the Shakespeare icon to support various cultural or political causes (rather in the manner of the Bible)” (Shellard 6).

Whether his iconic status is warranted or not, there is no denying that Shakespeare’s works have remained immensely popular for centuries. But though his plays were saved and published as early as 1623 (Shellard 112), Shakespeare the man has gradually been lost. Though determined scholars have, over time, unearthed a few additional bones to add to the partial skeleton of biographical data obtainable from public records, many are missing—including a hefty femur commonly referred to as the seven “Lost Years” of the playwright’s life, about which nothing is known at all.

More to the point, since Shakespeare left no personal journals, and since no “regular life” of him was written until almost a century after his death (Marder), his personality has effectively been lost. Shellard writes, “Rather as with Jesus Christ, the usual facets of biographical accounts are irretrievably missing, such as what he liked to eat, or whether he was fond of ale or sack; did he actually know Queen Elizabeth, and why did his father suffer such a decline in fortune during his early childhood?” (6). Barring some miraculous find in an archive, in other words, we will never know for certain whether (for example) William Shakespeare was a skinflint, or had a sweet tooth, or was gay.

But there is only one thing to do, as the saying goes, when life hands one lemons. Accordingly, scholarly biographers have been making lemonade of the enigma that is William Shakespeare for centuries. Louis Marder notes dryly, “Almost any kind of

Shakespeare can be reconstructed from facts collected, interpreted, and arranged by clever scholars. Thus we may find that the Bard was a poor student for leaving school early, a poor husband because he ran away from his wife . . . a poor father because he deserted his children . . . a lecher . . . a drunkard . . . a forger of pedigrees . . .”

Of course, Louis Marder is speaking only of the work of scholars. But academic careers and scholarly reputations are not the only lemonade to result from a thorough squeezing of a figure as popular and deeply enigmatic as Shakespeare. There are money and professional writing reputations to be made as well. Consequently, commercial fiction writers, who are even freer to take liberties with historical personages than scholars are, have for years been busy creating Bards of their own. Donald K. Hartman and Gregg Sapp’s useful reference work Historical Figures in Fiction (1994) in fact lists thirty-nine fiction books published before 1994 in which Shakespeare the man is a character. The earliest of them is an 1897 “YA” (their classification) novel entitled Master Skylark: A Story of Shakespeare’s Time.

Hartman and Sapp’s titles yield interesting results when they are broken down by decade and graphed with data for succeeding years from other sources (Fig. 1). For while the total number of fiction titles in which Shakespeare is a character produced between 1897 and 1997 (that is, all of Hartman and Sapp’s titles plus five produced between 1993 and 1997 that were found in other sources) is forty-four, no more than nine ever appeared in a given decade. When data for titles first published in the decade between 1998 and 2008 is plotted next to that for these earlier years, it becomes clear that a prodigious spike in titles in which Shakespeare the man is a character occurred sometime after 1997. A second graph, this one breaking down the number of such titles first published over the

past decade by year, shows a jump from one to five titles between 1999 and 2000, followed by a dip to three in 2001 before a spike to six in 2002 and a final, jagged tailing-off to zero in 2007 (Fig. 2).

While it is beyond the scope of this paper to conduct a rigorous statistical analysis of all the various factors that might have contributed to the post-1997 spike, the chance to hazard a couple of guesses concerning it is tempting. Predictably, the first is that the popular motion picture Shakespeare in Love had something to do with creating it. The film, which was released in 1998, earned \$289,100,000 at the box office—a high enough figure to rank it number 195 in an online listing of “All-Time Top Cinema Box office Earnings” (“Columbus”). The movie’s popularity would certainly have alerted both the publishing industry and individual authors to the possibility that a fictive Shakespeare in print might also be well-received—at least for awhile.

Though it is true that fiction in which the Bard is a character did not peak until 2002, it had already begun its rise between 1999 and 2000 (Fig. 2), only a year after the movie was released. Moreover, four of the six fiction titles in which the Bard is a character that were published in 2002 (i.e., J. B. Cheaney’s The True Prince; Philip Gooden’s The Pale Companion; Simon Hawke’s Much Ado About Murder; and Sarah Hoyt’s All Night Awake) are actually later numbers in series that began in 2000 or 2001. The fact that time is required to research a work of historical fiction, write it, and get it published is also pertinent—such a time lag might well cause the number of titles containing fictive Shakespeares to peak several years after the release of a film that had (hypothetically) led writers to begin producing them.

One final piece of evidence for the influence of Shakespeare in Love—an

admittedly circumstantial one in the nature of Sherlock Holmes's dog that didn't bark, but interesting nonetheless—is that of the *lack* of such a stimulus before the 1998 film. For though, as Norrie Epstein affirms, “more than four hundred Shakespearean silent films were made” between 1899 and 1927 alone (493), they were films of the plays, not films about the Bard himself. According to the compulsively readable The Name is Familiar: Who Played Who in the Movies (1993), only a single film in which Shakespeare was the title character was made before the early nineteen nineties. Entitled Immortal Gentleman, it was made in England in 1935 and featured a Bard who—far from conducting a racy romance with a beautiful starlet, as he does in Shakespeare in Love—merely “discusses his work with friends” who “each appear as one or more of his characters” (Nowlan and Nowlan 549).

A second possible cause of the spike in fiction in which Shakespeare is a character involves a more general phenomenon. Pamela Wells, a public library reference librarian interviewed for this paper, mentioned an overall increase in the popularity of *all* historical fiction in her library within the “past several years,” citing as specific examples the high demand for Diana Gabaldon's Outlander Series and the popularity of Philippa Gregory's The Other Boleyn Girl. Such an increase in demand for an entire genre might also have the effect of bringing a few more fictional “Wills” than usual into being over the span of years in which it occurred, whatever its cause.

But while historical fiction's recent vogue and Shakespeare in Love's great popularity may have helped increase the sheer number of books in which the Bard is a character over the past decade, they may or may not have had much to do with the nature of the Wills those books contain. Just who these fictive Shakespeares are and what

besides current films and fads may have influenced their personalities is the subject of this paper. Are they similar to the bumbling young romantic hero of the movie, or do they differ from him? If they do differ from him, do they also differ from each other, and in what ways? What might have made these Shakespeares who they are, and do the answers to that question have anything to say about who *we* are?

Of course, most fiction is the creation of an individual who lives in a given place at a given moment in time, which is to say the child of both a culture and a person who belongs to it. To Annalisa Castaldo, Shakespeare's unique malleability makes him an attractive vehicle for carrying this cultural and personal baggage. She writes, "Shakespeare wears well, in part, because he can be accessorized. Culture can keep reinventing Shakespeare to suit its needs, all the while pretending nothing has changed. . . . His personality can become a representative of some key cultural issue or mirror another writer's vision of self" (Castaldo).

Meeting a busload of fictional Shakespeares from the past decade and helping them to unpack their baggage is, one might say, what this paper is all about.

## Organization of the Paper

More fiction titles in which Shakespeare was a character were published over the past ten years than could be dealt with in the time available, as it turned out. No fewer than thirty such titles were published for the first time between 1998 and 2008. In addition, five that had been published before 1998 were reissued between 1998 and 2008, for a total of thirty-five potentially includable titles. My imperfect solution to the problem—to include at least one title by every author who produced such a work during



the period covered—has unfortunately resulted in the omission of seven titles published for the first time between 1998 and 2008. Regrettably, I have also had to exclude one reissued work discovered too late: Marchette Chute's The Wonderful Winter, which was originally published in 1954 and then republished in 2002. All eight of the omitted works are listed at the end of this Introduction, following the list of works covered in the paper. Excluded titles by authors whose other works are covered are mentioned in the body of the paper as well, at the end of the individual discussions of those authors' works.

The body of the paper is divided into three sections: Fiction for Adults, Fiction for Young Adults and Children, and Picture Books. Works included in each section are discussed individually, with an emphasis on the particular Shakespeare each presents. Wherever such comparisons seemed apt and useful, the works and their Bards have been compared to each other. The order of books considered within the sections, though somewhat arbitrary (I generally positioned discussions of the books in the order in which I read them), has been reshuffled a bit after the fact so that books of the same type or that dealt with similar subjects (e.g., alternative history, time travel) could be together.

Following the body of the paper is a Conclusion section in which the salient characteristics of each writer's Shakespeare are summarized; those that recur most frequently are tabulated; and conclusions are drawn regarding some of the factors that may have helped make these Bards who they are.

The presence of graphs and tables in the paper should in no way be taken to imply that this is a scientific examination of the subject. But it is at least as complete an examination of it, in terms of the number of titles covered, as it was possible to produce, and it is a thoughtful one. Perhaps one day students better versed in statistical

methodology will take it up again, reworking it to make it a valid critical instrument and broadening it to permit qualitative comparisons among fictional Shakespeares of different cultures and times. All my good wishes go with them, if they do.

The following are the twenty-seven works to be covered, followed by the omitted titles:

**Fiction for Adults**

Berkman, Pamela Rafael. Her Infinite Variety: Stories of Shakespeare and the Women

He Loved. (2001).

Gooden, Philip. Death of Kings. (1992, British ed.; 2001, American ed.)

---. Mask of Night. (2004).

---. Sleep of Death. (2000).

Hawke, Simon. The Merchant of Vengeance. (2003).

---. Much Ado About Murder. (2002).

---. A Mystery of Errors. (2000).

---. The Slaying of the Shrew. (2001).

Hoyt, Sarah. Ill Met by Moonlight. (2001).

Nye, Robert. The Late Mr Shakespeare. (1998, British ed.; 1999, American ed.).

Sanders, William. "The Undiscovered." The Year's Best Science Fiction: Fifteenth

Annual Collection. (first published in Asimov's Science Fiction, March 1997; rpt.1998).

Tiffany, Grace. My Father Had a Daughter: Judith Shakespeare's Tale. (2003).

---. Will. (2004).

Turtledove, Harry. Ruled Britannia. (2002).

### **Fiction for Young Adults and Children**

Blackwood, Gary. The Shakespeare Stealer. (1998).

---. Shakespeare's Scribe. (2000).

---. Shakespeare's Spy. (2003).

Cheaney, J. B. The Playmaker. (2000).

Cooper, Susan. King of Shadows. (1999).

Hassinger, Peter W. Shakespeare's Daughter. (2004).

Horowitz, Anthony. The Devil and His Boy. (British ed., 1998; American ed., 2000).

Meyer, Carolyn. Loving Will Shakespeare. (2006; pbk. ed., 2008).

Osborne, Mary Pope. Stage Fright on a Summer Night. (2002).

### **Picture Books**

Francis, Pauline. Sam Stars at Shakespeare's Globe. (2006).

Freeman, Don. Will's Quill: or How a Goose Saved Shakespeare. (1975; republished  
2004).

Koscielniak, Bruce. Hear, Hear, Mr. Shakespeare. (1998).

Rogers, Gregory. The Boy, the Bear, the Baron, The Bard. (2004).

### **Omitted Titles: Fiction for Adults**

Gooden, Philip. The Pale Companion (2002).

---. Alms for Oblivion (2003).

---. An Honourable Murder (2005).

Hoyt, Sarah. All Night Awake (2002).

---. Any Man So Daring (2003).

Nye, Robert. Mrs. Shakespeare: The Complete Works: A Novel (1993; 2000).

**Omitted Titles: Fiction for Young Adults and Children**

Cheaney, J. B. The True Prince (2002).

Chute, Marchette. The Wonderful Winter. (1954; republished 2002).

## Fiction for Adults

### The Mysteries of Simon Hawke and Philip Gooden: Introduction

Two major mystery series in which William Shakespeare is a character have been published in the United States over the past ten years, one written by American Simon Hawke and one by Englishman Philip Gooden. Given that mysteries tend to be formulaic and that the pool of what we know about Shakespeare isn't very deep, one would think that Hawke's and Gooden's Bards would have much in common. But reading the two sets of mysteries is like meeting a Shakespeare with multiple personality disorder—though the two Wills they portray resemble each other physically and have the same Stratford background, they are surprisingly different kinds of people. Unlike the books themselves, however, the reason for this is no mystery: it seems clearly to have to do with the existence of yet another Will—a film one—who antedates both of the mystery-book Bards and who has exerted a much greater influence on Hawke's Shakespeare than on Gooden's.

### Simon Hawke

The back covers and front flaps of Simon Hawke's Shakespeare and Smythe mysteries do all they can to link the series with the popular 1998 film Shakespeare in Love. The jacket blurb of A Mystery of Errors (2000) describes it as "Shakespeare in Love meets the Brother Cadfael mysteries of Ellis Peters." "In the ebullient spirit of the hit movie Shakespeare in Love," a Publishers Weekly review quoted on The Slaying of the Shrew (2001) insists, "young William Shakespeare takes center stage as an aspiring playwright and sleuth in this lighthearted historical . . ." (*Mystery*, Pub. Wkly.). A Kirkus

review beneath it enthuses, “Warring theater companies, familial chicanery, villains by the yard, and Will and Tuck as bumbling heroes—it all provides a good-natured romp for audiences who wish they’d make a sequel to Shakespeare in Love” (*Mystery*, Kirkus). The aim of all this energetic title-dropping is of course to attract the attention of the large group of consumers who enjoyed the film. If you liked Shakespeare in Love, these books are urging, you really ought to buy Shakespeare and Smythe.

It comes as no surprise that the possibility of riding the commercial coattails of a hit movie might have helped convince a quintessential commercial writer like Simon Hawke, who has also done Friday the 13<sup>th</sup> and Star Trek books (*Wands*), to write about the Bard. But in the afterword to The Merchant of Vengeance (2003), Mr. Hawke argues that Shakespeare himself would have done no different. He writes:

In an afterword to an earlier novel in this series, I said that I believed that if Shakespeare were alive today, he would probably be writing for television. I could easily see him sitting around over lattes at Starbucks with the likes of Steven J. Cannell and Harlan Ellison, talking shop. Or perhaps working with Lucas or Spielberg. And the responses to *that* comment were predictable. ‘*Shakespeare? Writing for television?*’ (You have to say that with your upper lip curling in an aristocratic sneer.) Yes, Virginia, writing for television. Because, much as the literati might blanch at the idea, Shakespeare was a *commercial* writer. (Hawke 249)

Hawke isn’t the first to make a connection between Shakespeare’s plays and television screenplays. In The Friendly Shakespeare, Norrie Epstein mentions that Shakespeare’s name “was not generally printed on the quartos because his plays belonged to the company, not the author,” and that a byline “wasn’t crucial to the Elizabethans, since plays were not considered to be great literary masterpieces” (287). Quoting Shakespeare scholar Louis Marder, she adds, “Do you know who writes your favorite TV

show? Their plays were like TV to us. They were popular theatre for the people. We know the actors in a TV show, but not the writers. It was the same with the Elizabethans” (qtd. in Epstein 287).

Hawke clearly relishes depicting Shakespeare’s commercial side; in A Mystery of Errors, Will discloses his plan for financial success to Tuck Smythe even as the two hike to London for the first time to look for work. A confident, businesslike Will declares, “Mind you, I shall take work as a player, if I can get it, for one must eat, after all, and working as [sic] player will allow me also to write plays. And writing plays and selling them will bring more profit, if the audiences come and I make a reputation for myself and become a shareholder of the company. And then, if I am fortunate enough to find a noble patron, that too can bring increase” (Hawke, *Errors* 36).

On the whole, the Shakespeare and Smythe Series is really just for fun; serious history buffs are likely to find it unsatisfying despite the afterwords that provide a bit of historical background in some of the books. But Hawke’s Shakespeare is an engaging fellow who bears a kind of family resemblance to the Will of Shakespeare in Love without being a slavish copy of Joseph Fiennes’ character. And Hawke does manage to maintain the light, bantering tone and fast pace of a film in which broad, physical comedy (of which its Will is often the butt) is blithely interspersed with “serious” drama and furious action. Moreover, as the series titles imply (and as the movie does with bits and pieces of Romeo and Juliet, Hamlet, and Twelfth Night), he also cleverly incorporates plot elements from one or more of the plays into each of his books.

Hawke does make a few noteworthy changes however, a couple of which may momentarily confuse fans of the film. Seemingly in order to help turn a romantic screen

comedy into a series of mystery books (in which romance traditionally takes a back seat to the puzzles to be solved), for example, he takes the hyper-heterosexuality of Joseph Fiennes' movie character, tones it down, and creates another main character out of it—the bumbling, sex-obsessed Will of Shakespeare in Love is transformed in the mystery books into Will's best friend Tuck Smythe, an endearing innocent who loves Hawke's version of Viola de Lesseps deeply, but at arm's length and with a pure heart. At the same time, Hawke makes his de-sexed Will (who has no romantic interactions whatever with female characters in the series' four books) a misogynist so once-burned by his bad marriage to Anne Hathaway that he has apparently become twice-careful forever.

These are significant changes, but in light of the fact that Hawke cites Anthony Burgess's Shakespeare as an influence (Hawke, *Errors* 238) and that Burgess writes of Shakespeare, "it is probable that his fault was not a single fixation but promiscuity. He loved not wisely but too well" (199), it seems reasonable to conclude that they have more to do with the demands of the mystery genre than they do with Hawke's view of either the historical Shakespeare or his film counterpart.

Shakespeare's drinking habits also undergo a transformation as they leap from screen to page. While the film's Will enjoys a beaker with the best of them, he is no match for the sodden Bard of Hawke's books, of whom we hear in Much Ado About Murder (2002), "Shakespeare . . . indulged heavily, sometimes to the point of near insensibility, though that point for him was reached long after most people had become utterly paralyzed with drink. There were few players in the Queen's Men who could keep up with him" (Hawke, *Ado* 51). Again, this is at odds with the Will described by Burgess,



who writes, “He did not drink much—there is the tradition that he would decline invitations to beery bouts with the excuse that he was ‘in pain . . .’” (195). In the case of Will’s drinking, Hawke’s reason for differing from both the film and his preferred source is less clear than it is in that of Shakespeare’s sexual proclivities, but his beery Bard is far from unprecedented. As Louis Marder notes, not a few scholars have characterized the playwright as “a drunkard from his Bidford days to his death—caused by drinking too much. . . .” And even among the relatively few versions of the playwright considered here, Hawke’s Will would find a drinking companion: William Sanders’ celebrated short story “The Undiscovered” contains a Shakespeare who inadvertently stows away aboard a pirate ship one night after getting drunk.

In *A Mystery of Errors*, the series opener, we meet both Tuck Smythe (a former apprentice blacksmith with a yen to act) and this cynical, pragmatic, soused, and often comical Will. The year is indefinite, but it is sometime between 1586 and 1592, Shakespeare’s famous “Lost Years” (Hawke, *Errors* 237). The two young men meet by accident as they make their way to London to look for work in the theater. They hit it off, share a room quite innocently at an inn, and decide to cast in their lots together once they reach the city.

From this point on, the book’s plot rapidly becomes as complicated as—unsurprisingly—a movie script. First, Kit Marlowe and a highwayman who also happens to be an aristocratic spy recommend Will and Tuck to Richard Burbage, who hires them as ostlers at the Theatre. Then on the job a short time later, Tuck opens the door of a nasty nobleman’s coach and finds Elizabeth Darcie, a girl so blonde, beautiful, willful, and rich that he falls in love with her instantly. Elizabeth’s social-climbing father, like

Viola's in the film, is trying to force her into an unwanted marriage, and she flirts publicly with Tuck in order to disenchant the prospective groom. Unfortunately for everybody, her fiancé turns out to be the initial target of a papist terrorist cell staffed (in an offbeat tie-in to The Comedy of Errors) by identical triplets. Thanks to her wealthy father's money, Elizabeth is in the villains' sights as well, and soon the solicitous Tuck and a very reluctant Shakespeare are drawn in as they try to protect her. Before the final mare's nest of mistaken identity and evil intent can be sorted out, Will comes within an eyelash of being killed, and Sir William Worley (the highwayman/spy) has to dash in with a troop of guards to save the day.

The harmless mayhem grows a bit darker in The Slaying of the Shrew, in which Elizabeth returns and involves herself in a scheme to save a strong-minded girlfriend from yet another arranged marriage. Predictably, given the title, the girlfriend's name is *Kate* Middleton, and she has a sister named *Blanche* (cf. *Bianca*). Neither of the sisters is exactly what she seems, Kate not really being as shrewish as she lets on and docile, submissive *Blanche* being a deft little manipulator. Most of the action occurs at the Middleton country estate, where Kate's wedding to doddering old Sir Percival Pennington-Pugh is soon to take place. The Queen's Men, including Will and Tuck, are there as well, as the company is scheduled to provide part of the wedding entertainment in the form of Will's first (and as yet unwritten) play, which is said to be about a drunken tinker named *Christopher Sly*. Kate's anti-marriage scheme involves a sleeping potion exactly like Juliet's, and it works just as planned until things go shockingly wrong at the hands of a very unexpected murderer. In the end, Middleton Manor is deliciously littered with bodies, Kate's and *Blanche's* among them, and a much-chastened Elizabeth, with

Will and Tuck in tow, returns to London to innocently await another chance to wreak havoc.

It arrives in book three, Much Ado About Murder, which opens to find the Queen's Men down on their luck. Dick Tarleton, their star comedian, has died; Ned Alleyn has defected to the Lord Admiral's Men, for whom the already wildly popular Christopher Marlowe writes plays; and the Burbage Theatre is falling apart. Worse luck, apprentices are banging foreigners' heads together in the streets and the plague has snuck back into town, as a result of which the theaters have temporarily been closed. The Queen's Men are reduced to scrounging for meals at the Toad and Badger tavern, with Shakespeare selling the odd sonnet to help pay the bills, when suddenly there is a glimmer of hope. Will has heard that the playhouses will soon be allowed to reopen, and "Ben Dickens," a former boy player who left years before for the wars, returns to visit, saying that he has an Italian friend who may want to invest in the Theatre.

If Ben sounds suspiciously familiar, there is good reason for it. Mystery-book versions of Beatrice, Claudio, Hero, Leonato, and even Don John and Borachio soon appear as well, as Hawke cleverly turns the documentable xenophobia of sixteenth-century London apprentices into a motive for murder and theft. Poor, filleted "Leonardo" was somewhat less than honest, as it turns out—but then, so was Ben. The two had planned to extract money for a phony sea venture from Elizabeth Darcie's rich father and then use it for their own purposes, which in Ben's case had included winning Molly the Tavern Waitress as a bride. In the end, Ben confesses to his involvement in the scheme, helps track down the murderous apprentices, and promises to live honestly in future, which is all Molly wanted in the first place. "Corwin"/Claudio is released from prison,

where he has languished unjustly since Leonardo's death; "Hera's" grief over her father's demise abates long enough for her to accept Corwin's proposal of marriage; and the anticipated double wedding takes place in St. Dunstan's Church.

In his afterword to The Merchant of Vengeance, the fourth and final book of the series, Hawke provides some interesting information about what he sees as the real Will Shakespeare's motivation for writing The Merchant of Venice. The play, he believes, was a shrewd commercial reaction to a successful posthumous revival of Christopher Marlowe's The Jew of Malta following the trial of Jewish converso physician Roderigo Lopez for allegedly attempting to poison the queen. Well aware of the popularity of Marlowe's play and recognizing that Barabas, Marlowe's villain, is hardly more than a caricature, Hawke's fictional Will decides to do his rival one better. "Forget Marlowe's Jew," he tells Tuck Smythe. "I will show you a Jew, by God! I will show you one who has a reason to be evil! A reason that any man can readily understand!" (Hawke, *Vengeance* 23-24).

Of course, the problem with trying to write a "realistic" Jew in Elizabethan England is that there are simply no Jews to observe, adherents of that religion having been legally banished from the country during the reign of Edward I some three hundred years earlier. Deciding that secondhand information is better than none, Will and Tuck visit their old friend Ben Dickens, now the proud owner of an armory shop in Cheapside. A former soldier, Ben has traveled widely and met many people, including "a number of Jews" (Hawke, *Vengeance* 50), and he is happy to offer what answers he can to Will's questions. In the middle of their conversation, however, a young friend of Ben's, a journeyman tailor named Thomas Locke, rushes in distractedly and blurts out

(rather too helpfully) that his fiancée Portia Mayhew's father has just cancelled their wedding on discovering that Thomas's mother is a Jewess.

At this point, the book's plot enters a kind of parallel universe in which Shylock the Moneylender becomes Thomas's father, the underworld leader Charles "Shy" Locke, and Portia's male rival in the play morphs into the mystery book's lubricious "Antonia," a young matron on the qui vive for anything fetching in a doublet and hose—including the young tailor. It all leads to Thomas's murder and the not-so-mock trial of Portia's father before Shy Locke's "Thieves Guild"—a trial in which Thomas's Jewish mother movingly demands a figurative pound of flesh for her dead son, Shakespeare adroitly defends the accused, and a surprising murderer finally confesses to the crime.

## Philip Gooden

In Philip Gooden's Shakespearean Murder Mystery Series, we move from the lighthearted-if-blood-spattered world of Shakespeare and Smythe into the more serious one of the British historical mystery. Not for Gooden and his hero Nick Revill the kind of short, flashy, funny scene that is so clearly the child of a big-budget popular film. In terms of a visual image, what Gooden's series offers readers is more like a long, dank ramble on a lonely moor, with a thick fog rolling in and something unutterable lurking just over the brow of the next hill. In several of the Nick Revill books, Gooden achieves this tone by literally allowing his villains to creep along behind his readers as they read. At the beginning of every chapter of Mask of Night (2004) and Sleep of Death (2000), for example, there is a short, italicized section in which Nick's world and the murders being committed in it are seen through the eyes of the killers.

Gooden has clearly done more history homework than Hawke has and has dug up a wealth of historical detail with which he fleshes out his stories. The stories themselves, like Hawke's, always showcase one or more of Shakespeare's plays, but they do so in thought-provoking rather than comical ways. In Mask of Night, in which the Chamberlain's Men perform the poison-soaked Romeo and Juliet, for example, the villain is a poisoner, and Elizabethan common names for the poisons he administers are used as chapter headings (e.g., "Friar's Cap" introduces a chapter in which an amateur actor playing Friar Lawrence is poisoned with monkshood). In Sleep of Death, a book loosely based on Hamlet, the mystery's murderer is unmasked by means of a play within a play. And in Death of Kings (2001), the friendship of Antonio and Sebastian in Twelfth Night becomes a metaphor for the mystery-book Shakespeare's relationship with the Earl

of Southampton during the dangerous period of the Essex rebellion.

If the general tone of Gooden's books is darker than that of Hawke's, his Shakespeare, who is referred to as "WS" by Nick, is a bit more serious as well. Though Nick Revill is an actor and we are still in a company of players, the date is the early 1600s, which is to say fifteen or more years after the period in which Simon Hawke's books are set. Gooden's Shakespeare is thus no longer the bumbling Will of the Lost Years. Nick Revill is the young one now, while WS has evolved into a successful middle-aged man who drinks sparingly and seems to spend what time he can with his family.

As a neophyte player dealing with a renowned author and company shareholder, Nick treats this generally kindly but distant Bard with great deference. Unlike Hawke's Tuck Smythe, who often teases a younger version of Will about writing too little and "borrowing" too much, he has few doubts about the playwright's genius. On the contrary, Nick Revill is quite certain that WS's work will prove immortal, in Mask of Night even wondering whether he might not be able to earn a bit of immortality himself as Shakespeare's biographer. He reflects, ". . . I had little doubt that William Shakespeare was a great man, whose work and reputation would outlive his mere earthly existence by many years. I wondered whether anyone had yet thought to amass biographical scraps, the materials for a life of WS, for the edification and entertainment of future ages. I wondered whether N. Revill was the man to undertake this task (and in the process of memorializing a great man win a little reflected glory for himself)" (Gooden, *Mask* 48).

Where Simon Hawke makes a main character of Shakespeare, liberally fleshing out his personality and never hesitating to draw conclusions about him, Gooden keeps his WS a secondary presence and contents himself with suggestion. As he is quick to

point out, “My hero is not William Shakespeare, who remains an elusive, even ghost-like presence in the books . . .” (Gooden, *Mysteries*). Such reticence is hardly surprising—there is no shortage of critics ready to call attention to factual errors made by historical fiction writers. But there seems something almost personal in Gooden’s diffidence. While the mystery of Shakespeare’s Lost Years appears to have acted as a stimulus to Hawke, spurring him to create a Will who is, as he puts it, “the way I would have liked to see him” (*Errors* 239-40), the notion of the Bard as a tabula rasa seems not to have tempted Gooden at all. One has the sense that, when it comes to inventing Shakespeare’s personality and character, the British writer is simply more comfortable erring on the side of kindness or withholding judgment altogether than violating Shakespeare’s image to no purpose. It is no accident, one feels, that WS makes his first appearance in the series costumed as a ghost.

This is not to say that Gooden fails to provide any clues at all regarding the version of Shakespeare’s personality he wants to convey, or that he shies away entirely from dealing with the more problematic aspects of the poet’s personal life. Rather, Gooden salts his texts liberally with suggestion. In Mask of Night, for example, he makes a subplot of the playwright’s possible romantic relationship with Jane Davenant and also touches on the famous deer-poaching incident, and in Death of Kings he even takes on the Shakespearean “hot topic” of the Bard’s relationship with Southampton. But when it comes to hazarding conclusions about such tenebrous connections and events, Gooden flashes the equivalent of a Mona Lisa smile and keeps mum. And by making Nick—through whose eyes we see things—an inexperienced young man who often has reason to doubt his own impressions, he always gives us readers to understand that we



should remain skeptical as well.

Gooden's WS may arrive at a performance of Romeo and Juliet in his shirtsleeves with Jane Davenant in tow, but he is never caught in flagrante delicto; he may imply that yes, he *did* poach deer with a certain friend of his once upon a time, but both he and the friend later deny it (Gooden *Mask* 126-28; 42; 119-20; 149-50). "You should believe nothing without the testimony of your own eyes, and not even then," the friend in question tells Nick (Gooden, *Mask* 120). "I am very fond of William but he's a play-maker who lives in a world of kings and castles and murderers, and if he has to choose between a fat story and a starved reality than he will pick the first one every time" (Gooden, *Mask* 120).

Even when he implies something as innocuous as that WS may be a bit acquisitive, Gooden takes pains to let readers know that this might not be the case, or at least that Shakespeare has a sense of humor about it. Nick recalls:

I was always a little taken aback by the nakedness with which Shakespeare and the other shareholders referred to money. They made no bones about it. As if he could read my thoughts WS now said, 'You know what our motto is in the Chamberlain's?'

'Our motto?'

'It is "You pay, we'll play".'

'No, I didn't know that.'

'That's because I just invented it, Nick. You ought to be a bit more wary of what you're told.' (Gooden, *Mask*, 45-46)

We first meet Nick Revill, a quick-witted and likeable young player engaged temporarily by the Chamberlain's Men, in Sleep of Death (2000). As the book opens, Nick's clever unmasking of a would-be thief leads to a young aristocrat's asking him to investigate the suspicious circumstances of his father's death. A few months earlier, Sir William Eliot had been found dead in his garden, where he had gone to take a nap, and

though there was no clear-cut reason to suspect foul play at the time, his son now believes that he may have been murdered. Sir William's brother, it seems, is a rather suspicious character who has already managed to marry the widow.

Not surprisingly, the Chamberlain's Men have recently begun performing Hamlet, and it soon becomes clear to Nick that there are troubling connections between the play and Sir William's death. A few of them, it turns out, even point to the play's author. For it seems that someone has carved the initials "WS" into the trunk of a pear tree in the locked garden in which Sir William Eliot died. And according to the Eliots' doorman Tom Bullock, someone calling himself "Shagspark, Shakespurt, Shackpeer, something like that" came to visit the Eliots on the afternoon of his master's death (Gooden, *Sleep* 198).

By making Nick a newly hired player and Shakespeare a murder suspect, Gooden renders the task of writing his "elusive, ghost-like" Bard appreciably easier. The young actor, who has met the playwright only recently, has little evidence on which to base conclusions about his character or personality. To Nick, "WS" may be almost any kind of person—even a murderer. Nick reflects:

. . . Master WS was a proficient in the art of murder – just as he was in those other dark arts of lying, cheating and forswearing, of slander, theft, mutilation and mayhem. To say nothing of treasons, plots, conspiracies and stratagems, as well as the more homely gamut of envy, lust, sloth and avarice. Master WS was quite familiar with all these things because it was his job to sound humanity to its nethermost depths. He is a playwright and daily presents us with our vices and virtues, leaving us to choose whether or not to acknowledge them. Everything human is known to him; nothing, perhaps, repels him. (Gooden, *Sleep* 136).

By leaving Nick in a position of uncertainty vis à vis WS, Gooden also likens him, intentionally or not, to scholars and fiction writers who must try to piece

Shakespeare together from scraps of equivocal and even conflicting information. He plays with his readers a bit as well, consciously tinting the fabric of his text with the suggestion that whatever conclusions they draw about the playwright's personality are necessarily based upon conjecture. There simply isn't enough evidence to support any single portrayal of Shakespeare the man, Gooden implies, obeying the first rule of successful fiction writing by showing this to his readers through the actions of his characters rather than telling it to them outright.

At the beginning of Death of Kings (2001), the year is 1601, and in his London mansion, the Earl of Essex is fomenting rebellion against the queen. One night, Nick is waylaid by some men, blindfolded, and brought before no less a personage than Sir Robert Cecil, Secretary to the Privy Council. The Secretary has received word that one of Essex's supporters will soon be coming to the Globe to request a performance of Richard II, which the Essexites hope to use as "a fingerpost signing the way down their chosen road" (Gooden, *Kings* 22). Nick's help is needed, Cecil says, to "uproot this fingerpost before it gets firmly planted" (Gooden, *Kings* 22).

When Essex's friend Sir Gelli Merrick turns up at the Globe as predicted to make his traitorous request, Nick overhears player/shareholder Augustine Phillips agree—rather too readily, Nick thinks—to have the company perform the play. Before he can report what he has heard, however, WS enters the picture, asking him to deliver a cryptic message to another Essexite, the Earl of Southampton. Despite Nick's respect for the playwright, he can't help recalling another suspicious thing WS has done recently: that autumn in Southwark, Nick has seen Shakespeare in intimate conversation with a dark young woman who has turned out to be the sexually promiscuous wife of a fellow player.

Meanwhile, the company is also preparing to perform WS's Twelfth Night at court, a happy complication that allows Gooden even more room for suggestion. Like Antonio, the working-class sailor who saves the life of young nobleman Sebastian in the play, the poet does all he can over the course of the book to save his aristocratic young friend Henry Wriothsley from the disastrous effects of his rash association with Essex, even risking arrest for him just as Antonio does for Sebastian. When one of Nick's fellow players suggests that Antonio's feeling for Sebastian resembles romantic passion more than it does friendship, the implication is that Shakespeare's for Southampton does as well. In case his readers haven't understood, Gooden drops the same hint even more emphatically a bit later, when another player (who later turns out to be the homosexual lover of the first) asserts boldly that Antonio "gives Sebastian a purse full of crowns and ducats but it is not the purse – or the crowns – or the ducats – that he wishes the other to dandle with" (Gooden, *Kings* 79).

As usual, however, insinuation is as far as Gooden is willing to go regarding Shakespeare's personal life, and even then he always undermines his hints in some way so as to keep things unobjectionably murky. In a conversation with Nick regarding male friendship, the poet seems merely to yearn for a return to a golden age in which innocent, platonic friendships between men were possible. "I ask you whether that steady-burning friendship is not a truer emblem of that eternal and stainless love which we are enjoined to believe in . . . than the passion of Aeneas for Dido, and hers for him, . . ." he says wistfully (Gooden, *Kings* 83). Of course there is also Isabella Horner, the "swarthy" (Gooden, *Kings* 84), sex-starved wife of a homosexual player. Nick has seen WS in intimate conversation with her, and his own girlfriend Nell has heard that the obvious

Dark Lady candidate is interested in a senior member of the company—all of which *could* add up to the poet’s committing old-fashioned adultery with a pretty girl and having a close but heterosexual friendship with the Earl . . . or not.

The fifth book of the series, Mask of Night, takes place during “the early months of 1603” (Gooden, *Mask* 7). In it, the Chamberlain’s Men set out on tour to escape an outbreak of plague and to earn money during the temporary closing of London theaters that ensues. Their first destination is Oxford, where they will stage plays at both the Golden Cross Inn and the home of Dr. Hugh Fern, a boyhood friend of Shakespeare’s. The company is to present a variety of plays in the inn yard of the Golden Cross, but at Dr. Fern’s house they’ll perform only Romeo and Juliet, which the Doctor has requested as a kind of lesson to the historically hostile families of young William Sadler and his fiancée, Sarah Constant.

All goes smoothly at first, with large audiences at the inn enthusiastically applauding even a couple of forgettable minor offerings by writers other than WS. But things change from placid to sinister quickly. Sarah’s cousin Susan tells Nick that she believes the bride-to-be is being poisoned. And when the company performs Romeo and Juliet at the Golden Cross a few days later, Dr. Fern, who has taken the role of Friar Lawrence, is found locked in a temporary tiring room, dead. Surrounded by a cast of mystery characters that includes counterparts of Romeo, Juliet, Rosaline, Friar Lawrence and even Juliet’s nurse, Nick must try to solve murders that continue to mount up even as the plague arrives in Oxford. When he finally sets a snare for an eerily bird-hooded murderer, Nick himself is caught in it and nearly loses his life before he uncovers an unholy alliance revolving around a misguided man far ahead of his time.

In addition to Sleep of Death, Death of Kings, and Mask of Night (its first, second, and fifth books respectively), Gooden's series also includes The Pale Companion (2002), Alms for Oblivion (2003), and An Honourable Murder (2005).

## Pamela Rafael Berkman: Introduction

Of the ten short stories in Pamela Rafael Berkman's Her Infinite Variety: Stories of Shakespeare and the Women He Loved, four concern characters from Shakespeare's plays. Shakespeare himself figures in only one of them, "Magic Wand," in which he is really only the catalyst of the fairy queen Titania's musings about herself. Shakespeare does appear as a character in the other six stories in the collection, however. In them, Berkman imagines his relationships with seven women: his mother; his wife; Jane Davenant; Mary Mountjoy; his daughters Judith and Susanna; and Queen Elizabeth I. While each of the stories offers a different view of Shakespeare and may be read and understood without reference to the others, they paint a more complete portrait of him when they are considered together. Like the clever adaptation of the Droeshout engraving on the book's cover, it is a portrait of a slightly more blandly self-serving Shakespeare than we normally see.

## Pamela Rafael Berkman

In "Gold," a sensitive, eleven-year-old William Shakespeare is upset by his mother's anxiety at having been forbidden to attend religious services. John Shakespeare has entered into some less-than-legal dealings in the wool trade and has sunk into debt, and he is afraid that his wife Mary may be approached by his creditors in church. Worried over his mother's unhappiness and shamed by his father's humiliation in a town in which he was once respected, young William declares that he has decided not to be a glover or a wool merchant when he grows up. Instead, he will "go to the city and do something else" in order to "discharge our debts and get fine clothes for Mother"

(Berkman 17). John Shakespeare scolds his son for his waywardness and sends William and his brother and sisters to bed without supper, but when he goes up to mend fences with the boy later, he finds William as determined as ever to restore the family's honor. "But I will buy us a coat of arms in the city, Father," he insists (Berkman 20). "For you. And for Mother" (Berkman 20).

The Shakespeares are Catholics, and as the story ends, Mary envisions her ardent eldest son setting off on a golden path to a bright future under the guidance of the Holy Virgin. Upstairs in his bedroom, however, William prays for a more tangible sort of gold, prefiguring the socially and financially ambitious man he will become (Burgess 17; 43). Moving fluidly between the first and third persons, Berkman writes, "Pray you, heavenly Father . . . Riches. Send me gold. Gold to pay his father's debts, gold thread for his mother—and a claim to be worthy to wear it. A coat of arms! Yes, gold to buy a coat of arms for his family, why not? Stranger things were done in the city. Gold to make his mother unafraid. Rubies and emeralds and silver and purple cloth and perfume—oh, but mostly gold. O Lord let me earn gold. Gold" (16-17).

In "In the Bed," Berkman explores the possibility that the writer who is often thought to have understood the human mind and heart better than any other may have failed utterly to comprehend important truths about his own marriage and life. The story is written in the third person limited, from Shakespeare's point of view, and as the title suggests, its overarching metaphor is that of the bed the playwright and his wife share. Each of the story's three sections presents a different bed scene from the marriage. The first involves the couple's final conversation and lovemaking on the eve of William's leaving to take up his life in London; the second, one of his annual visits home eight



years later; and the last, the illness and death of his son Hamnet a year after that.

Significantly, it is not the poet but his illiterate wife who correctly perceives the meaning of events in each of the scenes. Through them, Berkman quietly rehabilitates an Anne Hathaway whom history has often judged harshly. Her Anne may be unschooled, but she is warm, loving, and very shrewd. She is her husband's teacher, in fact—his senior in understanding as well as in years.

It is Anne who understands, in the first scene, that her children will suffer for lack of a father and that her affable husband will find female companionship in the city despite his protestations to the contrary. And it is Anne who knows intuitively in the second that her own illiteracy has become a barrier between her and William, who awakens one night to find her alone in the kitchen. Berkman writes, "She had lit a rush light. He had brought home a draft of something he was working on, a story of two lovers, Romeo and Juliet, with many blottings out and crossed-out lines. She was looking at it by the candlelight, turning page after page, gazing at the magic markings she could not understand. He backed away from the kitchen door, went back upstairs to their bed" (32).

For reasons Berkman never offers, perhaps because they would blur the impression of him she wants to create, her Shakespeare never tries very hard to draw this intelligent Anne into his world of plays and poetry. Instead, telling himself that he is giving her and their children everything they could want, he focuses on the social and financial course he is pursuing rather than on its consequences. As a result, his marriage slowly disintegrates, and his children gradually learn to view him as a stranger. Even after Hamnet's death, he has to be taught by his uneducated wife that in some cases

money is useless. Berkman writes:

She looked up at him, her eyes not round, but narrow lines, a shape in which he had never known them. This time, for the first time, she looked at him with hate.

. . . She was teaching him, as she always had, but this time it was lessons he did not want, about loss and death and precious things broken that could not fit seamlessly back together.

‘I want my son, that is what I want,’ she hissed at him. Then, more loudly, ‘I want my son!’ She threw the coins for the doctor and his potions at her husband and walked from the room as they rolled about the floor. (36-37)

“Jennet” is the story of Shakespeare’s friendship with Jane Davenant, the wine merchant’s wife thought by some to be the Dark Lady of the sonnets. But this Jane, or “Jennet,” as she is nicknamed in the story, is far from the fickle temptress of the poems. In Berkman’s hands, she becomes instead the intelligent and faithful wife of a husband she clearly loves, though his business requires him to spend a great deal of time away from home. Over the years during which the theater-loving Davenants’ friendship with Shakespeare develops, Jennet bears six children, all of whom die within a day of their births. The discouraged couple have just decided to leave London for some happier and healthier place when Shakespeare arrives to tell them—or perhaps to tell only Jennet, who is bound to empathize—of the death of his eleven-year-old son. Overcome with grief for him and sadness for herself, Jennet falls at Shakespeare’s feet, weeping. Unfortunately, her husband is upstairs, so no one is there to prevent Shakespeare from covering her face with kisses in response.

This is all the indiscretion we actually see. The Davenants soon move to Oxford, where Jane at last gives birth to a baby boy who lives. Whether he is or is not Shakespeare’s son we are never told. Two undescribed years pass, after which Shakespeare arrives at the Davenants’ tavern one day with a pair of tiny gloves for the boy and the

obvious hope of beginning—or renewing—a relationship with his mother. “Have you forgotten me, Jennet?” he whispers, pressing up against her in a corridor (Berkman 69). But Jennet has no desire for a friendship that is other than platonic. “Men could be selfish without even knowing it, it was such a part of their being,” she reflects before telling Shakespeare caustically, “You should behave better . . . I will remember as I choose” (Berkman 69; 70).

Of the ten stories contained in Her Infinite Variety, the six in which Shakespeare figures actively as a character are arranged in roughly chronological order. In “Gold,” we see him as a boy of eleven; in both “In the Bed” and “Jennet,” he passes through the years from youth to middle age. With this passage of time in the stories, the playwright’s code of ethics with regard to women undergoes a perceptible shift. In “Gold,” Shakespeare is an innocent child strongly loyal to his mother. By the beginning of “In the Bed,” he has become a young husband who rather disingenuously protests his faithfulness to the wife he is about to leave. Later in the same story, he is a successful man about town who makes neat ethical distinctions between the many women he has slept with and his wife:

There were beautiful women in London, and he was finding how much he liked women, but it was her he wanted. Truly. Only, he had not known there was so much room in a man’s heart, so many places. He did meet women who were not like Anne, not like any woman he had ever seen in Stratford or Shottery. He had a friend whose wife wrote poetry herself, as finely wrought as that of an educated man. And another, little Nell, had quite a sack of tricks to her credit but somehow never seemed other than innocent. He told himself that he used his English common sense in matters of London ladies; he was not debauched, like some of the other players. He was only a man away from home, a man who wanted for his wife and whom ladies found pleasant. (Berkman 30-31)

By the end of “Jennet,” whose heroine silently notices that his hair is now entirely gray,

Shakespeare has sunk to a new moral low: he is clearly hoping to have, or perhaps to rekindle, an affair with the wife of a close friend.

“Mary Mountjoy’s Diary” takes Shakespeare forward in time yet again, this time to the years of his retirement in Stratford. But it also takes him back to the past, thanks to some entries in one of his old journals—to a time more than eight years earlier, when he was still a working playwright and de facto bachelor lodging in the home of wigmaker Christopher Mountjoy on Silver Street in London.

As Shakespeare’s journal reminds him, Mountjoy’s daughter Mary was then already more than twenty years old, tall, gawky, shy, and predictably still unmarried. Except for her awkwardness, Shakespeare had not thought her especially memorable, though he had always been polite to her. (“I am always good to women. In truth, I am. I like them all,” he writes in his journal [Berkman 99].) On a couple of occasions, timid Mary Mountjoy had told him how much she had enjoyed the few of his plays she had seen. “Moth, Cobweb, and Mustardseed, and what was the other? Peaseblossom,” she had said to him (Berkman 108). “Such pretty names . . . I did delight in them. I wonder if I could ever think up such pretty names” (Berkman 108). She had saved up the price of admission, she’d told him, and gone to A Midsummer Night’s Dream by herself. Then she had asked Shakespeare whether his wife understood him and had declared herself “monstrous glad” when he had assured her that Anne did (Berkman 109).

There would have been no more to his memory of Mary Mountjoy than this, the playwright recalls, had her mother not asked a favor of him all those years ago. Mistress Mountjoy had hoped to marry her ungainly daughter off to her other tenant, an apprentice named Belotte, and she had needed someone to vouch for her husband’s

promise of twenty-five pounds, to be given to Belotte if he would take the girl off her parents' hands.

Though Shakespeare, busy with his writing and his mistresses, had disliked being drawn into the affairs of the Mountjoy family, he had done as his landlady asked. The wedding had taken place in due course, and a year later Shakespeare had moved to other lodgings, Mistress Mountjoy having died. He had not heard from any of the Mountjoys since—until a fortnight ago, when a summons had arrived for him in Stratford. Belotte, it seemed, was alleging that Christopher Mountjoy had never paid him the wedding portion that he had been promised, and a disgruntled Shakespeare was required to go to London to give testimony on the matter.

On disengaging himself from his memories and arriving in London, Shakespeare happens to meet Belotte himself outside the witness room of the courthouse. The former apprentice, he notices, has aged well, but the man's memory seems to have suffered. It was *sixty* pounds he was owed, he tells Shakespeare. When Shakespeare asks after Mary, the greedy husband declares that he finds his wife rather odd. She hoards things, he confides, such as the nail she once picked up off the floor of a theater during one of Mr. Shakespeare's plays, and also some of the poet's rough drafts that she had found in his old room.

Berkman's aging Shakespeare has apparently changed enough over the years to be shamed by Belotte's words. Homely, timid Mary Mountjoy, he finally realizes, had loved him, and he had not even noticed. "How could I, in my own absorption with myself and my new money and my new fame," he wonders, "not have seen at least a little into the heart of that poor child, sold off to a low bidder?" (Berkman 112). He resolves not to

join in as Mary's money-hungry husband and father haggle over how many pounds she is worth. "I can do her that kindness," he decides, "she who understood me too well, she who wondered if she could invent names and verses" (Berkman 112). It is a generous, if sentimental, explanation for Shakespeare's poor memory of the same dowry agreement in the historical incident from which it is drawn (Holden 214-15).

The story "No Cause" is set during the period between Shakespeare's middle age and his retirement. An epistolary tale, it is told through letters between the playwright and his daughters Judith and Susanna, through others between the daughters themselves, and through an additional, transcribed letter to Shakespeare from his illiterate wife.

The story begins with a stiff little missive to her father from Judith, who expresses surprise that something she has told Shakespeare in an earlier letter has upset him. "I have never heard of a father being made so unhappy . . . by such intelligence," she protests (Berkman 123). "I rather hoped for an expression of happiness and perhaps, Father, if I may be so bold, of relief" (Berkman 123). What Judith, a spinster no longer young, has apparently revealed in her first letter is that she has begun keeping company with a well-known wastrel. His name is Thomas Quiney, and though his father was an honest, if not especially able, businessman well known to Shakespeare, he is something else entirely. Writing to Susanna but addressing Anne as well, the overwrought Bard responds:

You know as well as I he is a bad piece of work; he had not eighteen years before he was known about town for his gaming debts, from cards and dice and cockfighting; he has been called for reprobation before the church council more than once, and once for fornicating, and all that by his twentieth year. He spends his family's money like water, takes no care with the company he keeps, consorting with servants and worse; he is as often to be found of a morning

asleep in a ditch at the roadside from his excesses of drink  
as in his own bed (Berkman 126-27).

While they are never less than polite, it is clear that Susanna and her mother are far more tolerant of Thomas than Shakespeare is—and far more impatient with Shakespeare himself. “But can you recall,” Anne asks her husband with deceptive mildness, “that Judith is nearly thirty years old? She has—and this would be, of course, impossible for you to know, since your business through no fault of yours keeps you so far away for such periods of time—all but given up hope” (Berkman 129). Susanna, too, plunges in the knife, writing to her father, “I am pleased to hear that the city, if no better than your usual report, is at least no worse; indeed, I wonder that you can have spent such a portion of your life in it . . . we are all grateful to you for having such attention to our happiness that you submit to spending such an amount of time there” (Berkman 128). Regarding Quiney’s character, Anne adds with dogged optimism, “It is possible young Thomas is not so very bad. . . . sure I never heard of Quiney sleeping in a ditch, and I do not believe he was ever found of a morning in one” (Berkman 129-30).

In a later letter to Judith, Susanna is even more unguarded about her feelings. Concerning Thomas Quiney, she advises her sister, “Do not mind our father’s distress. This is perhaps a thought of a disobedient sort and does not please God, but Father has never known the details of our affairs here and I do not believe he is so immediately made qualified to direct them” (Berkman 135). Seemingly not wanting to appear harsh, she adds that, though Judith must hardly remember it, their father had “adored” her when she was small (Berkman 136).

In the end, Judith’s marriage does take place, but not before she learns that Quiney has proposed to her only to cover up a dalliance that ended in his former

mistress's pregnancy and death in childbirth, along with that of the infant he had fathered. And not before she happens to pick up and read a manuscript copy of King Lear, with its affecting scene of reconciliation between a foolish father and a wronged daughter who nevertheless protests that she has "no cause" to withhold her forgiveness from him (Berkman 141). "Is it not strange," Judith asks her sister, "that our father should write such a thing? I never knew he thought much on the heart of mind of a daughter, did you?" (Berkman 142).

Yet despite his emotional abandonment of his wife and daughters, Berkman's Shakespeare does seem to love them, after a fashion. In a final letter to Judith in which he sadly consents to her wedding, the flawed father admits, "I have provided for you in a material way but in some other way not, and somehow that is the cause that you find yourself . . . with no hope of companionship when your mother and I are gone, save this path that lies before you. . . . And I ask you, my daughter, to forgive me" (Berkman 143-44).

In "Diamonds at Her Fingertips," the last story in the collection, Berkman escorts her Bard all the way to his deathbed. As he lies in the "great, shiplike bed" (Berkman 160) that has been moved into the kitchen of New Place for his comfort, the playwright's mind wanders over the events of his life. Predictably, his first thought is not of the family he is about to leave but of another woman he has known. This time it is Elizabeth I, whom he pictures attending the theater years before and regrets never having met in her youth. Suddenly recalling that it is his birthday, he tries to mention the fact and becomes fretful at finding that he can no longer speak clearly. An old serving woman attempts to soothe what she imagines are his anxieties about death, telling him it is "only a blink, and



then you find yourself in the greenwoods of your child's days, surrounded by young virgins" (Berkman 164), at which Anne Shakespeare smiles.

He loved Anne, Shakespeare recalls, matter-of-factly adding to himself even now on his deathbed that he "loved women. . . . He had never done well without them" (Berkman 164). When Anne calls Judith in to sit with her father, it occurs to Shakespeare that he also regrets the death of her twin. He tries to tell Judith this but can only manage to whisper the word "regret," at which she assures him that "everything is all right" (Berkman 165). Shakespeare hopes that what she means is that "all in his life was forgiven" (Berkman 165), but he has his doubts about this, admitting to himself:

. . . he did not regret as he should have the abandonment of his family. Rightly or wrongly, he believed for many years that it had done no real harm to leave his wife in the country alone while he pursued his calling in London, or to never know his children very well. Like many men, he sorted things into separate boxes in his mind and heart: home, here; work, there; love, there. And like many men he convinced himself that he was not really wanted in places where he did not wish to be. (Berkman 165-66)

Thinking of the queen again, Shakespeare recalls how she had helped him at the start of his career. A clever woman who liked to say that she was "married to England" (Berkman 161), she had understood, he thinks, how a writer's fictional characters were his true "sons and daughters" (Berkman 166-67).

When, in his final, dream-like state, Shakespeare calls out to the queen, Anne and Judith mistakenly believe he is calling them. It is an aptly ironic twist, but Berkman may be implying that Shakespeare's wife and daughter are not entirely wrong to think so. For in her playwright's last moments, the author conflates the guiding Virgin of his mother's prayers for him in "Gold" with the Virgin Queen of England, her fingers tipped with diamonds and her collar studded with stars. Elizabeth, a "holy" virgin indeed as the head

of The Church of England, is no less than an incarnation of Shakespeare's personal deity, the eternal female he has worshipped in "her infinite variety"—words appropriately drawn from his description of the Egyptian queen in Antony and Cleopatra (qtd. in Nye 354)—all his life. Anne and Judith are incorporated within her. At the hour of his death, Shakespeare knows that he will continue to "follow her, like a goddess, to beyond the ends of the earth" (Berkman 170).

Berkman's libidinous Bard is the stuff that modern mid-life crises and Peter Pan Syndromes are made of: a man who, during his middle years, reenacts the irresponsibility of childhood again and again in a series of extramarital sexual relationships with women. But in the later stories in Her Infinite Variety, he is also the most successful playwright of his time—i.e., a man who would no doubt have been thought a genius by many. Annalisa Castaldo has this to say about the link between puerility and genius:

. . . people, in general, have a mixed relationship to the idea of genius. While we admire it, we also resent it and the shadow it casts over our own much more meager accomplishments. . . . Genius must be reckoned with and explained, in order to control our own natural feelings of inadequacy.

There are two main roads which seem to satisfy people. One is that genius springs from maintaining a child's view of the world, from never fully growing up. Stories of Einstein's inability to make change or remember to wear socks are examples . . .

While Castaldo later dismisses the notion that a man as reputedly pragmatic as Shakespeare could have been "childlike" in the sense that Einstein or Mozart seem to have been, the heedless promiscuity of Berkman's Bard may certainly be viewed as an attempt to avoid "fully growing up." Following Castaldo's logic, it seems possible that this Shakespeare's immature sexual behavior, besides being material to the character Berkman wished to create, was also an artistic choice—a conscious attempt, on the

author's part, to help possibly Bard-phobic readers "reckon with" the pervasive, off-putting idea of the playwright's genius and make it easier for them to see him as a fallible, pitiable human being.

## Grace Tiffany: Introduction

Berkman's short stories "In the Bed" and "No Cause" explore the ways in which Shakespeare's life away from his family might have affected them and him. Other stories in Her Infinite Variety range farther afield than the playwright's immediate family. "Jennet," "Mary Mountjoy's Diary," and "Diamonds at Her Fingertips," for example, describe how Shakespeare might have felt about and behaved towards the pretty and accomplished wife of a friend, the ungainly daughter of a crass landlord, and even the queen who was his benefactress. By considering his relationships with women outside the circle of his family as well as within it, and by doing so from both his point of view and theirs, Berkman is able, in five relatively short tales, to produce a credible sketch of a Shakespeare who is an amiable but disingenuous man, a womanizer who "sorted things into separate boxes in his mind and heart: home, here; work, there; love, there" and who "convinced himself that he was not really wanted in places where he did not wish to be" (Berkman 166).

In contrast, Shakespeare scholar Grace Tiffany's novel My Father Had A Daughter deals primarily with Shakespeare and his family; her much longer story with its smaller cast of characters makes up in depth for what it forfeits in breadth. Where Pamela Berkman assembles a small crowd of characters whose various perceptions of the playwright all contribute to the clear if not very detailed image of him we take from her book, Tiffany looks hard at Shakespeare through a single pair of eyes—the eyes of his grown-up daughter Judith, who narrates her story in the first person, and who both loves her father deeply and has been deeply disappointed by him.

The non-identical twin threads of love and disappointment that run through

Tiffany's novel from its outset are not the only fraternal duality informing it. Judith Shakespeare's story is, after all, the story of a fraternal twin; what is more, it is the story of a twin who must find a way to live on after her beloved counterpart has died. Taking her cue from the often preternaturally close psychological and emotional bonds between twins, Tiffany creates an ingenious scenario involving two children who yearn for an absent father; an original take on how Hamnet Shakespeare might really have died; and the play Twelfth Night.

In Will, her sequel to My Father Had a Daughter, Tiffany creates a backstory for the earlier book that depicts Shakespeare as a man riddled with guilt over a variety of things he has done, thought about doing, or neglected to do over the course of his life. This guilt and his sense that he is an outsider in his family and in the world both affect his behavior and inform his works.

## Grace Tiffany

Judith Shakespeare's story begins with her realization, when she and Hamnet are still toddlers, that the man who occasionally turns up at her mother's house and whom she thinks of as the "scribbling one" is not a paying lodger but her father (Tiffany, *My Father* 2). This father, it turns out, writes stories for people to play on the stage, and when he sees that his children are interested, he gradually begins to tell the stories to them. Judith, Hamnet, and Susanna are enchanted, as much by their father himself as by the stories he tells. Judith recalls:

When I think on those times I cannot describe how much Hamnet and I came to love him. When we understood what he was doing with his quill and parchment, we could not imagine anything better in the world, except for him to tell us what he was writing about.

Because anything wild and fantastic or magical or otherwise intriguing that could be thought of might be growing on that paper. I had only to tell my father that I had seen a fairy queen in the Arden Forest, and he would put her on the page and give her something interesting to say. (Tiffany, *My Father* 12)

She adds dryly, “My mother and Aunt Joan were much more likely to smack me for lying in such a situation” (Tiffany, *My Father* 12).

As might be expected, the imaginative little girl doesn’t stop with the creation of Titania. When her father is in London, Judith begins to concoct little “spells” aimed at bringing him home. Hamnet lacks his sister’s offbeat creativity, but he is happy in the role of henchman, so Judith takes on the witch’s role, making up incantations and determining what is needed for the “magic” to work—the skull of a buried cat, in one case, and three petals from their mother’s peonies in another. Sometimes the two children go into the Arden Forest to perform their spells and sometimes to the River Avon. It is the kind of thing their father might do, Judith believes. Thinking about that long-ago time when she and her brother acted out bits of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* in the woods, Judith the grownup narrator recalls, “. . . the best scenes were the enchanted scenes, the spell-casting scenes” (Tiffany, *My Father* 40). “Hamnet,” she remembers, “assisted my conjurings, bowing at appropriate moments, wearing a wizardly crown he had made out of oak leaves threaded together with stuff from the Woolery” (Tiffany, *My Father* 40).

Whether because his relationship with Anne has grown increasingly strained or because of the pressures of work, Shakespeare visits Stratford less and less as the years go by. When Judith and Hamnet are eleven, he writes to say that the company will be going on tour during the summer and that he will return to the city afterwards rather than come home. Anne refuses to allow the children to visit him in London, which upsets the

gentle Hamnet greatly. Crushed at not being able to see his father, the boy begs his twin to cast one more spell. “The magic you seek is not woods magic,” Judith warns him gravely (Tiffany, *My Father* 46). “I know it,” Hamnet answers (Tiffany, *My Father* 46). “It is river magic, is it not? We must go to the river tonight” (Tiffany, *My Father* 46).

Given such ominous foreshadowing, something bad seems sure to happen when the children go the river, and of course it does. Though the Avon is in spate, Judith decides to finish her home-bringing spell with a flourish: she and Hamnet must enter the water and duck their heads three times for the magic to work. When they do, Hamnet drowns, and the guilt-ridden little girl’s life changes forever.

Obsessed with grief, Judith ceases to be the carefree tomboy she was. She goes to Coventry to be a nanny to some cousins, and two years pass during which she does not see her father. Then one Easter when she is home on holiday, she finds a rough draft of Twelfth Night that Shakespeare has discarded. The play’s ostentatiously grieving sister and drowned twin brother who returns alive from the sea infuriate her. Incensed at the idea that her father has made a comedy of her sorrow out of greed, Judith decides that there is only one thing to do: she will return the favor by going to London and shaming him on the boards of his own theater during a performance of the hateful play.

There is, of course, much more to the story, in which a great deal happens—including Judith’s Viola-like (and Viola de Lesseps-like) turn as a boy and her sexual initiation by the actor Nathan Field—before William Shakespeare and his daughter finally begin to understand one another. But for the purposes of this paper, the real interest of My Father Had a Daughter lies outside such details, in the nature of the William Shakespeare Grace Tiffany creates: that is, in the husband, father, artist, and

man she either implies or tells us he was.

Probably more than anything else, Tiffany's Shakespeare is an outsider—a man whose working-class family simply cannot fathom him. To a much greater degree than Pamela Berkman's Anne, Tiffany's neither understands nor cares to understand why her husband feels the need to write. Shakespeare's sister Joan and brother Gilbert are no different —Joan is depicted as Anne's close friend, confidante, and partisan, while Gilbert is a boor who makes crude fun of Shakespeare's work and—together with Anne—leads the poet to believe that they are cuckolding him. Only Shakespeare's younger brother Edmund and the twins possess the kind of imagination that can be fired by poetry and plays. In passages like the one below, Judith recalls her family's attitude towards her father's work. Because it tells so much about the hostile environment in which Tiffany places her Shakespeare, it is worth quoting at some length:

My mother could not understand why he or any of us should long to be part of a dirty crowd that spread disease amongst itself, or wish to live in a city full of noise and stink, where you could not walk from one end to the other in less than a full afternoon. . . .

But her disdain for the playhouses was well bolstered by the rest of my family. Though they welcomed the money my father sent, buying new cushions and rugs and expanding the Woolery, still they shook their heads in embarrassed amusement when neighbors asked of my father's doings. . . . As glamorous as my father's life sounded to me, the Shakespeare men were only bemused by the fact that my father frequently appeared in costume at Queen Elizabeth's court. That he went there not to sell anything useful, like corn or grain, but to recite poetry, wearing powder on his face and hundred-year-old armor or some sort of odd wizard's robe, was unseemly to them, and in fact, to all the businessmen and laborers of Stratford. And then for him to dance the morris with clowns for the entertainment of courtiers dressed almost as outlandishly as he! The thing was absurd. My uncle Gilbert made high sport of it when my father was home. (Tiffany, *My Father* 30-31)

Though Gilbert's "high sport" consists, in part, of crude hints about his brother's sexual orientation ("Sweet William. Did you kiss the royal seat of the gorgeous Earl of



Southampton at our queen's Christmas Revels?" [Tiffany, *My Father* 31]), Anne's suspicion and scorn seem to stem from a conviction that her husband is keeping a London mistress. "She was so sure my father loved someone in London," Judith recalls, "that the image of a mistress had grown as real to me as my own father's image . . ." (Tiffany, *My Father* 167).

Like Philip Gooden, however, Tiffany refrains, in *My Father Had a Daughter*, from drawing the conclusions such hints seem to warrant. When, as a grown woman, Judith finally meets both Southampton and his wife in London, she is charmed by them. Despite her father's disclosure to Anne that "something painful and bad" had happened while he was staying at Southampton's estate (Tiffany, *My Father* 28), the two men finally seem to have been simply good friends.

As for Shakespeare's purported mistress, his London rooms show no sign of her. Judith recalls, "Through a doorway, I had a glimpse of a straw pallet, barely big enough for one. Clothes strewn about, but no woman's garments that I could see. If there was a woman, they didn't meet here. And while her existence was possible, I suppose, I found I no longer needed to believe in her as the cause of his being in London. After all, I'd played at the Globe" (Tiffany, *My Father* 167-68). It is the lure of art and of his own genius, in other words, which draws Shakespeare to London and makes him an outcast in Stratford.

Though she never says so outright, Tiffany creates the impression that Shakespeare is at the mercy of this genius and is even bedeviled by it. In a letter to Judith in which he apologizes for misconstruing the true source of her grief, the poet writes, "There is a darkness in me, and sometimes it will out. There are times when I think I see

all things truly, when all I see is my own black heart. Other times I am cursed with a thousand perspectives. What follows is that I am not the surest judge of the world, and perhaps my family, who should look most clear, are less plain to me than anything else” (Tiffany, *My Father* 233).

Of course, Grace Tiffany isn’t the only writer, or even the first, to conjure up a tormented Bard for the delectation of her readers. In *The Late Mr. Shakespeare* (1999), Robert Nye’s playwright grieves aloud for his dead son Hamnet when he meets a boy who resembles him, and in the short story “The Undiscovered” (1997), William Sanders’ Cherokee captive Shakespeare actually dies of despair. Annalisa Castaldo throws revealing light on what writers gain from making Shakespeare suffer, noting:

A . . . common explanation for genius is that it results from extraordinary suffering. Much of popular culture is dedicated to teaching people that great talent and success result from (or at least lead to) terrible grief, emotional and sometimes physical pain, and isolation. The greater the talent, the greater the suffering. . . . The problem, of course, is that Shakespeare does not fit this equation . . . Documentation suggests a fairly quiet life. He was well liked, retired early, and died in his bed. . . . But another common move is to find intense suffering in Shakespeare’s life, despite the documentary evidence, and often this re-creation of Shakespeare’s emotional life . . . is the thing that makes Shakespeare so appealing, since what causes the emotional pain is as ambiguous and malleable as his plays.

In *Will*, her sequel to *My Father Had a Daughter*, Tiffany creates a backstory for the earlier book that probes even deeper into the Bard’s hypothetical wounds. Beginning with Shakespeare’s boyhood, she builds a case for the proposition that he is racked with guilt about all sorts of things. His Catholic uncle executed for complicity in a plot to overthrow the queen might never have been taken into custody if Will had not lost an incriminating “spiritual testament” in the library of one of Elizabeth’s flunkies (Tiffany, *Will* 25; 234). His son’s death by drowning might not have occurred if Will had spent

more time at home. His brother Edmund might not have died prematurely if Will hadn't introduced him to the addiction of playing. His wife Anne's love for him might not have grown cold if he hadn't carelessly left a steamy sonnet lying around at home or (for that matter) if he hadn't bedded Emilia Lanyer in the first place—a thing he'd only done in order to get over his guilty passion for Henry Wriothesley.

Tiffany also suggests that this chronic guilt becomes the basis of at least some of the characters her Shakespeare creates for the stage. In the following excerpt, she distills the process into a single scene in which a conscience-stricken Will fairly steps from Emilia Lanyer's bed into the character of Richard III, which he then promptly commits to paper:

He knew her for a will-o'-the-wisp.  
But he still desired her.  
HEDGEHOG. Bunch-backed spider. Toad.  
Will rose from his table and stood before the  
pier-glass that hung by his bed. The glass was  
defective, and gave back a distorted image of a  
lumpen face. He worsened the image, contorting  
his features, twisting his body.  
*Adulterer.*  
He broke loose from the glass and limped  
heavily about the room. Then he stood in the middle  
of the floor, hunched and sneering. He breathed  
heavily.  
After a minute of this he sat down to write.  
*I.*  
He had finished the rest. Now he had the beginning.  
Richard of Gloucester's first speech. *I.*  
Not Marlowe's 'I.' Not *I can, I will*. The other 'I. *I am  
alone. I am shut out. I am abandoned. I am denied.  
I am not king. I am not loved. I am deformed, unfinished,  
sent before my time into this breathing world, scarce  
half made up, and that so lamely and unfashionable that  
dogs bark at me as I halt by them.*  
*I am nothing.* (Tiffany, *Will* 158-59)

Significantly, it isn't only this Will's guilty actions that spawn his feelings of self-

reproach. It is also his sense, clear from Richard's speech, that he is simply *different* from other people—that he has long been an outsider “shut out” and “abandoned” by his working-class family and neighbors. Will's cousin Adam Arden explains the problem to him succinctly by means of a drawing:

‘Look.’ Adam pulled a paper from a pocket of his gown.  
‘A pencil?’ Will took one from his hat. Adam sketched something quickly, then held it before Will. ‘A game I play with my grandchildren. What seest thou? A horse or a tree?’  
‘A horse *and* a tree. See, here is the—’  
‘Marry, *get* thy hand off it. I know where the horse and the tree are; I drew the thing!’ Adam folded the paper and stored it in his purse. ‘My meaning is that everyone else sees one or the other.’  
Will's eyes widened. ‘Is't so?’  
‘Yes! And you, poor man, see all, and would say all.’  
(Tiffany, *Will* 385)

“Seeing all and saying all” may give one a sense of omnipotence, but for Grace Tiffany's Will, it clearly has its disadvantages. For one, by becoming a platform for a “thousand truths” (Tiffany, *Will* 385), this Shakespeare privileges none—becoming everything, he becomes nothing, thus losing his sense of who he is. For another, when he sees and embraces certain culturally objectionable truths—the sexual beauty of the Earl of Southampton, for example—he immediately puts himself in moral difficulty. By its nature, morality is exclusive and culture-based, and people different enough to notice and accept what most of their peers do not often pay a psychological price for their clairvoyance. For Tiffany's Will, the price seems to be a conviction that he is a kind of monster whose “unnatural” inclinations match his aberrant nature. Interestingly, for all her lack of education, Tiffany's Anne—who in this sense resembles Pamela Berkman's—understands this, shrewdly intuiting the problems her husband's protean nature causes

him. She confides to her daughter Susanna, “When he faces himself, he sees things he cannot bear. . . . He thinks he is something horrible. So he looks at himself askance, as though he were someone else” (Tiffany, *Will* 238).

To Tiffany’s Will, the horrible “something” in the mirror is a miscreation that must continually observe, assess, and allow everything that meets its eye. Its latent bisexuality is only one manifestation of a comprehensive alienation. “I look at myself in the glass and I see—nothing, no one; or a shape of death or a ghost or a yale,” he tells Adam Arden (Tiffany, *Will* 386). When his cousin asks what a “yale” is, Will answers that it is a “furry beast with two heads who lives in the Arden Forest” (Tiffany, *Will* 386). Adam suggests that it gives Will pleasure to think these things, and an embarrassed Shakespeare replies, “It doth. And yet I believe them, too” (Tiffany, *Will* 386).

Near the end of the book, Will’s perceptive daughter Judith pleads with her mother to forgive him so that he may finally put his guilt to rest and come home. “*Can’t you see he cannot stop writing it?*” Judith cries (Tiffany, *Will* 379). “Mama, his plays are full of murdered boys and guilty fathers, and lost uncles and treacherous brothers, and absent mothers—his own, I trow! And innocent, suffering *wives!* . . . Can you not see he will never come back here until you *forgive him?*” (Tiffany, *Will* 379).

Anne’s forgiveness is more than simply a means for Tiffany’s Will to achieve absolution for his sins. It is also the thing he needs to restore his wholeness and sense of place in the world. When the Globe goes up in flames at the end of the novel, he seems content to die beside a trunk of his playbooks too heavy to drag from the fire. It is only when practical, earthbound, working-class Anne conquers her stubbornness and follows him to London that this Will is saved and returned to himself. Gesturing at the burning

Globe from which she has pulled him, he asks bitterly, “Why did you not *leave* me? . . . I am *no one* without it!” (Tiffany, *Will* 402). “List, you!” his brusque wife answers, “You are not *no one!* You are married and your name is *Will!*” (Tiffany, *Will* 402).

Standing in the Thames with the Globe in flames behind them, Anne finally does forgive her husband—for the Dark Lady and for Southampton as well as for Hamnet. It is her forgiveness that gives Tiffany’s Shakespeare back the sense of belonging that enables him to go on (Tiffany, *Will* 403). It does not matter, in the end, that this Anne will never completely understand her poet husband. She has the countrywoman’s sense that everything has its season, everything ends, and she knows that the destruction of the Globe somehow represents the end of her husband’s life as a playwright. She sees clearly that he has gotten older, and that he is tired. Speaking vehemently about their garden that has run to weeds, his brother who drinks too much to be of any real help, and the beans that won’t thrive unless he is there to look after them, this Anne gives her Will something to live for, and a place to rest.

## William Sanders: Introduction

On several occasions in Will, Grace Tiffany's Shakespeare dreams of escaping his inner turmoil by going to the New World. Tiffany isn't the only writer who has thought about transplanting Shakespeare to the American wilderness—short story writer William Sanders has, as well. But Sanders' Will does more than just imagine roughing it in sixteenth-century America. In "The Undiscovered," a fighting Bard who has almost as much in common with Natty Bumppo as he does with Kit Marlowe actually ends up there.

Although "The Undiscovered" (1997) is included in a 1998 collection of outstanding science fiction, it isn't really science fiction at all. Instead, it is fantasy of a type known as alternative history. Specifically, it is the remarkable tale of a Will Shakespeare who comes to the New World with Lord Strange's Men to stage plays for Virginia colonists only to find himself, as the result of a stretch of very bad luck, the sole English captive of a band of Cherokee Indians. Unfortunately this Will, who is known to the Indians as Spearshaker, isn't around to tell his story any longer. We hear it from Mouse, his Cherokee friend, who is apparently recounting it to an acquaintance from another tribe. Interweaving his own reminiscences with saved fragments of Will's journaling on scraps of deer hide and tree bark, Mouse tells an often hilarious but finally poignant tale. At the heart of it lies the unbridgeable gap between two disparate cultures.

## William Sanders

It seems that, despite having been duly "engaug'd" (Sanders 229), Lord Strange's Men had arrived in Portsmouth in 1591 to find the town under the control of a "Mayor

and Corporation ... of the *Puritann* persuasion” (Sanders 229). Forbidden to perform their plays, the bankrupt players had been reduced to pawning their clothing for passage money home—all except for Will, who after a night of heavy drinking had decided to stow away on a nearby British ship instead. Unfortunately, it had turned out to be a pirate ship.

Thanks to his persuasive way with words, Will was ultimately excused from having to swab decks and dine on swill, but his troubles were far from over. Returning to Virginia after a successful sortie on a Spanish convoy, the buccaneers’ ship was buffeted by gales. Shakespeare was sent out in one of several small boats to look for a safe passage through some offshore islands, but high winds blew the craft away from the main group. When he and the others in his boat finally managed to make their way to shore, they were set upon by “Sauages” (Sanders 231). Shakespeare was the only Englishman left alive after the encounter, and he escaped only to be taken prisoner a couple of days later by the Tuscarora.

A year afterwards, a few of the Tuscarora out gathering firewood with their captive slave Will were raided in their turn by the Cherokee. Mouse’s tale in fact begins at this point, with a memorable scene in which a self-important warrior named Bigkiller hauls a bedraggled Shakespeare and a couple of Tuscarora women into town. “He’s a good slave,” says one of the women, hoping to save Shakespeare’s life by speaking up about his better qualities (Sanders 226). “He’s a hard worker, and he can really sing and dance” (Sanders 226). When this seems insufficient, she adds, “He can do tricks, too. He walks on his hands ...” (Sanders 227).

His acrobatic skills notwithstanding, Shakespeare is on dicey ground with the



Cherokee until *they* are raided in their turn by the Catawba. Then an astonishing Will emerges to earn his captors' respect. Indeed, as Mouse tells it:

That was when Spearsmaker astonished us all. Without hesitating, he grabbed a long pole from the meat-drying racks and went after the nearest Catawba with it, jabbing him hard in the guts with the end, exactly as you would use a spear, and then clubbing him over the head. Then he picked up the Catawba's bow and began shooting.

My friend, I have lived long and seen much, but I never was more surprised than that morning. This pale, helpless creature, who could not chip an arrowhead or build a proper fire or even take five steps off a trail without getting lost—he cut those Catawbas down like rotten cornstalks! He shot one man off the palisade, right over there, from clear down by the council house. I do not think he wasted a single shot. And when he was out of arrows, he picked up a war club from a fallen warrior and joined the rest of us in fighting off the remaining attackers (Sanders 230-31).

Although this surprising behavior turns out to be less miraculous than it at first appears (Shakespeare explains that *all* the “men of his land know stick-fighting and archery, which they learn as boys” [Sanders 231]), it is a far cry from the way most other fictional Wills conduct themselves. Clearly, Sanders is interested in creating a Shakespeare whom the Cherokee can respect. Considering the frequency of the inter-tribal raids he describes in the story, it is safe to assume that such a person would be able to aim an arrow and wield a war club, to—as Mouse zestily puts it—“to cut those Catawbas down like cornstalks” (Sanders 231).

In the course of the story, Sanders' Will shows himself to be more than a courageous fighter. He is also friendly, cheerful, and linguistically gifted. But all of these are facets of the man that might be found in other works, and what is more, they don't win Sanders' Will the esteem or sympathy of his captors. It is only Will the Doughty Warrior who is unique to Sanders' tale, and who gains the acceptance of the Cherokee.

Sanders' competent, adaptable Will is eventually so well accepted by the tribe

that he decides to reveal his passion for poetry and theater to them, rewriting one of his plays (Hamlet, which they call “Amaledi”) for them and staging it with Indian actors. After a long and difficult series of rehearsals, during which Shakespeare uses Mouse to help translate his ideas to his Cherokee cast, the play is performed. It is a resounding success, but for precisely the wrong reason—everyone in the tribe considers it a screamingly funny comedy. Shocked by his sudden vision of the unbridgeable gap between the English and Cherokee cultures, Shakespeare writes in his tree-bark journal, “If I lieu vntil our *Saviour*’s returne, I shall neuer vnderstande *Indians*. Warre they count as Sport, and bloody Murther an occasion of Merriment: ’tis because they hold Life itselife but lightly, and think Death no greate matter neyther: and so that which we call Tragick, they take for Comedie. And though I be damned for’t, I cannot sweare that they haue not the right of it” (Sanders 242).

Shakespeare never writes another “plei” for the Indians (Sanders 242), and though he eventually takes a Cherokee wife named Cricket and has a son, his reason for living seems to have deserted him. “Whatever happened that night, it changed something in Spearshaker” (Sanders 242), Mouse recalls, adding that the playwright never spoke of Amaledi afterwards, and that, some years later, Cricket had found him dead in their house. He had not been ill. “I think,” Mouse reflects quietly at the end of the story, “his spirit simply decided to go back to his native land” (Sanders 242).

There is a good reason why Mouse’s narration has the absolutely authentic feel that it does: in the introduction of “The Undiscovered” in The Year’s Best Science Fiction (1998), Mr. Sanders is described as “a former powwow dancer and sometime Cherokee gospel singer” (Dozois 224). But though this author certainly could have

invented his story out of whole cloth if he had wanted to, it would be wrong to assume for that reason that his wonderful tale has no basis in fact. Norrie Epstein includes the following interesting note in The Friendly Shakespeare:

1835: During the second Seminole rebellion, the Indians ambushed a group of itinerant Shakespearean players, massacred two of them and made off with the company's costume trunk. For a while a strange, unidentifiable tribe could be seen galloping through the range, clad as ancient Romans, Scotsmen, and Danes. Later when they were finally overtaken, several were found wearing the costumes of Othello, Hamlet, and an assortment of other Shakespearean characters. (397)

## Harry Turtledove: Introduction

If there were such a thing as a king of alternative history, Harry Turtledove would probably be it. His brilliantly skewed re-creations of the past fill whole shelves at public libraries. It comes as no surprise when the back flap of Turtledove's four hundred fifty-odd page Ruled Britannia (2002) reveals that he holds a doctorate in Byzantine History—the novel fleshes out an entire alternative Elizabethan world full of period detail and authentic historical characters. Fictional versions of Christopher Marlowe, the Earl of Essex, Lope de Vega, and many others enliven the prolific author's account of the adventures of a scared-but-gritty Will Shakespeare sunk up to his eyebrows in a rebellious plot against Spanish conquistadors.

## Harry Turtledove

Turtledove begins his tale in 1597. For the past nine years, since the Armada's defeat of the ships of Elizabeth I, Queen Isabella and her husband Albert have occupied the throne of England as puppet rulers, with Isabella's father King Philip II pulling the strings from Madrid. Elizabeth's life has been spared, but she is imprisoned in the Tower. The Spaniards' rule is a harsh and fanatically Catholic one, complete with an "English Inquisition" and bloody autos de fe (Turtledove 6; 4). Subdued by fear, London's populace is sullen and restive, but it seems to lack the leadership to rebel.

At least one old British lion remains, however. Sir William Cecil, Elizabeth's former lord high treasurer—a man King Philip unaccountably set free after the conquest—has bided his time for years. Now, as news of the Spanish king's failing health reaches England, the shrewd old man, himself very ill, decides it is finally time to act.

Through Kit Marlowe, he contacts Will Shakespeare and prevails upon the playwright to join in a plot. Shakespeare is to write a play based on the life of Boudicca, the queen of the Iceni who fought Roman legions in ancient Britain. Cecil hopes that such a play—one stratagem of many that he and his son Robert plan to employ—will incite thousands of Londoners to take to the streets against the Spaniards.

The problem, from Shakespeare's point of view, is the practical one of exactly how to do it. His acting company, now called the Lord Westmorland's Men in honor of the head of the English Inquisition, is under constant Spanish surveillance. A certain Senior Lieutenant Lope Félix de Vega Carpio haunts the Theatre day after day, seemingly for the pleasure of watching Will's plays but perhaps also to listen for snippets of treasonous talk in the tiring room afterwards. Will wonders how to hold rehearsals of Boudicca—assuming, of course, that he manages to *write* the play without being caught—under the ubiquitous Lope's nose. In addition, he must somehow learn which players may be trusted to join in the plot in the first place, and then find some way to ensure their silence once they do.

The whole plan, Will knows, is incredibly risky. But the danger increases exponentially when the Spaniards decide to hire him to write a *second* play—in this case, one to honor the memory of Philip II, who is apparently near death. Like Sir William, the Spaniards cajole, threaten, and pay Shakespeare handsomely in advance for his efforts. Deciding that his best chance for survival lies in humoring them, an apprehensive Will keeps mum about Boudicca and agrees—though he has no idea how he will do it—to write King Philip as well.

Unfortunately, Will's worries all turn out to be valid ones. In short order, the

Cecils' henchmen kill both the company's Catholic prompter and a player who talks too freely in a tavern one night. In addition, bumbling, Dogberry-like "Constable Strawberry" links Will to Cecil operatives, and old Sir William himself dies. Through it all, a thoroughly alarmed but dogged Shakespeare continues to write and rehearse both Boudicca and King Philip, the latter openly, the former in secret, under the watchful if preoccupied eyes (Lope is a ladies' man) of Lieutenant de Vega.

To Will's great good fortune, everything turns out even better than planned in the end. Boudicca, performed in place of the advertised King Philip, whips up a large crowd that promptly takes to the streets. At the same time, a female acquaintance of Will's manages to distract the distractible Lope. Minus the warning the lieutenant would have given, the Spaniards are taken by surprise. The Tower is stormed before they can reinforce it, and Queen Elizabeth is released and carried off on the shoulders of the Earl of Essex. The revolution, in short, is a success. Of course, it could hardly be otherwise, given that the historical Will lived on to write many more plays, at least some of which would be familiar to most of Turtledove's readers even if the details of Will's later life would not.

On a personal level, Turtledove's Will is a very unlikely candidate for involvement in espionage and rebellion. As Lope de Vega tells an acquaintance, "As a *man*, he is anything but remarkable. He drinks beer, he makes foolish jokes, he looks at pretty girls—he has a wife out in the provinces somewhere, and children, but I do not think it troubles him much here in London" (Turtledove 31).

Lope is right about Will in at least one respect: this Shakespeare admits that, though he prides himself on his discretion, he doesn't "live a monk's life in London"

(Turtledove 44). However, he apparently doesn't enjoy a homoerotic relationship with Henry Wriothsesley or cavort with a Dark Lady, either, since neither of the notorious love interests of the Sonnets makes even a walk-on appearance in Ruled Britannia. Instead, Turtledove—who seems intent on showing just how ordinary a man his Bard can be—makes Will the lover of a very nice and quite intelligent but also completely illiterate tavern maid. Nor is he merely her lover. He is actually in love with her, a fact that he demonstrates convincingly both by telling her honestly about his marriage and by remaining faithful to her throughout the book.

Though Lieutenant de Vega is right in thinking that this unremarkable Shakespeare is often unfaithful to his wife, he is wrong to assume that the playwright is untroubled about the situation. On the contrary, Turtledove's Will would be far happier to be faithful to a loving wife—if he had one—than to be an adulterer. But like many ordinary young men, he has married a woman he impregnated only to find out afterwards that she “wasn't always easy to get along with” (Turtledove 44). And in this case, there is no possibility of divorce. Will reflects, “. . . even if England were still Protestant, divorce was for sovereigns and nobles and those rich enough to pay for a private act of Parliament, not for the likes of a struggling poet and player who lived in a Bishopsgate lodging house, had a sour wife far away, and sometimes slept with the serving woman at the ordinary around the corner” (Turtledove 155).

Even four hundred years after the fact, such a Shakespeare sounds familiar. He is a man who made a reckless mistake when young and paid a high price for it. He has the same problems (not counting the Cecils and the Spaniards) and handles them in the same ways as other men. In fact, the comforting ordinariness of Harry Turtledove's

Shakespeare goes beyond his all-too-familiar home life and dead-end love in London. It even extends to aspects of his appearance, his personality, and his character—and not always to his credit.

This Will, for example, is vain enough to be embarrassed by his increasing baldness, conceding to himself that he has “squandered a few shillings on nostrums and elixirs purported to make hair grow back,” though “None did any good” (Turtledove 175). He is impatient with people who break in on him when he is writing, and even when he isn’t working he can be nasty to those who annoy him. (“I’ll spurn you with my foot if you trouble me more,” he snarls at a drunken tavern tout [Turtledove 2]). He is a man who worries about money, bargaining ruthlessly to obtain a discount of sixpence on a book he wants to buy. And he is a man who enjoys a good meal, relishing a fine mess of eels and even making “a small, almost involuntary sound of pleasure” as he sucks the marrow out of a marrowbone (Turtledove 325).

Like not a few modern businessmen, Turtledove’s Will doesn’t concern himself overmuch with the problems and personal lives of those in his charge. “To you,” the company tireman says to him of one young actor, “he’s but a boy playing parts writ or by you or by some other poet. You think on him more than you think on a fancy robe some player wears, ay, but not much more” (Turtledove 163). And like most of us, this Will isn’t the best at everything he does—in fact, he isn’t even the best at everything he does for a living, being only, in Dick Burbage’s shrewd opinion, a “steady” performer rather than an outstanding one (Turtledove 37).

Also like most of us, Turtledove’s Shakespeare has a couple of really significant character flaws. In his case, these include a certain physical cowardice and a tendency to



want to revenge himself on those who have frightened or harmed him. Turtledove mentions the first trait in no fewer than three places in the book, again as if to stress the idea that his Will is no paragon of bravery, but rather a common man as terrified as any reader at the prospect of being caught and put on the rack. “He was not a particularly brave man,” Turtledove writes. “Counterfeiting courage on the stage, he’d seldom needed it in humdrum everyday life” (Turtledove 58). Will admits as much to himself a little later, reflecting that he “was no hero, and knew it too well. If they tortured him, he would tell all he knew, and quickly, too” (Turtledove 84).

Will’s second major flaw, an infrequently manifested but disturbingly vicious desire for vengeance, is related to his cowardice in that it springs from fear. It shows itself in only two circumstances in the book, but both are memorable. In the first, a man Will knows slightly calls out to him piteously as he is marched past to be burnt at the stake. Realizing that he himself has instantly become an object of suspicion as a result, Shakespeare quails, curses the man silently (“*Devils roast you black, Kelley, and use your guts for garters*” [Turtledove 9]), and actually looks forward to watching him die.

The second manifestation involves the Irish soldiers who have happily terrorized British citizens for years in the service of the Spaniards. Though they have never harmed him personally, Will has clearly always feared that they might. Once the rebellion succeeds, he does not hesitate to wish destruction on them and their country. “He remembered . . .,” Turtledove writes, “the shivers Isabella and Albert’s Irish mercenaries had always raised in him. ‘Let them have their deserts for bringing terror to honest Englishmen.’ What England had done in Ireland never entered his mind. He thought only of what England might soon do in Ireland once more” (437).

For all his warts, however—or precisely because of them—Harry Turtledove’s Shakespeare is a likeable man. That is to say, he is a human being real enough to pity and—when he is in as much trouble as Turtledove gets him into—to waste a bit of worry on. Given that this Will lives in a world almost as different from the one that actually was as from the one to come, this is quite an accomplishment. A writer capable enough to manage it, Turtledove knows better than to leave his decent, ordinary Shakespeare unhappy after all he’s been through.

Accordingly, after she regains the throne, his Queen Elizabeth is so grateful to Shakespeare for the part he played in ousting the Spaniards that she knights him, gives him three hundred fifty pounds, and—best of all—grants him whatever he wishes to ensure his happiness. In characteristically modest fashion, the poet requests only three boons: permission to perform King Philip unmolested; the release of Lope de Vega (making it possible for *that* future writer of genius to fulfill his own destiny); and the dissolution of his marriage so that he may wed Kate the serving woman. Elizabeth is happy to comply, provided that Will settle a hundred fifty pounds of his fortune on Anne and his daughters. It makes for a bit of a fairy-tale ending, but in this kingdom that so clearly never was, that seems only appropriate.

## Sarah Hoyt: Introduction

In Ill Met by Moonlight (2001), the first of a three-book series by Sarah Hoyt, we fly (as it were on fairies' wings) from the relatively rational worlds of historical fiction and alternative history to that of full-blown fantasy. Full-blown, but not simple—for though Ms. Hoyt's tale of calculating, power-hungry elves who kidnap Anne Shakespeare and her baby and draw a young Will Shakespeare into their schemes may be read as pure fantasy, it is much more than that. It is also a murder mystery in which the victims are none other than Oberon and Titania, and in which the determined "detective," their shape-shifting son "Quicksilver," bears a striking resemblance to a well known Danish prince. In addition, it provides an admittedly farfetched but undeniably interesting solution to the problem of how an undereducated country boy like Will Shakespeare could have written such magnificent plays and poetry—if indeed he did, as Christopher Marlowe, who introduces and concludes the novel, seems to doubt.

## Sarah Hoyt

Hoyt's tale begins with a nineteen-year-old Will Shakespeare arriving home after a hard but unexceptional day teaching nursery school to find his house empty, his wife Anne gone, and his baby daughter's crib tenanted by a tree branch roughly carved in the shape of a child. Within moments, his teenaged sister Joan arrives to offer their half-deranged mother's assessment of the situation: "Nan," she tells him, has run off with the "velvet-clad gentlemen" who've been visiting her for some time now while Will is at work (Hoyt 4). She and baby Susannah left this morning, "before the sun came up, amid a large company, with twinkling lights all around" (Hoyt 13).

Though Will thinks of his weird mother as being “like a witch poring over her cauldron, brewing lies and plots around Nan” (Hoyt 13), he has a bad feeling about the empty house and creepy doll. Hoping that Nan has only gone home to Shottery to help with the birth of her sister-in-law’s soon-expected child, he sets off through the Arden Forest to fetch her. But once surrounded by the dark trees, he sees a sudden bright light that gradually resolves itself into a vast, transparent castle hanging in mid-air. Inside it, in an enormous salon thronged with glittering courtiers and ladies, he spies Nan. She seems to be dancing—and having a very good time—with a handsome fellow who looks like some kind of king.

In the next chapter, we find out the truth—that Nan and Susannah have been kidnapped by the elf king Sylvanus, whose mortal wife has recently died giving birth to a daughter. Nan is to be the little princess’s wet nurse. However, this isn’t all that Sylvanus expects. It seems that Nan will also be replacing the dead queen upon the elven throne and in the king’s bed.

Sylvanus, as the kidnapping gambit hints, is far from a merry old soul. On the contrary, he rules both his realm and his brother, Quicksilver, ruthlessly. In the upside down world of the elves, the younger Quicksilver is the rightful heir to the throne, but he is powerless against his tricky older brother. Nevertheless, when he learns that Sylvanus has stolen the kingdom from him by engineering the deaths of their parents Oberon and Titania at the hands of a mortal, it occurs to Quicksilver that he might steal it back the same way. He is wandering through Arden Forest working on the problem of how to acquire a human henchman when Will Shakespeare appears. Will, of course, is on his way to Shottery to look for his missing wife, and Quicksilver spots him just as he is

mesmerized by the sight of the fairy palace, which—unlike most humans—he seems to be able to see. Realizing that he has found the instrument of his revenge, the sly Quicksilver promptly shape-shifts into a stunningly beautiful “dark lady” (Hoyt 72) and approaches.

What sort of Shakespeare does Quicksilver—or “Lady Silver,” as he now calls himself—see before him in the Arden Forest? Thanks to chapter one, we already know a few things about him. He is a young man of great hopes and dreams who has so far been mired in a life of small-town drudgery as the result of his meager education and the financial help he gives his hard-luck, paranoid parents. He loves his wife and daughter and believes that Nan loves him, but he is insecure—thanks in part to his odd mother’s mutterings—about Nan’s faithfulness. He seems to be gentle with babies and kind to animals. Now, through Quicksilver’s calculating eyes, we also learn that physically, he is very much the romantic hero:

This looked scarcely more than a raw boy, with overlong bones beneath supple skin, his angles and jagged ends showing only a hint of future manly power. The hair on his chin was no more than a dispirited feathery growth.

Yet his skin glowed as pale and even and smooth as Lady Ariel’s, And his forehead rose noble and broad. His small pink lips held an unexpected hint of stubborn strength. His dark hair fell in soft curls to his shoulders. His yellow-brown eyes were the eyes of a falcon intent on the chase.

Not unpleasant to the eye, the young man might have been mistaken for one of the elven king’s own guards. . . . (Hoyt 39)

Clearly, despite his dispirited beard, this Shakespeare is a handsome fellow. It is no wonder that Nan loves him, whatever her cavorting with the elf king may hint to the contrary.

In fact, back in the palace, Nan is already thinking about escape. Sylvanus may be

handsome, but he is no Will. Beneath the elf's admirable exterior, Nan senses the kind of arrogant, controlling male she married Will to get away from, the kind of man who, like her father, would use a belt or a switch—or, in this case, elven magic—to subdue a woman. Her Will is different, in part because he is so young. "Still in many ways a child," he has been led by Nan, "by the hand and on tiptoe, through the threshold of adulthood" (Hoyt 57). Will is unworldly, as well. Anne thinks of him as a "young dreamer with scholarly notions" who "might know by heart the arguments of long-dead Romans, but had no idea how the bread was made that she set in front of him every night, or how the ale was brewed that he drank daily" (Hoyt 61).

Such a man, Nan had instinctively known, would "never try to restrain her, not even from walking alone the paths of Arden Forest" (Hoyt 71). Called the "shrew of Shottery" before her marriage (Hoyt 71), this hardheaded Nan Hathaway Shakespeare deeply misses her "quiet, young Will with his diffident ways; his vile, tentative poems, full of puns and little else; his slavish, yet real devotion" (Hoyt 71). One way or another, she is determined to return to him.

Back in Stratford, however, Will begins to understand that the story Lady Silver told him before "she" kissed him passionately and disappeared is true: Nan and Susannah have not gone to Shottery. They have indeed been kidnapped by elves, which means that there may not be any way for him to get them back except by doing Quicksilver's bidding—i.e., by killing King Sylvanus. But things are complicated in Elvenland. The wily Quicksilver/Lady Silver has neglected to mention that, even if Will agrees to kill Sylvanus and then somehow manages to do it, he will most likely die as a result—mortals aren't allowed to kill Elf Kings. As if this weren't enough of a glitch in the rescue plan,

Sylvanus puts a kind of elven “contract” out on Will (Nan is sure to be more pliant, the elf king reasons, if her husband is out of the way).

When Quicksilver learns that a hit squad of elves is en route to waylay Will in the woods, he rushes to the rescue—only to find that, like Hamlet, he is unable to bring himself to dispatch the chief assassin, who turns out to be his best friend. The friend has no such scruples about murdering Quicksilver, however, and he is about to finish the elf prince off when a gritty Will stabs him in the shoulder with an old dagger he carries for protection. Though humans aren’t supposed to be able to kill elves so easily, the dagger does the trick; “Pyrite” dies gaudily à la Mercutio (“Ask for me tomorrow and you shall find me a grave man. . . . A plague on both your houses. . . . You have made worm’s meat of me” [Hoyt 105]), and his three henchmen flee.

Quicksilver knows that as soon as they get back to the palace, he is going to be in trouble. But—partly to protect his potential henchman and partly out of curiosity about the oddly powerful dagger—he escorts Will safely out of the woods. Before he starts back to try and explain his role in Pyrite’s death, he discovers two things: that the dagger, which is enchanted, is likely the weapon that murdered his parents; and that Will Shakespeare found it in his father’s workshop.

Sarah Hoyt’s Shakespeare may be a diffident, nineteen-year-old stripling, but he is a determined and inquiring one. “All his life,” she writes, “he’d been like a curious fox, nosing here and there, and routing all about . . . for the joy of knowing what hid behind every rock and peeked from behind every tree . . .” (Hoyt 128). Hoyt’s foxy Will isn’t just inquisitive; he’s also smart. Unlike his younger brother Gilbert, who labors over a Latin essay “full of corrections and erasures,” Will’s “quick mind” has allowed him “to

sail through grammar school with little effort and time enough for pranks and carousing” (Hoyt 141). It doesn’t take this quick-witted Will long to discover that his father knows all about the enchanted dagger, and that this is why he’s become more and more paranoid over the years. In fact, John Shakespeare is the mortal who murdered Oberon and Titania for Sylvanus, and for half a decade now the dead elf king and queen have been haunting him.

Thanks to his native intelligence, as well as to information and help provided by his nosy sister Joan and a curiously elf-wise drinking companion named Christopher Sly, Will also finds out about Quicksilver’s dual sexual nature (albeit after he’s spent a wild romantic night with Lady Silver). What is more, he not only gets the truth out of Quicksilver regarding how to rescue Nan and Susannah without losing his own life, but he also (quite innocently) causes the elf prince to fall in love with him. With his love for Will mightily increasing the wattage of his magical powers, Quicksilver successfully battles his brother and regains his kingdom. He then reunites Will, Nan and Susannah, pardons Will’s father, and—love no doubt making him generous—tells the young couple, “for your pains, you shall have the good will of elvenkind as long as you both shall live” (Hoyt 271).

Everything has worked out wonderfully, but in an epilogue narrated by Christopher Marlowe (who, we learn, has enjoyed the favors of both Lady Silver *and* Quicksilver), Hoyt reminds her readers that elven love has its price. The Will who leaves the fairy glen at the end of the story is not the Will of the book’s beginning. “Fantastical tragedies and mad farces,” notes a prophetic Marlowe, his eye dripping blood, “hatch within him like eggs, laid by some mystical insect and waiting only the right time to let



their wondrous, magical engendering come to life” (Hoyt 274).

Marlowe isn’t sure, in fact, that this *is* a happy ending. He ponders, “And is Will—who will leave wife and daughter and mother and father behind and trade his small domestic happiness for a spotlight in a world made stage—better or worse off than if he had never come across the unexplained marvels of elvenkind?” (Hoyt 274) Answering his own question with an airy, “Who is to say?” (Hoyt 274), Marlowe smilingly considers the possibility that this version—the accepted version—of Will’s life may in fact be a false one. His bloody eye suddenly healing as if by elven magic, he speculates:

Maybe Will settled down in Stratford, and plied his father’s trade, and became a master glover and a dealer in wool. And perhaps I, Marlowe, never died in a tavern brawl, with a dagger through the eye, and was, and am, hailed as the magnificent playwright of Great Elizabeth’s age. Or maybe, just maybe, both stories—the play you watch and the play you live—are just tales told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing. (Hoyt 274)

Whatever it signifies, Ill Met By Moonlight, with its Shakespeare-spouting elves, unique take on the Dark Lady and Southampton, and characters drawn playfully from the plays is at least good fun. The second and third books in Sarah Hoyt’s Shakespeare series are, respectively, All Night Awake (2002) and Any Man So Daring (2003).

## Robert Nye: Introduction

Robert Nye's The Late Mr. Shakespeare (1999) is something of an anomaly among the books discussed here, since Shakespeare is more nearly a presence in it than an actual character. The book, which we are told is to be a biography, is ostensibly being written fifty years after the playwright's death by an eighty-one-year-old man nicknamed Pickleherring. A former boy player in Shakespeare's company, Pickleherring is writing his book as an "answer to the plague" (Nye 93) and to postpone his own death. But he is also following in the footsteps of fellow players John Heminges and Henry Condell, who (he tells us) assembled the First Folio of Shakespeare's plays forty-three years earlier. Quoting them, Pickleherring insists that he, too, works "without ambition either of self-profit or fame, but only to keep the memory of so worthy a friend and fellow alive as was our Shakespeare" (qtd. in Nye 12).

Driven by his desire to make readers remember Shakespeare and think for themselves about the things he tells them about him, the old player uses personal memories, stories he says he has heard, and mementos he claims to have collected to construct a "biography" that is by moments enlightening, amusing, outlandish, and shocking.

## Robert Nye

Pickleherring has good reason to think that the public's memory of Shakespeare may be fading. In 1666, the year in which he is writing (Jokinen), his dead master's reputation is in serious decline. "It is much to be deplored," he grumbles, "that people nowadays find it convenient to look down their enlightened noses at him. I know the

modern taste calls him vulgar and crabbed, an uncouth spirit. I say his day was good, and that it will surely come again when the French fashions that swept into England with King Charles II have gone out again” (Nye 117).

During the course of his narrative, Pickleherring restates his dual intentions of resuscitating Shakespeare’s memory and staving off his own death repeatedly. He insists, variously, that “I write to prove that I am still alive, and that so is Mr Shakespeare”; that “My purpose is to postpone and even exorcise my own death by writing the Life of Mr Shakespeare, and by certain ‘magical operations’ with words to make him live again before your eyes”; and that Shakespeare was “a man who lived in the old days not so long ago, and who will live again, if you’ll hear me out, for as long as this book lasts, at least” (Nye 117; 192; 40). His problem, of course, is how to manage it: how to reanimate the dead Bard thoroughly enough through the tales he tells that—at least for a little while—he, too, will triumph over death.

Such a task would no doubt befuddle most of us, but it doesn’t worry Pickleherring, who—when he isn’t ogling the prostitutes who live below him through a knothole in the flooring—unleashes such a barrage of rumor, gossip and innuendo about that “sweet little rogue,” Shakespeare (Nye 194) that it would be little short of a miracle if the dead playwright did *not* wake up. Have we wondered, for example, how Shakespeare became so sexually precocious that he managed to get a twenty-six-year-old woman pregnant when he was just eighteen? Well, Pickleherring tells us, it was because his mother Mary started him out early, fondling his genitalia in the cradle. Not that it mattered, the old player adds, since Anne Hathaway may well have raped him during his teens. Then too, there is the possibility that Shakespeare was the bastard son of the

Reverend Bretchgirdle, the vicar of Stratford's Holy Trinity Church, who "fattered" Mary Shakespeare to exhaustion one day when her husband John was off on business (Nye 33-37). And Mary may have been a witch, by the way . . . but that is part of another story.

What Mr. Nye is doing through Pickleherring, of course, is only what any intern attempting to keep a moribund patient from flat-lining in an Emergency Room would do: figuratively speaking, he is applying defibrillator paddles and turning on the juice. It doesn't matter if some of his tales aren't true, or if we decide they are just too ridiculous or shocking to believe. His aim isn't to make us believe; it is to bring his patient—Shakespeare—back to life by getting us to raise our eyebrows and take notice. Pickleherring assures us, "These fictions are jocose, and not officious. These fictions are fantastic, and not pernicious. These fictions are a comedy, and not malicious. . . . Your author gives an account of his origins and originals, to feed a need for stories, and to supply a Life" (Nye 40).

Yet Pickleherring isn't, or at least isn't always, making his "fictions" up as he goes along. Rather, he is engaging in "country history" (Nye 68), which, he explains, is:

. . . a tale told by various idiots on the village green, all busy contradicting themselves in the name of a common truth. It exaggerates and enflames what it talks about: It delights in lies and gossip. It is unwise, Wild and mystical and passionate, it is ruled by the heart. . . . Easy to mock, it always strains belief. But sometimes it catches the ghostly coat-tails of what is otherwise ungraspable. It is the only possible way of accounting for Mr. Shakespeare. . . .

What matters is that it's told tales I am telling you. Tales told me. Twice-told tales. Tales, tales, tales, tales. . . .

And if some of my told tales are tall, that's because in the minds of the tellers the late Mr William Shakespeare was a giant. (Nye 68-69)

Working out just how much of Pickleherring's biography is "country history" and

how much is—as he also calls it at one point—“a pack of lies” (Nye 42) is a task for scholars, not readers of popular fiction, but that does not matter. The goal is to resurrect Shakespeare, not to demystify him. Besides, as Pickleherring reminds us, “I only tell you stories about Shakespeare. I only tell you tales which I have heard. You are not required to believe any particular one of them. . . . But from the over-all impress of the various stories may you perhaps come to know our poet thoroughly. One story might cancel out another. But the whole book will be more than the sum of its parts” (Nye 38).

Seemingly intent on presenting us with as many “parts” as possible, Pickleherring piles up chapter after short chapter (the book contains a hundred), each dedicated to an item or two of Shakespearean lore. Predictably, he digs into the hot topics of the Bard’s life with gusto, rekindling Shakespeare with the sheer heat of his bluster and frequently “resolving” controversies with the help of his own “observations.” (Something, he assures us, definitely *was* going on between Shakespeare and Southampton, though the self-absorbed Earl’s part in the playwright’s life was actually “negligible” in the end [Nye 260]. Also, Emilia Lanyer, who was *not* the Dark Lady, “favoured sodomy to satisfy men’s lusts” [Nye 281-82] . . . and Shakespeare’s tennis partner John Florio enjoyed “torturing rats” [Nye 327]).

It would all be only painstaking scholarship leavened with good, not-so-clean fun were it not for an unsettling subtext involving Pickleherring’s own past. We learn it piecemeal as the story unfolds, but what we finally understand—i.e., what Mr. Nye wants us to realize, despite his elderly narrator’s clear devotion to the playwright’s memory—is that this Shakespeare has ruined Pickleherring’s life.

Meeting him by accident when he was a lonely, fatherless boy of thirteen, Nye’s

Shakespeare simply appropriated Pickleherring, giving him over, body and soul, to the transvestite theater in which he made his own living. Himself excited at the thought of boys in female dress, he then began to engage Pickleherring in erotic play that, together with the women's roles he had to assume and the women's clothes he had to wear onstage, so confused the boy's sexuality that he never achieved normal maturity.

Instead, Pickleherring grew into a mixed-up, pathetic man addicted to cross-dressing. His marriage to a woman he loved but apparently couldn't satisfy sexually ended in her suicide after she learned that he had hidden and watched as she had sex with a lover. Now, as he writes his admiring biography of Shakespeare, Pickleherring lives in poverty-stricken old age above a brothel and watches a young whore he fancies himself in love with service female clients in the room below. He presses on with his writing, telling us not to worry about him even as the flames of the Great Fire of London reach the building (Jokinen), because he is the actor for whom "Mr Shakespeare" wrote Ariel, and so he will be able to "fly away" (Nye 398).

For all its jocularitas, and for all the unfeigned praise it heaps on Shakespeare, Pickleherring's tale is thus also an indictment. The things the old player divulges about his past are not "twice-told tales" (Nye 68), as his various bits of hearsay about the playwright are, but his own memories of things that were done to him. He produces them one by one, almost as unconscious asides, over the course of the book, often relating them with the kind of brazen flippancy that typically hides embarrassment and pain. "Call me a little epitome of the leavings of Dame Nature's workshop, a compound of all sorts and sexes, a whey-faced hermaphrodite. I shall not care to quarrel with those callings. I am what I am, and William Shakespeare made me," he insists (Nye 374).

Like the images of Pedro Almodóvar's film Bad Education (Mala educación) (2004) (Marsh), which tells the story of the gradual disintegration of the life of a Spanish boy molested by a priest, such words leave a taste of revulsion and pity in the mouth. True, Pickleherring isn't "real." But he could be—his personal revelations and the completeness of his forgiveness are both plausible and poignant enough. Recalling Ariel's hopeful, approval-seeking words to Prospero at the end of The Tempest, he tells us:

Note Ariel's last words to Prospero, my words to Mr Shakespeare in that part:

*Was't well done?*

That is the only question I care to ask. His answer to it, spoken aside, still more than contents me:

*Bravely, my diligence. Thou shalt be free.*

I always took that for my approbation. My master's approval of my career in his service. (Nye 374)

As for Shakespeare, he has become a more discomfiting character in Mr. Nye's book than most of us are used to or would like him to be. But there is no doubt that he is also a real seeming one—he is alive. And that, after all, is what Pickleherring set out to accomplish in the first place.

Though it preceded The Late Mr. Shakespeare in Great Britain, Nye's Mrs. Shakespeare: The Complete Works: A Novel followed it in the United States. Published here in 2000, it, too, is a book ostensibly being written by someone other than its real author. This time, Nye's fictive author is Anne Shakespeare. Setting out to relate the "true history of how it was between me and Mr Shakespeare" (Nye, *Mrs. Shakespeare* 23), Anne's bawdy story fills in details Pickleherring left out, or in some cases could not have known—e.g., just how "negligible" a figure Henry Wriothesley actually was in her husband's life, and what sort of sex her famous husband taught her to prefer.

## Fiction for Young Adults and Children

### Gary Blackwood: Introduction

The world of the boy player in Elizabethan acting troupes has stimulated the imagination of a number of writers of books for children and young adults. Gary Blackwood, Susan Cooper, Anthony Horowitz, and J. B. Cheaney have all written “J” (Juvenile) or “YA” (Young Adult) novels in which the main characters are young male actors and William Shakespeare is, so to speak, a member of the supporting cast.

Blackwood’s YA Shakespeare Stealer Series comprises three books: The Shakespeare Stealer (1998), Shakespeare’s Scribe (2000), and Shakespeare’s Spy (2003). The hero of all three books is a boy named Widge, a hard-luck orphan apprenticed at the age of seven to a dishonest apothecary named Dr. Bright. In The Shakespeare Stealer, Bright—a character based on the historical inventor of a kind of shorthand—teaches Widge a shorthand system that enables the boy to copy down human speech as fast as it is uttered. When Widge is fourteen and adept at the shorthand, the acquisitive apothecary sells him to Simon Bass, an unscrupulous businessman who intends to use his new employee’s skill to pirate the plays of famous dramatist William Shakespeare.

By pure luck, Widge’s life of crime is short-lived: after he is caught skulking around their theater, the Chamberlain’s Men take him on as an apprentice player instead of handing him over to the authorities; the rest of The Shakespeare Stealer chronicles his adventures during his first year with the company. In Shakespeare’s Scribe, Widge’s friendship with Blackwood’s mysteriously irascible Bard deepens when he becomes Shakespeare’s de facto secretary after the playwright breaks an arm. Shakespeare’s Spy, the final book in this series that presents a more nuanced Shakespeare than is common in



works for young adults, sees Widge both helping to uncover a surprising spy within the company and also becoming one himself— on Shakespeare’s orders.

## Gary Blackwood

At the opening of The Shakespeare Stealer, the year is 1601, and Shakespeare is both successful and well known. Bass describes him to Widge as “a poet of quality, perhaps of genius” (Blackwood, *Stealer* 33). Taken to London by Falconer, Bass’s menacing henchman, Widge is given the daunting task of attending a performance of Hamlet and copying the entire play as it unfolds on the stage. Though Widge’s shorthand is up to the task, the play proves too engrossing—he forgets to take notes and has to beg Falconer to let him see it again. But when Widge returns to the theater, something unexpected happens: though he manages to copy the whole play, he is discovered hiding in a balcony by the company cannoneer, who has come upstairs to set off a charge during the action. Distracted by Widge, the man’s shot goes astray and starts a fire in the thatch of the Globe’s roof. Worse still, in the crowd’s rush to leave the theater, a pickpocket steals the wallet in which Widge has secreted his shorthand Hamlet.

Thinking that he has simply dropped the play in the crush, Widge tries to reenter the theater, in which the fire has at last been put out. But he is caught by Thomas Pope, a member of the company. Forced to come up with an excuse for his presence, Widge can think of nothing better than to insist he wants to become a player. To his dismay, the Chamberlain’s Men believe him and take him on as an apprentice. Assuming that the pirated play is still somewhere in the building and frightened that Falconer will find him before he locates it, Widge decides, quite literally, to play along—he will be an

apprentice actor until he recovers his Hamlet, at which point he will run off with it and hand it over to Falconer. The next morning, his life as a player begins.

As it turns out, there is a great deal to do as an apprentice player at the Globe, but very little of it involves the company's poet. "You won't see much of Mr. Shakespeare," Sander Cooke, another boy player, tells Widge (Blackwood 79). "He's a private man, and a very busy one" (Blackwood 79). In fact, it isn't until after Widge accidentally splatters Shakespeare with a brushful of whitewash one day that he meets the playwright and gets a taste of his acerbic wit. "You don't want that brush to escape you," Shakespeare remarks dryly when he happens to see Widge learning to apply stage makeup later the same day (Blackwood, *Stealer* 105). When Widge blushes, recalling the painting accident, Shakespeare adds, "There, you see, you've reddened your whole face" (Blackwood, *Stealer* 105). Kindhearted Sander reassures Widge that Shakespeare is "a bit prickly at times, but not mean-spirited" (Blackwood, *Stealer* 105).

Prickly Mr. Shakespeare may be, but he and the rest of the Chamberlain's Men are far kinder masters than any Widge has known, and as time goes by the boy becomes less and less enthusiastic about stealing the play and taking it to Simon Bass. How Widge manages to avoid both crime and punishment and find a permanent home with the Chamberlain's Men is, in fact, the real focus of this novel in which William Shakespeare is actually only a minor character. But Shakespeare does peek from the wings now and then as Widge's story unfolds, and when he does, Blackwood lets fall tantalizing bits of information about the kind of man the players think he is. On one such occasion, the observant Widge watches surreptitiously as the dark-haired poet whitens his face to play Hamlet's father's ghost, noting, "He had finished repairing his ghostly pallor and now sat

staring at his reflection, not as if assessing his appearance, but as though the looking glass were a scrying glass and, like the gypsies he resembled, he was seeing into another time or place. And perhaps he was. Perhaps he was preparing his next play in his mind, even as he prepared himself physically for this one” (Blackwood, *Stealer* 115).

Unfortunately for Widge, the sharp-tongued Shakespeare catches him looking. “Do you have nothing better to do than lounge about in the tiring-room?” he demands (Blackwood, *Stealer* 115). After Shakespeare leaves, Widge wonders aloud whether he was truly angry. Chris Beeston, a young man playing the part of Laertes, answers, “He’s a hard one to know. They say that, in his younger days, he was a good companion—and he still can be on occasion. But much of the time he’s withdrawn and pensive. If having a touch of genius also means having so strong a dose of melancholy, I’ll settle for merely being extremely talented. (Blackwood, *Stealer* 116)

Later in the story, a typically “pensive and self-absorbed” Shakespeare passes three of the boy players picnicking in a nearby wood without noticing them (Blackwood, *Stealer* 151). When Widge asks the others whether they shouldn’t at least say hello to the poet, he is told, “Better not. If he’s mulling over some problem in a play, he won’t welcome the interruption” (Blackwood, *Stealer* 151). Curious, Widge asks in his Yorkshire accent, “Why is ‘a so glum and gloomy, do you think?” (Blackwood, *Stealer* 151). His friend Julian—who later turns out, in this 1998 contemporary of Shakespeare in Love, to be a disguised girl—thinks it has something to do with a “thwarted love affair” (Blackwood, *Stealer* 151). But Sander Cooke maintains, as Grace Tiffany might, that there is another cause for the poet’s somberness. “If you want to know what I think,” he says, “I think it’s his son that’s the cause of it. . . . The boy grew ill and died while Mr.

Shakespeare was here in London. I doubt that he's ever forgiven himself" (Blackwood, *Stealer* 152). In the end, no one seems to know why the poet acts as he does, and a philosophical Widge has the last word when he offers, "Perhaps . . . 'a's simply ruled by a melancholy humour" (Blackwood, *Stealer* 152).

At the opening of Shakespeare's Scribe, the second book in the series, plague breaks out in London and the theaters are closed until further notice. Hoping to bring in some revenue during the down time until the Globe can reopen, the Chamberlain's Men go on tour. Unfortunately, their first few destinations are close enough to London to have seen a few cases of the disease, and local authorities wary of possibly infected strangers often send them on their way without allowing them to perform. When the company is asked to leave Newbury, a town that seems untouched by the plague, player/manager John Heminges finally resists. The Chamberlain's Men have a license to play, he maintains, and play they shall. The rest of the company agrees, playbills are handed round, and by show time a crowd of eager playgoers surrounds the company's wagon-stage.

Things seem to be looking up, but suddenly a group of armed constables arrives. Though the ever-sanguine Heminges tries to reason with them, a fight soon breaks out and several players are hurt. Unfortunately, one of them is William Shakespeare, whose right arm is broken when he tries to defend his brother Ned. Widge draws on the skills he acquired as an apothecary's apprentice to splint the poet's arm and even rig up a cast for it. But it is the boy's knowledge of shorthand that proves especially useful in the end. It seems that Shakespeare has been working on a new comedy to be performed at court when the company returns to London, and with his arm broken he will need help to finish

it in time. When Robert Armin tells Widge about the playwright's predicament, the boy is nonplussed. "But . . . when could 'a possibly find the time to write?" he asks (Blackwood, *Scribe* 66). Widge begins to understand the strain under which Shakespeare always works when Armin answers, "When the rest of us are abed" (Blackwood, *Scribe* 66).

Widge's temporary job as Shakespeare's scribe provides Blackwood with an opportunity both to show readers a more personal—and personable—side of the playwright and also to depict him at work writing a play. By foregrounding Shakespeare in scenes with just one other character, and that one a young apprentice whose help he needs and appreciates, Blackwood effectively creates an atmosphere in which the playwright can be friendlier and more forthcoming than usual, while also being very much the working writer. This Mr. Shakespeare is a painstaking craftsman who can still show the caustic edge he possessed in The Shakespeare Stealer but who now exhibits a number of more amiable qualities as well.

Despite the pain in his arm, for example, this Shakespeare has only praise and thanks for Widge's medical assistance, telling the boy, "you did as well as any surgeon, and I'm grateful" (Blackwood, *Scribe* 87). In addition, Blackwood's Bard can both make and take a wry joke at his own expense, poking fun at himself for procrastinating on one occasion and breaking into a grudging smile on another when Widge implies that he is being overly dramatic and a bit vain. And though he sometimes barks at Widge, this Shakespeare never patronizes him; when Widge asks just what it is that makes a successful play, he answers patiently, "A play is like a balance, you see. If on one end of the arm, you place a certain quantity of loyalty and cleverness and strong will,

on the other end you need an equal weight of something else, to offset it” (Blackwood, *Scribe* 173).

Perhaps the most interesting possibility that Blackwood explores through the unlikely partnership of Shakespeare and Widge is that of the playwright’s not having been an especially fluent writer. For Blackwood’s Bard, composition is a slow and laborious process, and the results often dissatisfy him deeply. Widge remarks:

From copying out the actors’ sides, I was used to reading Mr. Shakespeare’s undisciplined scrawl; nevertheless, I found it hard to decipher these words. A good half of them had been crossed out. In addition, there were black blotches everywhere, as though an ink plague had struck the paper.

‘They tell me,’ said Mr. Shakespeare, ‘there’s a rumor about London to the effect that I never blot out a line. Obviously it isn’t so.’ He sighed and added ruefully, ‘Would that it were.’  
(Blackwood, *Scribe* 74)

In a later scene, Shakespeare warns Widge dolefully that becoming a dramatist is a thankless pursuit. “Never attempt to write a play, Widge,” he tells the apprentice (Blackwood, *Scribe* 174). When Widge answers, “I had no plans to,” Shakespeare says, “Good, They always betray you. When you’re only imagining them, they seem so ideal, so full of promise and possibility. Then, when you try to get them down on paper, they turn on you and refuse to live up to your expectations.” (Blackwood, *Scribe* 174).

For Blackwood’s Shakespeare, this “getting them down on paper” is often an agonizing business that proceeds, as Widge tells another boy player, “like the wheel of Fortune . . . now up, now down” (Blackwood, *Scribe* 91). The poet is hampered by a kind of constant, partial writer’s block that, each session, must be broken through before the flood of ideas and language that often follows can gush forth. When it doesn’t, this Shakespeare can be harsh, as the following excerpt from one of his sessions with Widge

shows:

He lay back on the bed with a slight groan, and continued. ‘Still *Lafeu*: “Will you see her, sire, and know her business?” *King*: “Bring her on, *Lafeu*.” Oh, God. That sounds as though she’s a platter of meat. “Bring her *hence*, *Lafeu*, that we may . . . that we may . . .” That we may *what*? That we may admire? That we may wonder? Damn!’ He struck the bed a blow of frustration with his good arm, which jostled his injured limb; he at once cried out and pressed it to his chest. ‘That was stupid,’ he muttered brokenly.

‘Can I get you something?’

‘No, no . . . unless it’s a new brain, one that works.’

‘It sounded well enough to me,’ I ventured.

‘Yes, well, what do you know?’ he snapped. (Blackwood, *Scribe* 76-77).

Afterwards, the poet is apologetic; clearly, it isn’t his nature that makes him so surly. Rather, Blackwell seems to want readers to understand that it is the constant pressure to produce new plays that “de-natures” his Shakespeare. It fills the man with an anxiety that may, in fact, be the cause of his writer’s block, and that manifests itself in his short-tempered outbursts at Widge. When Shakespeare finally succeeds in breaking through his mental barriers and coming up with needed characters or verses, the transformation in his personality is immediate. The observant Widge recalls one such session, during which the poet has a sudden epiphany regarding a villain he needs for

#### All’s Well that Ends Well:

Wearily he closed his eyes and rubbed at his forehead. Then abruptly he stopped and raised his head, his eyes wide open. ‘I know,’ he repeatedly (sic) softly. ‘I know. I know who he is.’

‘Who *who* is?’

‘The someone. The balancing someone. The despicable someone.’

As I had seen it do before, Mr. Shakespeare’s mood transformed in the space of a few seconds from melancholy to manic. ‘He’s a soldier—a friend of Bertram’s, but not a true friend. He’s a braggart. He’s deceitful. He’s a coward. Bertram, though, will not hear a word against him—like Helena, he’s loyal—’ Mr. Shakespeare waved his good hand at me. ‘Go back, go back,’ he commanded.

‘Back?’ I echoed.

‘To Act One. We’ll write him in.’

I flipped frantically through the pages of the script. ‘What’s his name to be then?’

‘I don’t know. Something despicable. *Menteur. Poltron*. It doesn’t matter. Just write.’

And we were off, galloping once again. (Blackwood, *Scribe* 175).

As debilitating for this Shakespeare as the pressure to churn out play after play clearly is, it isn’t his only stressor. Blackwood also introduces another source of anxiety—a distasteful Shakespeare family member whose sole function in the series seems to be to engender conflict. This time, it isn’t the much-maligned Anne or one of Shakespeare’s problematic children that causes the bother. In Shakespeare’s Scribe, it is the poet’s brother Edmund, also known as Ned.

The Ned that Grace Tiffany creates in Will is a likeable, imaginative young man who pays the ultimate price for his dedication to acting by working too hard and dying young. In contrast, Gary Blackwood’s is a complaining malingerer more interested in other kinds of playing—specifically, gambling and womanizing—than in performing onstage. This is a Ned who has been in and out of three other acting troupes in the space of a year; who routinely sneaks off, against company rules, to play cards for money; who blithely sleeps through emergencies that see all the other players pitching in to help; and who even (though he does so inadvertently) causes his brother’s broken arm. Amusingly, Blackwood’s Ned is also a braggart who claims to have had to leave Stratford for suspiciously familiar reasons: he poached deer, he says, and got a girl pregnant out of wedlock.

Considering the professional and familial burdens he has to bear, it’s surprising that Blackwood’s Shakespeare doesn’t take his troubles out on his fellow players or on the company’s apprentices to a greater degree than he does. But apart from seeming a bit



tart and moody at times, he keeps his troubles to himself, and the fact that he shoulders his responsibilities honestly and without complaint is a lesson to the orphaned Widge. The book's main storyline involves a suspicious character who claims to be Widge's father, and it is the impression made on the apprentice by such men as upright Robert Armin and grumpy-but-honorable William Shakespeare that causes him, finally, to view his putative parent with open eyes.

In all three of the books in the series, Blackwood paints a picture of life in Elizabethan London as well as one of life in Shakespeare's theatrical company. Besides re-creating the day-to-day activities of the Chamberlain's Men, he also always introduces important issues of the time for Widge to engage in some way. Among those he tackles in Shakespeare's Spy, the final title in the series, are the plight of Catholics in an increasingly Puritan culture; the impending death of Queen Elizabeth and its ramifications for London's theatrical companies; the rivalry among the various companies; and the omnipresent Black Plague. As usual, the story centers around Widge, who tells it in the first person. Also as before, William Shakespeare is a secondary character. The reader again learns about him through the comments of other characters and through scenes between him and Widge, whom he has gotten to know and trust in the earlier books.

If Shakespeare depends upon and enjoys the company of a lowly apprentice like Widge to an unusual degree in Shakespeare's Spy, he does so both innocently and understandably. The hardworking, diffident apprentice is the antithesis of the playwright's brother Ned, who is back for an encore performance in this last book in the series. Shakespeare's daughter Judith turns up in Shakespeare's Spy as well, in the company of an odd gentleman who for some reason needs to be provided with a disguise

and who is strangely loathe to speak about religion. Blackwood's Judith, unlike Grace Tiffany's sensitive and imaginative girl, is a bold and impertinent hussy with whom the innocent Widge promptly falls in puppy love. Between her titanic shopping binges and Ned's adamant, undisclosed demands, Shakespeare's cup of troubles is soon brimming. But there are other problems as well. Someone seems to be pilfering the company's expensive costumes, and even more worryingly, the Queen's Privy Council has begun to take such a great interest in the religious content of some of Shakespeare's plays that shareholders Heminges, Shakespeare, and Armin begin to suspect the company may be harboring a spy.

The mole responsible for both the theft of the costumes and the unhealthy interest of the Privy Councilors turns out to be working for Philip Henslowe, owner of the rival Fortune Theatre, the home of the Admiral's Men. But though the fact that the acquisitive Henslowe is behind the spying takes none of the Chamberlain's Men by surprise, the spy's identity does. It proves to be neither the scapegrace apprentice Sam nor the tiring-man Richard, but Ned Shakespeare who has been willing to ruin his brother in order to pay his gambling debts and stay out of jail.

Ned is responsible for something still worse, however. It was he who—again in exchange for either money or the leniency of the authorities—tipped the queen's pursuivants off to the identity of Judith Shakespeare's traveling companion. The man was not, as Judith had told Shakespeare, merely a recusant Catholic unwilling to pay his fines for missing Anglican church services, but Father John Gerard, a Jesuit priest sought by the Crown. Though her reasons may have been more altruistic than her uncle's, Judith seems to have been as ready to put her father and his company in jeopardy as Ned.

Ned Shakespeare is only one of the secret agents in Shakespeare's Spy, as it turns out. The other spy to whom the book's title refers is actually none other than Widge. For in order to discover the mole they suspect he has planted in *their* company, Shakespeare and Robert Armin send the apprentice to spy on Henslowe's troupe. It is only when Widge finds the key to the "cypher" in which Henslowe and his spy communicate that Ned is finally unmasked.

Given all the action and suspense in Shakespeare's Spy, Gary Blackwood has plenty of opportunities to demonstrate his Bard's courage and determination. His stalwart Shakespeare tells Widge that if Henslowe wants to wrest Ben Jonson's Sejanus from the Chamberlains, for example, "he had best be armed" (Blackwood, *Spy* 170). Not one to make idle threats, Blackwood's Shakespeare is at Robert Armin's side to take on the burly Henslowe when the rival theater owner sneaks in to steal the play.

Just as in the earlier books, he also continues to slave away doggedly at his writing both before and after the company's performances, though not always with success. When neophyte playwright Widge asks him what to do when inspiration doesn't come, this Shakespeare—sounding very much like the working writer Simon Hawke calls him—answers unapologetically, "When that happens . . . The only thing left to do is to steal from someone else" (Blackwood, *Spy* 122). Widge's startled look at this frank response prompts the poet to add dryly, "Come, now; you needn't look so dismayed. Don't you know that there are no new ideas in the world? Every story has been told—and lived—a hundred times before. The best we can hope for is to find some new way of telling them" (Blackwood, *Spy* 122).

Neither this Shakespeare's grit nor his occasional gruffness represents a departure

from the Bard that Blackwood created in The Shakespeare Stealer and Shakespeare's Scribe. But if Shakespeare's Spy essentially reiterates the poet readers met in the first two books of the series, it also pushes the envelope a bit regarding the playwright's family. Again and again in this last book, Blackwood lets readers know that his Bard is a man who has the same kinds of family troubles other men have—and maybe more of them than most. Concerning Ned's endless litany of complaints and problems, Widge says:

I was already more familiar with his troubles than I cared to be. They were predictable, in any case, nearly always involving either a game of chance, a drunken brawl, or an insult to someone's honor—very often a woman's. The most predictable thing was that Ned himself was never at fault. He was, he insisted, a mere victim of circumstances, condemned by Fate forever to be in the wrong place at the wrong time and in the wrong company. (Blackwood, *Spy* 40-41)

In fact, the apprentice reflects, “If he had been anyone but Mr. Shakespeare's brother, the company would surely have given him the chuck long ago” (Blackwood, *Spy* 36).

Yet even when Blackwood's Shakespeare finds out that Ned has betrayed him and the Chamberlain's Men and has also placed Father Gerard's life in danger, he shows more regret than anger. “He needed the money—,” this Shakespeare explains to Widge, “to pay off gambling debts, and bribe his way out of trouble with the law, and God knows what else. . . . *Money* . . . Would that it had never been invented” (Blackwood, *Spy* 219). Despite his disillusionment with his brother, this Shakespeare also asks the company to keep “the circumstances of Ned's departure . . . among ourselves” (Blackwood, *Spy* 221). “I don't wish to harm his chances of finding a position with another company,” he explains (Blackwood, *Spy* 221). Though such a request may certainly be seen as a self-serving attempt to shift the burden of a worthless relative from his own shoulders onto

another's, it feels more like evidence of the steadfast loyalty of an honorable brother in this case.

As for Shakespeare's troubles with his daughter, they are the kind that Blackwood's young teenaged readers and their parents should instantly recognize. Judith feels—and her feelings, at least in this regard, seem to be honest ones—neglected by a father whose profession keeps him away from home much of the time. She is so fed up with hearing that her father is busy writing plays that when Widge begs to be excused from an outing with her and an apprentice he dislikes, giving as an excuse the play he is writing, she snaps impatiently, “I might have known” (Blackwood, *Spy* 127). Widge's friend Sam remarks afterwards that he would bet “she's heard that very excuse from her father a hundred times, at least” (Blackwood, *Spy* 128).

But if Judith's sense that her father has neglected her is real, it is no less true that she makes the most of the situation. In the disrespectful way in which she speaks to Shakespeare in public; in the shopping spree during which she spends, Widge calculates, the equivalent of “a full year's wages for a prentice” without his consent (Blackwood, *Spy* 106); and especially in her lies regarding Father Gerard, Judith appears selfish, manipulative, and immature. What is more, she is blithely willing to broadcast what she sees as her father's faults to whomever she pleases whenever the whim takes her. To Widge, an underling whom she has just met, she says of Shakespeare, “He never lets on to Mother and me how much he makes, of course; he doesn't want us demanding more of it. But . . . it's enough to allow him to buy a hundred acres of land in Stratford, and the largest house in town—three stories, it is, with ten fireplaces!” (Blackwood, *Spy* 67). “To tell the truth, he's a bit of a miser,” she adds (Blackwood, *Spy* 67). “He won't even

consent to loan money to his nearest friends. I think he's afraid of ending up like his father . . ." (Blackwood, *Spy* 67).

Blackwood's Shakespeare "seldom speaks about his family," it is true (Blackwood, *Spy* 44). But Widge's mentor Mr. Pope both compares Judith to the duke's daughter in Two Gentlemen of Verona ("No, trust me: she is peevish, sullen, forward, / Proud, disobedient, stubborn lacking duty; / Neither regarding that she is my child, / Nor fearing me as if I were her father" [qtd. in Blackwood, *Spy* 86]) and says that he suspects she "is less her father's daughter than she is her mother's" (Blackwood, *Spy* 117). The impression Blackwood conveys of the poet's home life, in other words, is fairly bleak. In light of it, this irritable, gloomy Bard who takes an orphaned apprentice under his wing seems, by the end of the series, both a decent man and one to be pitied.

In an e-mail to the author, Gary Blackwood described the hard-pressed Shakespeare who inhabited his imagination as he wrote his series as "prickly, melancholy, moody, overworked, but withal basically kind and generous, with a ready wit. . . ." (Blackwood, "It's Not Too Late"). He also had this to say about why he made his Bard the kind of person he did:

I tried to take into account what was going on in his life; he was continually under pressure to produce new work, and to make it suit both to the demands of the company and the whims of the Master of Revels, and he bore quite a burden of guilt, I suspect, over having left his family and over the death of his son. I also assumed that, when he was writing the character [sic] of Hamlet, he was to some extent writing about himself, so I took a lot of cues from the play. (Blackwood, "It's Not Too Late")

## Introduction: Susan Cooper

Like Harry Turtledove's Ruled Britannia, William Sanders' "The Undiscovered," and Sarah Hoyt's Ill Met By Moonlight, Susan Cooper's Young Adult novel King of Shadows (1999) is a kind of fantasy. Unlike the three works for adults, however, King of Shadows deals neither with alternative history nor kingdoms of elves, but with the intriguing subject of time travel. In the book, a fourteen-year-old boy grieving for his lost parents is given the opportunity to return to the past. Surprisingly, however, it is not his own past to which he is returned, but a more distant one in which he meets a William Shakespeare who both offers him help and is in need of it.

## Susan Cooper

As King of Shadows opens, Nat Field and the nineteen other boys who make up The American Company of Boys are in Cambridge, Massachusetts rehearsing. Thanks to a philanthropist's generous donation, the troupe of gifted young actors chosen from all over the United States will soon travel to London to present two of Shakespeare's plays at the new Globe Theatre. The new Globe is an exact replica of Shakespeare's own theater, and Nat is both grateful and happy to be given the opportunity to perform there. But it isn't only because he wants the chance to act on a famous stage that the boy is glad he's been accepted into the company. It is also because he is an orphan, and his world is still shadowed by the loss of his parents. For Nat, the opportunity to play Puck in A Midsummer Night's Dream is also an opportunity to cease, for a little while, to be Nat Field.

However, strange things begin to happen once the company arrives in London.

Three times during their first rehearsal at the Globe, Nat feels unaccountably dizzy, and his vision blurs. He suddenly hears “a buzzing . . . like the voice of a crowd” (Cooper 28), smells “strange sour smells” (Cooper 23), and detects “a faint thread of music” in the air (Cooper 28). When he staggers as the last of these episodes occurs onstage, even Arby, the company’s intense and eccentric director, grows concerned.

Nat feels better when he gets back to the home of the British family he is staying with, but after dinner, he is overcome with nausea and racked with chills. Sure that it is just a twenty-four-hour virus, his hostess Mrs. Fisher gives him a hot drink and puts him to bed. Once under the covers, Nat falls instantly into a deep sleep in which he dreams he is flying off into the blackness of space only to be guided gently back to earth by an unseen hand. When he awakens in the morning, however, he isn’t back in his bed at the Fishers’—he is in Elizabethan London. What is more, he is in the home of famous actor Richard Burbage, whose upstairs room Nat seems to be sharing with “Harry,” one of Burbage’s apprentices.

Harry reminds the still-woozy Nat that his name is Nathan Field, and that he has recently come to the Chamberlain’s Men from “St. Paul’s Boys” for a week to play Puck in an upcoming performance of A Midsummer Night’s Dream (Cooper 34). He also says that Nat fell seriously ill the night before, adding, “Dear Lord, I was afraid you had the plague” (Cooper 32). What Harry doesn’t realize is that Nat has somehow switched places with Nathan Field, a character based on an actual young player of Shakespeare’s day. And neither Harry nor Nat is aware that this other, “real,” Nathan now lies in a twentieth-century London hospital room being treated for bubonic plague.

In no time, the modern Nat is swept up into the life of a boy player in the



Chamberlain's Men. It's a demanding existence, with declamation, tumbling and swordsmanship classes; work behind the scenes; and the playing of women's and children's roles keeping the young apprentices busy from morning till night. For a boy from the twentieth century, such a schedule is difficult enough, but Elizabethan life is hard for Nat for a number of other reasons as well. He recalls:

Not only all the people and places of my life were missing but all the support systems too: electricity, gas, plumbing, running water, refrigeration, central heating, regular plates and knives and forks, packaged food, canned food, paper tissues, toilet paper . . . Without any of those, living in 1599 was like being on a permanent camping trip in a third world country. I began to feel grubby all the time, and itchy, and hungry, and vaguely sick. (Cooper 68)

As uncomfortable as he is, however, Nat is also deeply happy about one thing. He has met and will be acting with William Shakespeare, whom he senses from the first is an incredibly wise and kindhearted man—the kind of man that Nat hasn't known since his father's death.

Physically, Cooper's Will Shakespeare more or less resembles the time-honored image of the Bard: he isn't very tall; his hair is receding, “leaving lots of forehead” (Cooper 47); and he wears “a little gold hoop in his left ear” (Cooper 47). But this Shakespeare's skin is more lined—lines that Nat deduces have come “from laughing” (Cooper 47)—and his beard is thicker (the sign, perhaps, of a reassuring manliness). His eyes, too, are extraordinary, “a strange color, a dark tawny mixture of hazel and green” (Cooper 47).

Predictably, this Shakespeare of the laugh/worry lines and deep, riveting eyes turns out to be a preternaturally intuitive and empathetic man. He will be playing Oberon to Nat's Puck, and already at their first solo rehearsal together, he is so aware of and

supportive regarding Nat's difficulties with one of the other apprentices that the boy breaks into tears. The perceptive poet understands at once that his borrowed Puck is deeply troubled. "There is more here than persecution by a nasty boy," he murmurs (Cooper 74). "What ails thee, Nat? What is it, this terrible buried sorrow? Dost miss thy parents?—where are they?" (Cooper 74).

Shocked by Shakespeare's instinctive ability to go "like an arrow . . . "to a truth he couldn't possibly have sensed" (Cooper 74), the distraught Nat pours out the story of his parents' deaths. His mother, he tells Shakespeare, has died of cancer; his father committed suicide out of grief. "I was all he had left, and I tried to be enough for him, but I wasn't," Nat sobs (Cooper 74). The poet gently disagrees. "Listen to me," he says, wiping Nat's tears and looking into his eyes (Cooper 76). "Do not say thou wast not enough for thy father. Never say that. Some things are beyond our command. A man so caught and held—men will destroy much for love, even the lives of their children, even their own lives" (Cooper 76).

Lines about men "caught and held" by uncontrollable urges may hint broadly at Southampton, the Dark Lady, and a guilt-ridden Will in the style of Grace Tiffany, but Cooper does not pursue the hint anywhere else in King of Shadows. Neither the Earl nor the lady appears in the book, and though this Shakespeare goes on to tell Nat that Hamnet, his son who died three years before, was "just your age" and "a sweet pretty boy" (Cooper 75), he expresses no guilt over his death and even says to Nat pityingly, "Thy loss was the greater . . . I have two daughters still, one of them his twin" (Cooper 75).

Shakespeare and Nat's surrogate father/surrogate son relationship deepens as the

story unfolds, with Nat even moving into Shakespeare's lodgings temporarily so that they may rehearse their scenes together more easily. Preoccupied with rehearsals for A Midsummer Night's Dream, which the Queen will be attending in secret, and buoyed by his friendship with the poet, Nat tries not to think about what will happen to him when the week is up and he must "return" to St. Paul's. Worse still, once the play has been presented, Nat will never see Will Shakespeare again.

After the final rehearsal, Nat's dejection at the thought of leaving the man who has so quickly become a second father to him gets the better of him. "When the play is over—instead of going back to St. Paul's," he asks Shakespeare, "could I—would you take me as your apprentice?" (Cooper 103). Ironically, it is the original Nathan's acting prowess that prevents it. Kindly as ever, Shakespeare reminds him, "Nat, my dear—th'art enrolled at St. Paul's, th'art one of Richard Mulcaster's prize actors, I am told. He would never let thee go" (Cooper 103). Nat's bereft reply of "I shall be so lonely" (Cooper 103) moves the poet to bring a copy of Sonnet 116 to the boy's room and read it to him.

Believing that Nat's sadness has only to do with the loss of his biological father, Shakespeare tells him, "I have no picture of what may become of us after we are dead . . . But I do know thy father's love for thee did not die with him, nor thine for him. Nor mine for my Hamnet—or for this lady. Love is love. An ever-fixed mark. Remember that, and try to be comforted" (Cooper 105).

The following day, the company's performance of A Midsummer Night's Dream is a great success, with an elderly but sharp-witted Queen Elizabeth asking Shakespeare, Burbage, and Nat to her box afterwards to congratulate them. That night, Shakespeare promises Nat a place with the Chamberlain's Men when he finishes school. "I shall not

forget thee, Nat Field,” the poet says, adding, “And thou must remember what my poem tells thee, and be at peace” (Cooper 147). Unhappy but resigned, Nat goes off to bed . . . and awakens back in the twentieth century.

There is a bit more having to do with exactly why the two Nats were switched (an unearthly power had decreed that Shakespeare had to be kept from catching the plague from the Elizabethan Nat), but it is unimportant here. What *is* important is the man the modern Nat left behind in Elizabethan London—that is, Susan Cooper’s version of William Shakespeare. What, if anything, makes him different from, or similar to, the Shakespeares of, for example, Pamela Berkman, Grace Tiffany, and Gary Blackwood?

Put as succinctly as possible, the answer is simply that Cooper’s Shakespeare is both flawless and utterly “normal.” Clearly conceived as a healing father figure for a boy who has suffered, he cannot be permitted to harbor the slightest strangeness or flaw that might cause Nat confusion or pain. He cannot be neglectful of his own children, or unfaithful to his wife (though Cooper neatly side-steps this last issue by simply not telling her readers who the “lady” referred to in Sonnet 116 is [Cooper 105]). Most certainly, he cannot be—as a relatively sophisticated twentieth-century boy would surely suspect if there were a whiff of anything unsavory about him—a pedophile dallying with his apprentices.

Unlikely as it seems, there is consequently not the slightest hint of the homoerotic in this story that sees a thirty-something playwright visit a fourteen-year-old boy in his room and plant a kiss on his forehead. Far from it, Cooper’s Shakespeare is simply very comfortable making the kind of physical demonstrations of affection that the fragile Nat seems to need. Though he may give hugs, rub necks, and proffer kisses, this

Shakespeare's gestures are always pure and chaste. It is also worth remembering that he tells Nat Sonnet 116 was written for a "lady" (Cooper 105), as if to underscore the point that he is heterosexual. Anything else, and Susan Cooper's Shakespeare could not be the man her story needs him to be.

For the same reason, this is also a Shakespeare who seems as concerned with the mundane activities of his family as he is with the more exciting ones of his acting company. He tells Nat after the performance, "I leave very early tomorrow for Stratford. I must see my family, and my father has a lawsuit beginning . . . I shall be gone until Dick Burbage hauls me back again. Which will not be long, I dare say" (Cooper 145). Clearly, it wouldn't do for a character meant to serve as a grieving boy's therapist and surrogate dad to neglect his daughters, or to want to get away from them before he is "hailed back" by the convenient Burbage.

Though it does not relate directly to Cooper's portrayal of Shakespeare, the title of her book is also of interest. Like Pamela Rafael Berkman's in Her Infinite Variety, it is taken from one of the plays—not surprisingly, in this case, A Midsummer Night's Dream, in which it is part of a line of Puck's addressed to Oberon, the "king of shadows" (qtd. in Cooper 155). No fewer than three such kings may be teased out of Cooper's book, it turns out: there is Oberon himself, the fairy king of night; Shakespeare, who both plays him in the book and is himself often thought the most enigmatic or shadowy of figures; and Nat, whose life has for so long been shadowed by the tragedies of his parents' deaths that he, too—at least at the beginning of the story—may be thought a "king of shadows."

## Mary Pope Osborne: Introduction

As thousands of enthusiastic second graders can confirm, Mary Pope Osborne's Magic Tree House Series recounts the adventures of "eight-year-old Jack and his seven-year-old sister, Annie" (Osborne 1). Like Susan Cooper's Nat Field, a character written for somewhat older readers, Jack and Annie are time travelers. However, their adventures, unlike Nat's, are precipitated not by a vague entity that seems to control human events, but by the reassuringly friendly "magic librarian of Camelot" Morgan le Fay (Osborne 2), whose enchanted tree house periodically appears in the woods near their Pennsylvania home. Jack and Annie have only to point to a picture in one of Morgan's books to begin their travels. In Stage Fright on a Summer Night, the brother and sister journey to Elizabethan England, where they meet a Bard who is more than a little like the best teacher a second grader ever had.

## Mary Pope Osborne

Stage Fright on a Summer Night begins with Morgan Le Fay telling Jack and Annie that she is sending them back in time to "learn magic" (Osborne 5) as a reward for the help they've given her in previous Tree House books. Clutching the "secret rhyme" the magic librarian gives them before she disappears ("To find a special magic, / You must step into the light / And without wand, spell, or charm, / Turn daytime into night" [Osborne 6]), the children point to the cover of a book entitled *Merry Olde England* and instantly find themselves in Elizabethan London. There they cross London Bridge on foot, make friends with a caged bear destined to fight in the brutal Bear Garden, and finally arrive at the Globe Theater.

Inside the Globe, a worried William Shakespeare, short two boy players for A Midsummer Night's Dream, overhears Jack reading from Morgan's book and begs him to help by taking one of the missing boys' roles. At first, the shy Jack is reluctant, but when "Will" agrees to let Annie disguise herself as a boy and perform along with him, he is persuaded. Both children read their parts brilliantly (no surprise, since the Tree House series is widely used in classrooms to encourage reading) and are brought back onstage with the cast at the end of the play to take bows before Queen Elizabeth I. Addressing the crowd, the Queen solves Morgan le Fay's secret rhyme, telling everyone that the players "gave us a special kind of magic—the magic of theater. They turned the very daytime into night" (Osborne 54).

Everything seems to have gone perfectly, but Annie has not forgotten the plight of "Dan," the tame bear. When she and Jack try to steal Dan to save his life, they are pursued by his owner. In the nick of time, Will Shakespeare not only confronts the man but also buys Dan, telling the owner—in a sly reference to The Winter's Tale that Osborne explains later in a note—that he has "been planning to write a play with a part for a bear" (Osborne 57).

Despite its short length (70 pages) and the grade "2.4" reading level noted on the back cover, Osborne's little book paints a surprisingly detailed and idiosyncratic portrait of Shakespeare. A notably kindly, honorable, and generous fellow, her Will is also uncharacteristically freethinking. This adaptable, liberated, un-Elizabethan Will is perfectly willing to permit a little girl—albeit one disguised as a boy, thanks perhaps to Shakespeare in Love—to act onstage. He is even a kind of proto-animal rights activist. "Tut, tut" you're a sorry sight, man," he scolds Dan's owner (Osborne 57). "Trying to

sell an old tame bear to the fights” (Osborne 57).

It is clear, both from the many teacher testimonials that precede the text and from her portrayal of Shakespeare within it, that Osborne has an educational agenda to further. The Will she creates is the kind of imaginative, enthusiastic, grown-up child that youngsters naturally find appealing, but he is also the sort of kindly, fair-minded (and very pro-reading) adult that makes for a good classroom role model. To point out, as Anthony Burgess does, that the real Shakespeare worked next to a Bear Garden for years without any apparent moral discomfort (Burgess 68) seems unkind; surely second graders deserve to retain a few illusions. Besides, it would only serve to muddy the generally unobjectionable lessons Osborne is trying to teach, not the least of which seems to be that the world would be a nicer place if great people were kind ones as well.



## Anthony Horowitz: Introduction

Shakespeare makes a cameo appearance (6 pages out of a total of 178) in Anthony Horowitz's The Devil and His Boy (2000), a fast-paced adventure aimed at middle-school audiences. Horowitz, who also writes the popular "Alex Rider" adventure/spy series, tells his wild tale of Tom Falconer, the thirteen-year-old illegitimate "grandson" of Queen Elizabeth I, in short, action-packed chapters. Full of oddball characters, hairbreadth escapes and sharp visual images, they seem—thanks to the author's naturally cinematic imagination—almost to jump straight from the movie screen onto the page.

Horowitz's Bard, though a minor character in The Devil and His Boy, is an important one: because Tom Falconer has by chance seen and loved one of Shakespeare's plays, he dreams of becoming a player, and his attempt to do so is instrumental to the book's plot. But the young "Bill . . . or Will" Shakespeare (Horowitz 82) Tom meets in the story is interesting as an individual as well. While friendly, he is clearly an already-successful playwright with little time to waste—one who in fact calls to mind this enjoyable book's very busy young author.

## Anthony Horowitz

When the book opens, Tom Falconer has as yet no idea that he is a "royal." All his life, or at least as much of it as he can recall, he has been a mistreated stable boy at an inn run by the Slopes, a couple so egregiously awful as to be comical. Before Tom finds out the truth about himself and is safely under the queen's protection, the fiendishly inventive Horowitz runs him through a gauntlet of dire predicaments and fates worse than death as hilarious as it is hair-raising. Often, Tom's troubles involve actual historical

figures: highwayman Gamaliel Ratsey blows a hole, with a harquebus, in the knight sent to save him; legendary pickpocket Moll Cutpurse delivers him from the clutches of a villain set on amputating his legs (the better to turn him into a profitable beggar); and members of the “Garduna,” a secret society “also known as the Holy Warriors of Spain” (Horowitz 180) entangle him, without his knowledge, in a plot to overthrow his royal grandmother.

Luckily for Tom, there is also a young playwright named “Bill Shakespeare . . . Or Will Shakespeare, if you prefer” (Horowitz 82), who quite unwittingly saves the boy’s life in at least as real a sense as the Queen finally does. For Tom sees Shakespeare’s The Comedy of Errors performed at an inn on his way to London, and the play captures his imagination to such an extent that he decides to become an actor. Even when he learns of his aristocratic connections near the book’s end, the only favor Tom asks of the Queen is to secure a place for him in the Admiral’s Men—Shakespeare’s acting company, in this story set in 1593.

Who is this Shakespeare whose work and personality make such a deep impact on Tom Falconer? In some ways he is quite ordinary—the Will most of us would still recognize, four hundred years after the fact, if we were to meet him on the street. He has brown hair that hangs “almost down to his neck at the back and sides,” and he is “already going bald on top” (Horowitz 82). Though not a dandy, he seems to favor the kind of simple elegance familiar from the Chandos portrait: he wears, for example, “a black velvet tunic with a high white collar” (Horowitz 82). On a more personal level, this Shakespeare is also in some respects a cousin of Susan Cooper’s hyper-intuitive Bard of the mesmerizing gaze: he has “an unusually intelligent face” and “deep brown eyes” that

“seemed to look right into you, through you, and at you at the same time” (Horowitz 82).

Tom doesn't get to spend much time with Shakespeare. As a matter of fact, they have only a short conversation after the boy careens into the preoccupied playwright, knocking the manuscript he is carrying into a mud puddle. But the conversation is instructive. For one thing, it shows Horowitz's Shakespeare to be an admirably reasonable and forgiving man, especially in light of the fact that Tom has just ruined what is probably his only copy of his play. True, this Shakespeare flares up a bit when he sees his closely written words blurring in the mud. But even so, his reprimand is mild, a mere, “Why couldn't you look where you were going?” (Horowitz 82). When Tom offers an apology, explaining that he'd been watching the action onstage, this Will softens immediately. “I wasn't looking either,” he admits (Horowitz 82). “I was thinking about my new play” (Horowitz 82).

But though he is certainly more approachable than Gary Blackwood's irritable Bard, Horowitz's Bill-or-Will is also noticeably less dad-like than Cooper's caring, empathetic poet. When Tom says that he has come to the Rose to audition, this affable Shakespeare doesn't simply hire him and proceed to make all things right in his life. Instead, he winces and tells Tom that he's too late—all the girls' parts have already been cast. And when the inexperienced Tom wonders aloud why girls' parts must be played by boys in the first place, a coolly pragmatic and somewhat conservative-sounding Will answers unconcernedly, “They just are!” (Horowitz 85).

What's more, this friendly but detached and busy Bard doesn't do the Elizabethan equivalent of taking Tom's phone number and promising to get back to him should any stray parts turn up. Though we learn that he and Tom become fast friends after Tom joins

the Admiral's Men at the end of the book, it isn't at Shakespeare's request that he is allowed to become a member—it is at the Queen's. If not for the intervention of the Queen, in fact, there is no reason to think that Horowitz's Shakespeare would bother to invite Tom Falconer to join the Admiral's Men at all. Certainly, such a Shakespeare serves the needs of Horowitz's wild tale—Tom's problems must be allowed to multiply and worsen before they can be satisfyingly resolved. But it is tempting to wonder whether this over-committed Bard, who, although likeable, is already an important and too-busy young man, doesn't also contain a bit of the very successful young writer Anthony Horowitz himself.

Interestingly, the busy Mr. Horowitz was one of the writers contacted for this paper who did not consider himself too busy to write back. In a generous reply to three questions (i.e., how he would describe his Shakespeare; why he gave him a minor role in his book; and what may have influenced his portrayal), Mr. Horowitz drew no comparisons between himself and the overworked playwright. He did, however, mention an interesting influence that spoke to his peculiarly cinematic scenes and images. "I was thinking a little," he wrote, "of 'Shakespeare in Love' when I wrote the book. . . . I also remembered 'Amadeus' which took a great genius (Mozart) and made him human" (Horowitz, *Letter*). As for his own view of his Shakespeare, he wrote: "How would I describe Shakespeare? It seems almost impossible that one man, from a provincial town in England, could have achieved such greatness. I was writing a children's book so I tried to make him warm, humane and friendly. I suspect he was all those things in real life" (Horowitz, *Letter*).

## J. B. Cheaney: Introduction

Anthony Horowitz begins his entertaining afterword to The Devil and His Boy with a sentence beloved by students. “This,” he writes, “is the chapter you don’t have to read” (Horowitz 179). Of course, he is playing with his readers—any young person who even stumbles upon such a sentence is guaranteed to be made too curious by it to stop reading. Horowitz, who earns his living writing books young adults can’t put down, knows this better than most. In the three pages full of short, conversational sentences that follow, he goes on to provide a wealth of historical information about his book’s main characters and the era in which they lived—all of which, as he knows, will be avidly read.

At the end of the afterword, Horowitz underscores the point that his books are written to be enjoyed and not sweated over. Noting that it is “quite possible that teachers will find some mistakes in this book,” he adds impishly, “These mistakes are entirely deliberate. I put them in to keep the teachers happy” (Horowitz 182).

In J. B. Cheaney’s The Playmaker (2000), we leave this lightsome world and reenter that of The Serious Novel for Young Adults. The first of a two-book series, The Playmaker is a much-researched and carefully composed work that was intended at least in part as supplementary material for introductory Shakespeare classes (Cheaney, “Re: Website”). As such, it makes numerous intelligent connections between a number of Shakespeare’s plays and the life of Cheaney’s main character; provides an admirably detailed look at life in Elizabethan London; and presents readers with yet another version of Shakespeare himself to mull over. Is it a “fun read”? Not really. But then, neither is Susan Cooper’s King of Shadows or Gary Blackwood’s Shakespeare Stealer Series, at

least in this writer's view. On the other hand, both Blackwood's and Cheaney's books—and especially Cheaney's—provide a lot of information about Shakespeare, his times, and his works, and they are far more palatable than a dry textbook.

### J. B. Cheaney

In The Playmaker, Cheaney tells the story of Richard Malory, another boy without a full complement of parents who joins a theatrical troupe in Elizabethan London. Unlike Blackwood's Widge, who is forced to come to the city to try and steal Shakespeare's plays; or Tom Falconer, who ends up there after the murder of his escort; or Nat Field, who is catapulted backwards in time, fourteen-year-old Richard arrives in London rather unspectacularly—after his mother dies, he simply walks there to try and find work. Luckily, the Chamberlain's Men are short a boy player, and he is spotted by a shrewd and kindly girl with ties to the company. But Richard, like Widge, is also interested in finding his long-lost father. When he follows a lead that his mother has given him on her deathbed, he stumbles instead on the outer edges of a papist plot.

If this storyline sounds familiar, there is good reason for it: Cheaney's book and Gary Blackwood's series—in particular his Shakespeare's Spy (2003), which deals, as The Playmaker does, with the conflict between Elizabethan Protestants and Catholics—are similar in a number of respects. Like Blackwood's Widge, Richard Malory is a motherless boy searching for his father—a boy who also becomes a player in Shakespeare's acting company. Both Widge and Richard have antagonistic relationships with an older boy player and close friendships with a supportive girl (or two, in Widge's case). Both boys use a religious medal to locate their lost fathers. And both fathers turn

out to be very much alive and quite clever, but also less than honest.

For all the similarities, however, there are a couple of marked differences between Blackwood's series and Cheaney's book. One is that, while Blackwood's Widge engages the issues of his day, he doesn't become involved in them in the personal way in which Richard Malory does. (Richard's father, for example, is one of the plotters in The Playmaker's papist cabal, a fact that tests the limits of both the boy's family loyalty and his patriotism.) A second difference—one even more important to a book intended as supplementary reading in Shakespeare classes—is that, in Richard's mind much more than in Widge's, a kind of ongoing dialogue takes place between life and certain of Shakespeare's plays.

Throughout The Playmaker, lessons Richard learns from three Shakespeare plays staged by the Chamberlain's Men in the course of the book (i.e., The Merchant of Venice, King John, and The Winter's Tale) help him understand things that are happening in his life. Initially, for example, he is unable to comprehend why, in The Merchant of Venice, Bassanio agrees to the trial of the three caskets—to the boy, the artificiality of the choice lessens the believability of the play. Richard grumbles, “He who chooseth me must risk and hazard all he hath.’ But anyone who chooses wrong must swear he will never again seek to marry. Who would take a risk like that?” (Cheaney 84).

Later, however, Richard is faced with the difficult decision of whether to turn his treasonous father over to the authorities or help him and so become a traitor himself. Recalling the play, he begins to understand that love and loyalty can sometimes win out over reason, and that it is love that makes Bassanio behave as he does. When his father leaves a message asking that they meet, Richard recalls, “The paper felt heavy in my

hands, and I thought of Bassanio in The Merchant, pondering the lead casket with its ominous inscription: *Who chooseth me must risk and hazard all*. . . . My hands shook as I opened the message, with good reason. It was a risk and a hazard, but perhaps I was a bit of a gambler, too, like my father” (Cheaney 270; 271).

The link Cheaney forges between Richard’s life and Shakespeare’s words is a potentially useful one—her main character’s situation is undoubtedly more comprehensible to an audience of young teenagers than Bassanio’s is. With luck, her student audience may be able to learn about the plays from Richard Malory’s life in the same way that Richard learns about life from the plays.

Given that her books are intended in part for high school English classes, it is hardly surprising that Cheaney’s Shakespeare, though a minor character, is a wise and kindly man who cares about his teenaged apprentices. Like those of Anthony Horowitz’s and Susan Cooper’s Bards, her Shakespeare’s good qualities fairly shine from his eyes. Richard notes after their first meeting, “His eyes were the kind that seem to pierce through the styles and habits one may assume, and into the soul of a man” (Cheaney 66). This “mild” and “gentle” Shakespeare (Cheaney 111; 129) has kind words for a blundering young actor when no one else does. He is a soft-spoken man who answers his bombastic friend Ben Jonson’s criticisms of his work with only a quiet, “I will think on it, Ben” (Cheaney 125). And he is beloved by the members of his company, who tell him that he speaks “from the heart” (Cheaney 66) and who never silence his first readings of his new works. One such reading, conducted in an alehouse where the players often gather after a performance, attracts “almost every person in the tavern,” in fact (Cheaney 126).



Cheaney's Shakespeare is more than just a sensitive man who is kind to apprentices and generous with his colleagues, however. He is also a businessman, an overworked but successful playwright, and a poet, and Cheaney finds ways to highlight all of these aspects of him in her story. When two gentlemen come to the theater to ask Shakespeare to write a funeral ode for the dying Lord Hurleigh, for example, they do so in part because he is successful; his work—including his poetry—is well known and respected. One of the gentlemen assures him diffidently, "Lord Hurleigh admires your verses exceedingly" (Cheaney 81). A regretful Shakespeare refuses the commission because he is too busy, a hint that he is overworked and under constant pressure to produce new plays. "My humble thanks for the honor you give my poor pen," he says, "but I fear I have not time to do justice to Lord Hurleigh. . . . I am exalted by his regard, but the stage is my mistress. And demanding she is, too" (Cheaney 81). After the gentlemen leave, the money-conscious businessman in the playwright makes him add ruefully, "Though it's a fair purse they were offering" (Cheaney 81).

As a playwright, Cheaney's Shakespeare is both humble and painstaking. When his fellow players insist that the Admiral's Men have stolen The Winter's Tale in order to perform it under another title, he doubts the truth of their accusation and reminds them that he, too, had the story from another writer. "How could they steal from my play before it's even performed?" he asks them reasonably (Cheaney 179). "And it must be admitted, I stole the story from Robert Greene" (Cheaney 179). Moreover, he tells them honestly that he is dissatisfied with his original version of the play, and he reworks it diligently to improve it.

Cheaney's Shakespeare is also a careful observer of life and of human nature.

Richard Malory notes, “He listened far more than he talked; there was always a listening look about him, as if the whole world had his ear” (Cheaney 112). This Shakespeare isn’t afraid to portray individuals or events faithfully, even when such portrayals seem exaggerated. For him, what counts is whether a character or event is true to life—to its inconsistencies as well as its norms.

Richard begins to understand this when he makes the acquaintance of Zachary, a friendly street performer, occasional player, and small-time cutpurse. Before the two meet, the young apprentice thinks that some of “Master Will’s” (Cheaney 304) characters, such as the charming but dishonest Autolycus in The Winter’s Tale, seem a bit unbelievable. Once he gets to know and like Zachary, however—and once the affable cutpurse steals both his money and half a slice of gingerbread he’d been planning to eat from out of his very pockets—Richard realizes that the character of Autolycus is actually a quite realistic portrait of a certain kind of individual. “I would never again,” he recalls ruefully, “consider one of Master Will’s characters to be overdrawn” (Cheaney 145). Though it may be unwarranted to maintain that Shakespeare never overdrew his characters, the possibility that Cheaney included the scene to make her high school audience more attentive regarding them is worth considering.

Cheaney’s Shakespeare’s preoccupation with authenticity may be seen in his exchanges with his friend Ben Jonson as well. Ben loudly deplores the way Shakespeare brings characters and situations that don’t “belong” into his plays. Of the bear that suddenly arrives to finish off Antigonus in The Winter’s Tale, he complains, “But you allow us no preparation for the beast. There are no bears in the plot, no warnings from a madwoman or wise fool or any of the usual devices. And I daresay the animal never

reappears after dispatching Antigonus? I thought not. At least give us a verse on the subject from the Oracle, otherwise shalt be an unbearable play” (Cheaney 125).

Making occasional dramatic use of the improbable doesn’t bother this Shakespeare, however, since improbable things happen all the time in real life. “But what hurt to have the beast appear as a stroke of divine judgment?” he rejoins mildly (Cheaney 125). Later, when Ben criticizes the plot of Romeo and Juliet for skipping around and flouting the classical unities of time and place, Shakespeare insists, “But life is not like that . . . Life cannot be tied in a package. It sprawls and tumbles” (Cheaney 304). To Jonson’s huffy, “Oh, life! . . . Art should exalt life, not reflect it,” Shakespeare only replies gently, “Illuminate it, rather . . .” (Cheaney 304). The last words J. B. Cheaney’s “Master Will” utters in The Playmaker, they may very well also be her own “last word” on the nature and breadth of the playwright’s accomplishment.

In an e-mail to the author, Ms. Cheaney described her Shakespeare, writing, “The real William Shakespeare is a man of mystery. From what we know, he was extraordinarily busy as an actor, manager, and part-owner of a popular theater. But he must have been exordinarily [sic] observant as well. I see him as quiet, wry, perceptive and often preoccupied, going about his business with little fuss but putting in a sharp elbow or a word to the wise when the occasion called for it” (“Re: Shakespeare”).

In a second e-mail, the author also described what she saw as historical fiction’s role in helping to acquaint students with Shakespeare. Cheaney wrote:

Historical fiction has an important role in introducing students to Shakespeare: that’s one reason I wrote the novels. I wanted to give young readers a context in which the plays might have been written . . . and how they were performed, and how they affected the audience—not to mention the players. Thus prepared, students could watch a BBC video performance or feature movie or live

adaptation with some notion of what makes Shakespeare great.  
Whether they catch the bug or not. (“Re: Website Inquiry”)

J. B. Cheaney completed her Shakespeare series in a second book about Richard Malory and his world entitled The True Prince (2002).

## Peter Hassinger: Introduction

Peter Hassinger's Shakespeare's Daughter (2004) is the kind of book that occupies a small, uncomfortable no-man's land between children's books and young adult novels in many public libraries. While its format and language—i.e., large font, double spacing, simple vocabulary, and uncomplicated sentences—would ordinarily situate it in the children's room, some of its subject matter (e.g., teen love and the extramarital affair of a parent) tend to place it in collections for young adults. The jacket of a copy borrowed from a library in Setauket, New York illustrates the problem: the book's back flap tells readers that Shakespeare's Daughter is Peter Hassinger's "second novel for young adults," while the front flap notes that its interest/reading level is "Grs 5 up" (i.e., grade five, which would typically still make it a children's book, and up). No doubt influenced by this reading-level recommendation and the book's format, the Setauket library classified it as "J," or children's fiction.

The lack of a good fit between the book and a specific audience is made up for to some extent by the accessibility of its language. Mr. Hassinger's characters speak the kind of contemporary and casual-sounding American that the fifth through seventh graders likely to read the book here in the United States will instantly feel comfortable with. They may also be drawn to the problems and adventures of its heroine, Shakespeare's elder daughter Susanna, who resembles an independent young teen of today far more than a (presumably) more obedient Elizabethan girl. With his loveless marriage, extramarital affair, and seeming difficulty in knowing how to be a good parent, Susanna's father, too, may seem familiar to readers raised in a culture in which many marriages fail, affecting the lives of the children involved.

## Peter Hassinger

At the beginning of Shakespeare's Daughter, the thirteen-year-old Susanna, a gifted and already quite expert singer, performs in an annual church pageant, at which she meets Tom Cole, a handsome seventeen-year-old chorister who dreams of singing professionally. Speaking with Tom about his hopes and plans makes Susanna realize that she, too, would like to pursue a career as a singer. But such a career is an impossibility for girls in Elizabethan England, and so a frustrated Susanna continues her life as usual in Stratford, where her atypically independent spirit provokes the local vicar, embarrasses her grandmother, and incenses her conservative mother.

Things are bound to go on in this way indefinitely, it seems, until a terrible accident changes the course of Susanna's life. Her beloved younger brother Hamnet, a mischievous boy who likes to play harmless tricks, pretends to fall overboard one day while he and Susanna are punting on the Avon. Though Susanna manages to pull him back into the boat, Hamnet becomes ill a short time later and dies. Shocked into realizing that she will never "fit in" among her provincial family and neighbors, a grieving and guilt-ridden Susanna decides to run away to her father in London.

Running away proves as foolhardy for Susanna as it might for a young teen today. Before she is anywhere near her destination, she is attacked in the woods by a vagrant, and it is only thanks to the steady trigger finger of a passerby that she is saved. Her pistol-wielding savior, who thoughtfully stops her coach and offers Susanna a ride, turns out to be a dark-haired young woman who introduces herself as Emilia Lanier.

Once Susanna meets the Dark Lady, difficulties naturally follow. Emilia invites her to the estate of Lord Hunsdon, where it turns out Tom Cole is soon to perform with

his chorus. Just as romance seems about to bloom between the two teenagers, Tom is sacked without warning and sent away. Surprisingly, Emilia identifies the menacing bald man Susanna has seen looking for him as Richard Topcliffe, a vicious anti-Catholic agent. Worried that Susanna may have put herself in danger by being seen with the ardently papist Tom, the older woman puts her on a coach bound for her father's lodgings in London—but not before she complicates matters by handing Susanna a note for her father and telling her that she and William Shakespeare were once lovers.

As improbable as it seems given all the obstacles, things work out for everyone (with the exception of Anne Shakespeare and Richard Topcliffe ) in the end. Susanna is reunited with Tom; Shakespeare renews his relationship with Emilia; Susanna comes to terms with her father's infidelity and decides not to tell her mother about it; everyone escapes from Topcliffe; and the two teenagers embark for Italy together to pursue their respective singing careers.

One could wish that Mr. Hassinger had included an afterword to explain to readers that the historical Susanna neither sang professionally nor went to Italy at the age of thirteen with a boyfriend. On the other hand, this Susanna is clearly not meant to be a realistic approximation of an actual, historical person. Rather, she is a modern teen in Elizabethan dress, with a modern-seeming Bard for a father—the two experience the kinds of feelings and exhibit the kinds of behavior a contemporary American girl and her flawed but loving “dad” might. In short, Shakespeare's Daughter aims not to educate, but to entertain.

In a letter to the author, Mr. Hassinger noted that the possibility of “bringing history alive . . . and playing with an icon of Western culture” had intrigued him when he

wrote Shakespeare's Daughter (Hassinger, *Letter*). Regarding the book's Shakespeare, he added, "I would have to say that most of who he was derived from my own experiences and uncertainties around being a father" (Hassinger, *Letter*). He envisioned his Shakespeare, he wrote, as:

. . . a country boy who became successful in the highly literate, competitive world of the Elizabethan theater. He leads a double life, separated from his roots—symbolized by his family of both birth and marriage—while immersed in his work as an urban and urbane playwright and poet. The two worlds function apart until his daughter, Susanna crosses the boundary by running away and showing up on his doorstep in London. He then is forced to confront who he is as a man and, in particular as a father (Hassinger, *Letter*).



## Carolyn Meyer: Introduction

In a short prologue to the first chapter of Carolyn Meyer's Loving Will Shakespeare (2008), Anne Hathaway Shakespeare "writes" that this is "the story of our life, Will's and mine, from its beginnings" (Meyer, *Loving* 1). The beginnings to which Anne refers occur earlier than one might suppose—in fact, they occur only a few days after William Shakespeare's birth. Ms. Meyer necessarily invents them, since there are no documents to tell us whether Shakespeare and his eventual wife knew each other from childhood, or, if they did, what their relationship might have been. But Meyer does not, in this estimable novel for young adults, fashion her Will and Anne—who is called Agnes, as she actually may have been, until a young Will one day calls her Anne instead—out of whole cloth. Instead, she does what good writers of historical fiction usually do: she creates a plausible storyline and believable characters from a combination of historical data and her own imagination, while changing nothing that has been established by historians as fact.

Better still, Carolyn Meyer steers her characters and their story clear of many hoary Shakespearean stereotypes. Her Agnes/Anne, who narrates the book in the first person, is far from the familiar, calculating shrew who entraps a much younger husband, and her Will is more complicated—and much more likeable—than the well known innocent-led-astay who would like nothing better than to escape the older woman carrying his child. Rather, thanks to Meyer's circumspect consideration of the few things we actually know about Shakespeare and his life, her Will and Anne become believably real. Though not, certainly, the people they were in history, they are in both cases respectful portrayals of people they *might* have been, given what we know.

## Carolyn Meyer

Beginning with the supposition that the families of a yeoman farmer who may have had animal skins to sell (i.e., Anne's father, Richard Hathaway) and a glover/whittawer living in the same area (i.e., John Shakespeare) might well have known each other, Meyer sets about creating a world in which Anne Hathaway is acquainted with Will Shakespeare almost from his birth. The book opens, in fact, with a scene in which the little Anne, together with her mother, who is portrayed as a close friend of Mary Shakespeare's, visits the Shakespeare home and rocks a baby Will in his cradle as the ladies chat. It is a cozy scene that conveys a pleasant first impression of Shakespeare's future wife: she is a happy child, loved by her mother and father, with an older brother and an infant sister of her own at home.

But 1564, the year of Shakespeare's birth, is a plague year in England (Shellard 25), and things soon change. The plague arrives in Stratford and, unlike Mary Shakespeare, Anne's pregnant mother has no readily available safe haven far from Shottery to which she can take herself and her children. In November, she dies of the disease, and a seven-year-old Anne is left to keep house and care for her baby sister alone. Needing help to run the farm, Anne's father soon takes a new wife. Joan, Anne's new stepmother, quickly proves to be a sour, vindictive woman who belittles and torments her and her younger sister Catty throughout the remainder of their childhood. Like most country girls of her class in Elizabethan England, Anne now spends her days at hard labor around her father's farm. She is never sent to school to learn to read and write.

Carolyn Meyer's Anne does eventually learn basic reading and writing from a young stepbrother who teaches her as she walks him to school. Equipped with a sturdy

practical intelligence and an enthusiasm for life, as well as a strong desire to avoid her stepmother, she also gradually takes on various chores that get her off the farm. She tends bees and grows lavender, which she sells at Stratford's weekly market, and she delivers her stepmother's home-brewed ale to customers in town. In this way, her path often crosses that of Will Shakespeare, a precocious, friendly boy who always says hello as he passes on his way home from school, and whose mother occasionally invites Anne for a meal out of remembered affection for her dead mother.

Over the years of her adolescence and his childhood, Anne meets Will casually in other places as well. Their families are invited to the same Christmas, Twelfth Night, and harvest celebrations, and Will—always socially adept and full of enthusiasm—never fails to find Anne for a chat or even a dance. Once, when the Queen comes to visit the earl of Leicester at Kenilworth Castle and their families are among the crowds gathered to catch a glimpse of her, an enterprising eleven-year-old Will gallantly climbs the railing of the castle bridge to throw a lavender wand Anne has made into Elizabeth's lap.

Several times during these years, Will tells a bemused Anne of his desire to be a playwright and actor. "I won't spend my life as a glover, you see," he declares at thirteen on a visit to her father's farm to select kidskin (Meyer, *Loving* 77). He will, he says, become "a poet . . . And mayhap a player as well," he says, adding, "Better to write the spoken words than to be the one who speaks them. Best of all, though, to do both" (Meyer, *Loving* 77). Such ideas can only be foreign to a nearly illiterate young woman whose days are spent in the fields and the dairy. Though Anne admires Will's keen intelligence and is irresistibly drawn to his friendly, sunny spirit, she never actually believes that he will really pursue his dreams.

Despite their differences, however, this young Shakespeare's interest in Anne Hathaway never wavers over the years. When a schoolboy Will laughingly kisses Anne's hand at her market stall; when, two years later at thirteen, he promises to make her a pair of cheveril gloves as a gift because she can't afford the ones in his father's shop; when he challenges the loutish suitor her stepmother has forced upon her to an archery contest to impress her; and later when, surprised by the unwelcome news that she is pregnant, he hesitates only a moment before asking her to marry him, we know that Anne has always been special to him.

Allowing Anne Hathaway to tell her own story permits Meyer to keep her Shakespeare mum on the difficult subject of exactly why he has seemingly been smitten for years with a girl so much older than he. Because he never explains it to Anne, it comes as no surprise to us that we never find out exactly why Will—eight years her junior—seeks her out socially as often as he does, or why he confides his hopes to her. Did she become important to him because his intellectual gifts had made him an outsider among children of his own age? When Will was young, Anne would have been a pretty, older girl with a difficult life—just the kind of girl who might be expected to appeal to a friendly, sensitive boy who was ignored by his schoolfellows or was secretly a bit bored by them. It's a plausible theory, and that is really all readers need to suspend their disbelief.

Moreover, the many examples of this Will's affection for his Anne are convincing in themselves. His love for her is believable simply because, again and again through the years chronicled in the book, his behavior attests to it. As a result, the fact that he never puts his reasons for loving Anne into words presents no real problem for the reader; on

the contrary, it is a kind of positive omission that makes it possible for Meyer's Shakespeare to retain a part of his traditional mystique.

Having Anne Hathaway as its narrator also gives Carolyn Meyer's story a depth and poignancy unusual in young adult novels. True, her Anne can only see the world as an unsophisticated farm girl might see it, and she can only know what she is told or what a young woman never encouraged to be introspective might deduce. But as a result, her thoughts about her life and Will Shakespeare's part in it tell us more about this Anne than she seems to know about herself. Though she wastes little time on self-pity, this Anne is indeed pitiable. Orphaned young and bullied by a malicious stepmother, her early life is one of hard labor rarely brightened by joy, love, or even good luck. She is, in fact, a kind of Cinderella, and we sympathize with her just as we do with the heroine of the fairy tale.

At twenty, Meyer's Anne falls in love with an itinerant farm worker, who turns out—like the historical Will of the famous deer story—to be a poacher who has to flee the area after being caught and beaten. At twenty-two, she becomes engaged to a respectable schoolteacher and then loses him to the plague. After her father's death when she is twenty-five, she is pressured by her stepmother to marry a violent lout who attempts to rape her and whom she barely manages to fight off.

Into this life—a life made plausible, moreover, by its resemblance to those of other young women of Anne's class and time—comes a shining boy, whose bright mind and spirit illumine the darkness. It happens in snatches and over years, because Meyer never lets her Anne forget that this Will is too young. But Meyer's contrasting of Anne's harsh home life with Will's friendliness and regard is so effective that, long before the end of her story, one wonders how the historical Anne Hathaway could possibly have

avoided falling in love with this too-young man with the “head of unruly tawny curls . . . high, fine brow, dark eyes brimming with good humor and intelligence, and . . . winning smile” (Meyer, *Loving* 44-45).

Though most of Loving Will Shakespeare is a portrayal of Anne Hathaway’s and Will Shakespeare’s early lives and courtship, the Anne who narrates the book is middle-aged. As she has said she would do in the prologue, she has recounted her story while waiting for Will to arrive home from London to take up retired life in Stratford. Now, in the final twenty-five of the book’s two hundred sixty-two pages, a subdued Anne very different from the young woman whose life was transformed by a “witty, lighthearted boy” (Meyer, *Loving* 259) tells the story of her long married years alone.

It is a story of progressive disillusionment, in which Anne gradually understands that Will’s dream of becoming a playwright and actor—a dream that, to her, had always seemed merely fantastic—is more urgent to him than anything else, including their marriage and children. Thinking back, she admits to herself, “I remembered a time when he was still a boy of thirteen, and I had walked with him along the field path from Shottery; he’d told me that he would one day be a poet. And years later, when we’d become lovers, he’d told me of his desire to go to London to write and to act. The dream had been there all along, he’d spoken of it frankly, and I hadn’t taken it seriously!” (Meyer, *Loving* 252).

Will does, of course, go to London, and though he has assured Anne that it will be only “for months,” and that he will soon “come home again . . . satisfied that I’ve had my hour upon the stage” (Meyer, *Loving* 251), his stay lengthens. Eventually, he falls into a pattern that, to Anne, makes him “but an occasional visitor to his own home, coming

down from London for a fortnight or so each summer to renew acquaintance with his family and to saunter through the familiar streets of Stratford . . .” (Meyer, *Loving* 261).

Over the years, Anne goes from being frustrated at her incomplete marriage and anxious over the toll Will’s absence takes on the children to being resigned. But even at fifty-four she still movingly recalls what it was like wait for Will to arrive for his first visit home, and to worry if he would still love her:

I was no longer the comely young woman he had wooed. *Lips like cherries*, he’d once said; *skin pale as a lily tinted with a primrose blush, eyes the very shade of bluebells*. Every one of my two-and-thirty years was plainly written on my face. Will on the other hand was a young man in his prime. I still could not forget my stepmother’s words: *You are nothing to him but an entertainment between acts*. And yet, just as in the old days, I could hardly wait to see him, to hear his voice, to touch him. (Meyer, *Loving* 256)

We never meet the much older Will for whom Anne waits in these last chapters—he is still elsewhere, as he has been for twenty-four of the twenty-nine years of their marriage. But though it is mixed with disappointment, the love for Will Shakespeare that once changed Anne Hathaway’s life is still faintly audible in the book’s final lines. “Well, then,” she says, “let him come. I shall welcome him as I always have—with love and hope—for what may be the final chapter in our story” (Meyer, *Loving* 262).

In an e-mail to the author, Ms. Meyer described her young Will as “bright, funny, mischievous, and like many young people today, he had no idea where he was heading” (Meyer, “Loving”). This last characteristic, she wrote, “made him significantly different from boys of his era,” who “pretty much followed in the family trade, with their work and their lives laid out for them” (Meyer, “Loving”). Writing that she hoped Will’s “misfit” status would resonate with contemporary readers, she pointed out, “Lots of young readers probably feel like misfits and yearn to belong, not to stand out, to be like everybody else,

and I hope they'll respond positively to my portrait of the talented boy who didn't quite know what to do with himself" (Meyer, "Loving").

Ms. Meyer concluded with some revealing information about why she wrote the novel. "No doubt," she wrote:

I was influenced by my own teenage years; I wanted to be a writer—always had, in fact—but I didn't have the slightest clue about how to make it happen. I was also a misfit—not because I wanted to be, but because I didn't know how to fit in without becoming someone else. Meanwhile, my family and all the cultural influences of the time were pushing me to become a traditional wife and mother. Part of me wanted to do that as well, but there was always the nagging inner drive to step outside the accepted boundaries and be a writer. I certainly never became a female Shakespeare, but I do know how he felt when he crossed the Clopton Bridge. I did something similar, and I probably made a lot of people miserable along the way. (Meyer, "Loving")



## Picture Books

In picture books, we don't just read about a story's characters—we actually see them in front of us. But the characters we see are only one version of themselves, one illustrator's idea of how the people described in texts that are often spare might look. As such, they restrict our imaginations temporarily to a single way of seeing—especially if we are three or four years old, as many browsers of picture books are. Given this power of illustrations to influence the imagination, no consideration of how Shakespeare the man has been portrayed in recent fiction would be complete without a look at the singular Wills of picture books.

### Don Freeman: Introduction

Don Freeman's Will's Quill: or How a Goose Saved Shakespeare (2004) was originally published in 1975, but its publisher, Viking Press, decided to put out a second edition in 2004. A combination of gracefully written text and soft, watercolor illustrations created by a single talented writer/illustrator, the book tells the story of "Willoughby Waddle," a country goose living in Elizabethan England. The long-haired, gentle-faced William Shakespeare that Willoughby meets and helps is the physical epitome of many young American men of the early seventies—a number of whom were no doubt the older brothers and young fathers of the book's original four-to-eight-year-old readers.

### Don Freeman

Willoughby Waddle, a well-intentioned goose, has two admirable goals in life: to see the world and to be useful. He waddles off to London, hoping to accomplish both, but

the city proves bigger and busier than he'd imagined. After nearly being crushed under a cartwheel and caught by a poultry seller, Willoughby takes refuge inside a barrel. When he finally emerges, he is doused with historically accurate dishwater and vegetable peelings tossed from a window. Things look bleak until a young man appears and kindly brushes the dripping goose off. "Here, my friend," he says, feeding Willoughby a handful of ripe berries. "Thy need is greater than mine" (Freeman).

Captivated by the fellow's courtesy, Willoughby waddles after him to the Globe Theatre, where he is horrified to see his man attacked onstage by a rapier-wielding ruffian. The intrepid goose promptly flies to the rescue, flapping up and biting his friend's attacker in the seat of his breeches, which both brings down the house and ends the play. Worried that "Will" will be angry with him, but still determined to help, Willoughby finally follows his hero to his lodgings, where he waits for more than an hour before an upstairs window finally opens and his unhappy friend tosses a bunch of inferior quills out into the street. "Curse these quills!" Will grumbles (Freeman). "How can I write with such wretched pens!" (Freeman).

At last, Willoughby knows exactly how to help his friend. Plucking a fine quill from under one of his wings, he waddles to the door and knocks. When Will answers, he understands immediately and gratefully invites the goose inside. The next morning, thanks to the loyal bird, a new play by William Shakespeare (we aren't told which one) is born. "And from that day forward," the story ends, Willoughby and Will "made their way to The Globe theater together, delighting the people of Londontown and filling their hearts with pride" (Freeman).

Clearly, Don Freeman's Will is not only a gifted man but also a very nice one.

Kind-hearted enough to pity a half-drowned goose and so intelligent that he can read its mind, this Will is also a favorite of his fellow players, one of whom tells him that he is “the only writer who sings from the heart” (Freeman).

Freeman’s charming watercolor illustrations contribute at least as much to the creation of this Shakespeare as his text does. His graphic Will is no burly Bard but a twenty-ish fellow with a slight, almost delicate build, a gentle, wispily-bearded face, and collar-length hair that is most often topped with a soft hat.

We don’t really know much about how the historical Bard looked, beyond a general idea of his facial features, and Don Freeman’s Will, with his high forehead and collar-length “pageboy” haircut, more or less conforms to these. But there are also his youth, his slight build, his open, gentle face, and the wispieness of his beard to consider—traits that may have less to do with the man from Stratford than they do with the fact that in 1975, when Freeman’s book first came out, most young American men fitted this description. At the time, their longish hair, youthful beards, and benign expressions could be seen on college campuses across the country, and even to a certain extent in society at large. Such a Will—a Will who might have been the big brother or young father of a member of the book’s original intended audience—would have been familiar and non-threatening both to the children likely to see the book and (equally importantly, from a publishing standpoint ) to the young parents who might buy it for them.

Interestingly, the appeal of Freeman’s gentle, hippie-like Will seems timeless. Thirty-three years after his first appearance, librarians and parents clearly still view him as so “child-friendly” that it is easy to find copies of the second edition of Will’s Quill on public library shelves.

## Gregory Rogers: Introduction

In his ingenious wordless picture book The Boy, the Bear, the Baron, the Bard (2004), illustrator Gregory Rogers takes the comfortable notion of a gentle, friendly Shakespeare and gleefully explodes it. Rogers's choleric, cartoon Bard, with his bright red hair, pipe cleaner limbs and kidney bean-shaped head is the polar opposite of Don Freeman's kindly, boyishly handsome playwright. What's more, this Shakespeare is the comic villain of the piece.

## Gregory Rogers

Entirely by means of color illustrations that range from comic book-style multi-frames to breathtaking full-page aerial views, Rogers tells the story of a little boy in contemporary London whose soccer ball sails through the boarded-up window of an abandoned building. Intent on fetching his ball, the boy climbs through the window and finds himself inside an old theater, complete with props and trunks of costumes. He playfully dons a pair of hose and a red cloak, cuts a few capers, and trots through the opening of a stage curtain after his ball—to find himself blasted backwards in time to Shakespeare's Globe, where thousands of playgoers are enjoying a performance that he has just interrupted. Instantly, an enraged Bard crashes through the curtain behind him, trips on the soccer ball, and goes flying, to the guffaws of the crowd. The boy flees, the irate Shakespeare pursues, and a delightful chase that takes up the rest of the book begins.

Along the way, the little boy and a tame bear he rescues from the Bear Garden manage to save an anxious aristocrat from the chopping block and even crash a party on Queen Elizabeth's barge—all with an infuriated Bard in hot pursuit. The chase winds

through London streets before it finally ends with Shakespeare and the boy back in a pitch-dark, after-hours Globe, where the playwright tears what we now realize is a magic cloak from the boy's shoulders just as the little fellow breaks through the stage curtain once more and finds himself back in the present. He arrives home minus his soccer ball, however—in a perfect final touch, a cloaked Bard on the book's endpapers clutches it in smug triumph.

On the book's dedication page, Rogers explains his motivation in creating the story to young fans. He writes:

I have always been fascinated by everything Elizabethan: the clothes, the music, the dancing, the food. When I had the idea for a story about a young boy who is flung through time to land on the stage of the Globe Theatre in Tudor London, I saw my chance to share those harsh, dirty, brutal, beautiful times with others. I made my way through a mountain of books to discover all the amazing historical details of the era; then I drafted and redrafted the story to make it rich and real. (Rogers)

Rogers's caricature Shakespeare is the kind of comical, non-threatening "villain" children love: he makes a big fuss, his skinny legs look silly in their baggy trunks, and all he really wants is his magic cloak back—and a soccer ball to play with. Even if the children who "read" the book don't know who Shakespeare is (and few of them do), they are bound to be entertained. But Rogers also entertains their parents, who know that his clever portrayal of the iconic playwright is hilariously out of character. Though the illustrator's fascination with Elizabethan England may have spurred him to write the book, it's thus the recognizable yet infinitely malleable image of the Bard that gives it its broad appeal.

## Pauline Francis: Introduction

Shakespeare's image is transformed yet again in Pauline Francis's Sam Stars at Shakespeare's Globe (2006). Another of the many Juvenile and Young Adult titles set in the world of boy players, the picture book tells the story of Sam Gilburne, a poor boy who sees the Globe Theatre from his new home on London Bridge and dreams of working there. The Shakespeare who hires him and gently coaches him through his first big performance is a man who, though a demanding director and consummate playwright, is also a tenderhearted father who deeply misses his dead son.

## Pauline Francis

As the story opens, Sam and his mother—he seems not to have a father—have just moved into one of the many buildings that line London Bridge. When his mother points out the new Globe playhouse from the widow of their room high above the Thames, Sam instantly wants to go there. But he and his mother are too poor to go to plays; instead, his mother says, Sam must look for work. The next day, Sam walks to the Globe, finds a door open, and slips inside, thinking to ask for a job. A man who turns out to be William Shakespeare finds him gazing up in wonderment at the painted sky above the stage.

Illustrator Jane Tattersfield's Shakespeare is rather dour-looking, but he proves kind enough. When Sam dons a lion's head and successfully insinuates himself into a rehearsal—a trick that reminds this Shakespeare of his dead son Hamnet—the playwright takes the boy on as an apprentice despite his lack of acting experience.

As might be expected, Sam has his difficulties at first: he has trouble countering

the crude taunts of the groundlings and is put off by the goriness of plays like Titus Andronicus and Julius Caesar. Worse than these annoyances, however, is the disappointment he feels at losing the part of Juliet to Jack, a more experienced player. But when Jack's voice breaks on the day before the company's first performance of Romeo and Juliet, Sam gets his chance to shine. After some last-minute coaching by Shakespeare, who helps Sam learn to express emotion by telling him the sad story of Hamnet and making him weep, Sam triumphs in the role.

The book ends with the apprentice and the playwright congratulating each other on Sam's performance outside the Globe after the play. "Well done, Samuel!" says Shakespeare (Francis). "You have made them laugh and you have made them cry. That is why they come to the Globe. Now they will go home happy" (Francis). "You are the greatest writer in all England!" enthuses Sam in response (Francis), sounding a bit like a paid advertisement for the Bard.

While it is easy to see how the graphic representations of Shakespeare created by Don Freeman and Gregory Rogers fit their respective projects—the former by personifying the kind of young man adored by children and necessary to the story's plot; the latter by looking at once comical enough to delight youngsters and out-of-character enough to amuse their elders—it is a bit more difficult to find a connection between the stiff playwright pictured in Sam Stars at Shakespeare's Globe and the grieving father of the book's text. But there may indeed be such a connection, and no less erudite a source than Gary Taylor sheds light on it. Regarding the very different "selves" Shakespeare embodied in his life, Taylor writes:

When he was not acting in plays he was writing them. . . . As an actor he needed to become only two or three characters per

play; as a playwright he had to perform all the parts in his head, momentarily recreating himself in the image of each. He juggled selves.

He did not stop juggling them when he stepped out of the theatre. . . . He doubled one set of commitments in metropolitan London with another set in provincial Stratford-upon-Avon, like two roles in one play, like plot and subplot, like art and nature. He embodied mutability. (3-4)

In his gentle advice to the weeping and apparently fatherless Sam, as well as in his use of the example of his son to help the boy, Francis and Tattersfield's Shakespeare is reminiscent of Susan Cooper's understanding, fatherly Bard. But—as Taylor's words suggest—in combining this gentleness with a no-nonsense demeanor and attitude towards work, this Shakespeare may also resemble the historical man.

In an e-mail to the author, Ms. Francis described the various selves of the Shakespeare she created in Sam Stars at Shakespeare's Globe, writing:

I was determined to show him as a man of emotion – and a father. The plays were secondary. . . . There is hardly any mention of his son's death, and I felt it much [sic] have had a huge influence on his life. I felt the best way to portray it was through a young boy who would bring those emotions to the surface. . . . For me, Shakespeare was: a player, a man of emotion, a storyteller, a devoted father and a man capable of great empathy on the stage and thus in his own life. (“Thesis”).



## Bruce Koscielniak: Introduction

Bruce Koscielniak's lively Hear, Hear, Mr. Shakespeare: Story, Illustrations, and Selections from Shakespeare's Plays (1998) is the kind of busy picture book designed to be enjoyed by a number of different audiences—in fact, its blurb describes it enthusiastically as “a perfect introduction to Shakespeare for readers of any age.” On the most basic level, via text boxes all beginning with the “Hear, hear, Mr. Shakespeare” of the title, the book tells a story simple enough to be understood by four-or-five-year-olds. For the school-aged crowd, it adds boxed historical and biographical asides and definitions, as well as lists of “Shakespeare's Dates” and “Shakespeare's Plays” on the endpapers. Lastly, for anyone able to understand and relish them, it sprinkles its cartoon-style ink-and-watercolor illustrations with lines from the plays, all of which are playfully spoken by a variety of animals, birds, and bugs. In the midst of all the animated chatter, the book's Mr. Shakespeare himself is silent. Though obviously good-humored and obliging, he seems content to allow the world he writes about to speak his words in his stead.

## Bruce Koscielniak

The basic story on which the wealth of information in Hear, Hear, Mr. Shakespeare depends is a simple and whimsical one. It begins with a faraway Bard out tending his Stratford garden one overcast day when an itinerant troupe of costumed players appears. They are on their way, they announce, “To London, to London, O to play before the queen” (Koscielniak). Accompanied by two young neighbors and flourishing a garden rake like a drum major's baton, Shakespeare leads them in a parade

through town.

Suddenly, however, the skies open in a terrific downpour, complete with “kaboom-ing” lightning (Koscielniak). The playwright generously shelters the troupe in his house, but it seems that their “one and only play—a very fine comedy called “A Very Fine Comedy of Blunders” (Koscielniak)—has been ruined by the rain. When the actors beg him to write them “some jolly new play” (Koscielniak) to take its place, this Shakespeare cheerfully obliges. The sun reappears in due course; the queen arrives unexpectedly and approves the new comedy; and the troupe is invited to London to present the play onstage.

Though his baldpate and pageboy side hair certainly identify him as Shakespeare, Koscielniak’s pleasant cartoon Bard is not quite the standard issue. Plump and smiling rather than imposing, he sports a comfortable jerkin over a frilly white long-sleeved blouse. Moreover, though his facial features are the minimalist ones of cartoons in the body of the book, there is a portrait on the back cover that shows him in a distinctly doe-eyed, boyish light. Like the Will of Will’s Quill, this back-cover Bard seems designed to attract, not frighten away, even the youngest “readers” and their watchful parents.

Koscielniak’s Shakespeare, like Gregory Rogers’s comic villain, is a silent, cartoon figure. But here, where he virtually floats on a sea of quotations from his works, his silence has a different quality. In Rogers’s book, the wordlessness paired with frantic activity is that of silent film comedy—The Boy, The Bear, The Baron, The Bard is Shakespeare as Keystone Kop. In Hear, Hear, Mr. Shakespeare, in contrast, the playwright’s wordlessness in the midst of the very words he wrote has the feel of metaphor—it reminds us concretely that, though Shakespeare’s writings have become so

familiar we hear them quoted daily in all sorts of places, the man who wrote them has been silenced by the passage of time.

In fact, over the centuries Shakespeare seems gradually to have become what he is in Hear, Hear, Mr. Shakespeare: an amiable, silent cartoon of whoever he once was. If we like, we may set him down in any situation, however unlikely; we may put whatever words we choose in his mouth. He may be made into a drunkard or a teetotaler; a coward or a doughty fighter; a blithely neglectful father or a sensitive, loving one. He may even be graciously allowed—as Bruce Koscielniak allows him—to maintain his smiling silence amid a chorus of the voices he wrote.

## Conclusion

What, in the end, are we to make of this multiplicity of Shakespeares? Who are they? Do they reflect the individuals who devised them and the world in which they were produced as much as they do the historical Bard? Do they often, in Annalisa Castaldo's words, "become a representative of some key cultural issue or mirror another writer's vision of self"? Do these characters, who are to some degree the by-product of how little we know about Shakespeare the historical man, echo the situation of the playwright's over-analyzed works, of which Gary Taylor writes, "We find in Shakespeare only what we bring to him or what others have left behind; he gives us back our own values" (411)?

The Shakespeares who appear in the twenty-seven books considered here do, I think, reflect both their individual creators and aspects of the culture in which these authors live. At the same time, they echo some of the theories that scholars frustrated by the lack of information about the playwright—scholars who are themselves both individuals and products of a culture, it must be remembered—have proposed over the years.

But trying to keep nineteen Bards sufficiently straight in one's mind to be able to draw a few conclusions about what may have made them who they are seems hardly possible without help. To provide it, I have included the following list, as well as two tables located after the Figures that follow this Conclusion. They are meant to aid readers in recalling the individual Shakespeares discussed here and to begin to foreground some of the similarities and differences among them.

Next to each of the authors' names in the list is a thumbnail summary of the outstanding characteristics of his or her Bard. In selecting these, I have tried to confine

myself to only those attributes either actually mentioned in the texts or so well represented in a particular Shakespeare's behavior as to be incontestable. My hope is that, though they are by nature reductive, both the list and the tables will remain objective enough to be useful as a result. I apologize for any vagueness that attempting to be brief may have caused and refer readers to the reviews in the body of the paper and to the works themselves for clarification.

### A Thumbnail List of Shakespeares

**Hawke** – still quite young (all four books are set during the Lost Years); friendly; outgoing; a heavy drinker; physically timid but mentally courageous (e.g., he defends an accused murderer before the Thieves' Guild); verbally witty; unintentionally comical or “bumbling” at times; tends to procrastinate with regard to his writing (has not yet completed a single play in the series, although he does finish and sell some sonnets); no evidence of genius; unhappily married; apparently uninterested in sexual dalliance; no suggestion of homosexuality or bisexuality.

**Gooden** – late thirties; enigmatic; a sparing drinker; a literary genius; a financially successful writer; possibly an adulterer (with “Dark Lady” Jane Davenant); merest hint of homosexuality/ bisexuality (though he is a close friend of Southampton's, the exact nature of their relationship is never disclosed); worldly; dry sense of humor; wryly accepting of Nick Revill but not above using him for his own ends (e.g., he puts Nick at risk by having him deliver messages to Southampton during the period prior to Essex rebellion).

**Berkman** – in various stories a child, a young man, a man in the prime of life, and a

man nearing death at the end of his middle years; a habitual adulterer; seen by his wife and children as neglectful of them; not unkind, but curiously unaware of the feelings of others, especially women; a man who “compartmentalizes” his life; no suggestion of homosexuality or bisexuality; perjures himself in Bellot case in memory of Mary Mountjoy.

**Tiffany** – My Father Had a Daughter: early twenties through death; imaginative and loving father but not often at home; guilt-ridden (for a variety of reasons); gifted; an outsider within his family and among his Stratford neighbors; emotional. Will: boyhood through final retirement to Stratford; guilt-ridden (again, for a variety of reasons); adulterer (with “Dark Lady” Emilia Lanier); homosexual leanings (sexually attracted to Southampton), though he never seems to have had a homosexual affair; marriage troubles; jealous/suspicious of Anne while he is absent (suspects her of having an affair with his brother Gilbert); eventual reconciliation with Anne. Note: story includes a disguised girl player, a possible tie to Shakespeare in Love.

**Sanders** – quite young (27 when he first arrives in Virginia); a drinker; cheerful; friendly; sensitive/emotional (weeps when rehearsals go badly); adaptable; physically very courageous; apparently heterosexual (takes a Cherokee wife after a couple of years in captivity); no hint of homosexuality/bisexuality; misses his home; conservative (shocked by the idea of women players); moved to despair by the realization that his art does not transcend culture.

**Turtledove** – mid-thirties; physically cowardly but grittily determined; hardworking; overworked; forced, years before, into an unsatisfactory marriage to a sour-tempered woman as the result of a youthful indiscretion; has (not surprisingly) marriage troubles;

an adulterer, but uncomfortable about it; unwaveringly heterosexual; successful playwright; an “ordinary” man with ordinary flaws; pragmatic (a businessman, with a touch of the tight-fisted about him); gifted (but still a man like any other); a “steady” (Turtledove 37), rather than a gifted, actor; occasionally impatient with social inferiors and those who disturb him while he is writing; does not concern himself overmuch with the problems of those in his charge at the theater; a tendency to support revenge against those who have frightened or harmed him or his country; slightly (but amiably) vain (has bought nostrums to re-grow his receding hair); generally honorable and fair-minded.

**Hoyt** – under twenty (Hamnet and Judith have not yet been born); handsome; heterosexual (but tricked into a [heterosexual] dalliance with a sexually shape-shifting elf); enthusiastic regarding sex; adulterer, but only when seduced; loving husband and father; nursery school teacher (i.e., not yet a playwright); courageous; diffident (i.e., not domineering with respect to his wife); curious; intelligent; a dutiful son; frustrated at being mired in a small town and an uninteresting job.

**Nye** –already dead at the opening of both of Nye’s books, which take in, in some respects, his entire life (i.e., as recollected by, or in some cases as ferreted out by, his narrators); polite; courteous; ingenious; a grieving father; capable of prodigious, if sporadic, amounts of creative work; otherwise lazy; not particularly courageous; distaste for “normal” heterosexual sex (with a near inability to perform sexually); homosexual liaison with Southampton; sexual and emotional ties to prostitute Lucy Negro; molester of a boy player; gourmand (addicted to sweets; a lover of delicacies); something of a sycophant (lionizes aristocracy; patronage seeker); an elegant dresser.

**Blackwood** – early middle age (37 years old in The Shakespeare Stealer); “prickly”;

“melancholy”; “moody”; “overworked”; “basically kind and generous, with a ready wit”; “continually under pressure to produce new work”; bearing “quite a burden of guilt” (Blackwood, “RE: it’s not too late”); pensive; self-absorbed; withdrawn; anxious; short-tempered; private; under great professional and familial stress; has family problems of an “ordinary” man; difficult home life (in daughter Judith’s opinion, he has been neglectful of her and is something of a miser); well known; successful; perhaps a genius; pragmatic; an unapologetic plot borrower; courageous; fair-minded; loyal; honorable; determined; hardworking; appreciative; has a sense of humor; suffers from writer’s block; no references to his sexuality. Note: Blackwood’s series has a disguised girl player, a possible tie to Shakespeare in Love.

**Cooper** – around thirty-four (Hamnet has died three years before); wise; kindhearted; sensitive; penetrating eyes; “laugh” lines; intuitive; perceptive; empathetic; supportive; caring; a father figure; no references to his sexuality; no hint of the homoerotic in his close relationship with a boy player; a responsible family man; personally flawless.

**Osborne** – kindly; an animal lover; enthusiastic; honorable; just/fair-minded; freethinking; courageous; adaptable; brave; generous; pro-reading; busy; anxious; no references to his sexuality. Note: Osborne’s Annie is disguised and permitted to perform in one of Shakespeare’s plays, a possible tie to Shakespeare in Love.

**Horowitz** – “warm”; “humane”; and “friendly” (Horowitz, *Letter*); twenty-nine years old (the story is set in 1593); an intelligent face; penetrating brown eyes similar to Cooper’s Shakespeare’s; a simple but elegant dresser; reasonable; easygoing/forgiving; mild-mannered; preoccupied; busy; detached; affable; pragmatic; apparently conservative (regarding boys playing girls’ roles); relatively unconcerned with others’ problems;



likeable; already somewhat successful (i.e., his play is being staged when Tom first meets him); no references to his sexuality. Note: Mr. Horowitz mentioned, in a letter to the author, that he had been “thinking a little” of Shakespeare in Love, as well as of the film Amadeus, when he wrote The Devil and His Boy (Horowitz, *Letter*).

**Cheaney** – “quiet, wry, perceptive, and often preoccupied, going about his business with little fuss but putting in a sharp elbow or a word to the wise when the occasion called for it” (Cheaney, “Re: Shakespeare”); wise, kindly and caring, when he has the time to be; piercing eyes like those of Cooper’s and Horowitz’s Bards; mild; gentle; soft-spoken; beloved by members of company; sensitive; overworked; a pragmatic commercial writer/businessman; successful both as a playwright and poet; under constant pressure to produce works; a humble, painstaking, diligent craftsman; honest; a careful observer of life and human nature; no references to his sexuality.

**Hassinger** – thirty-two or three (Susanna is thirteen years old); contemporary-seeming; has a domineering wife; in love with another woman; loving father; indulgent parent; seemingly incapable of disciplining his children; a blatant adulterer (openly conducts an affair with Emilia Lanier while his daughter visits him in London); exhibits questionable judgment (his affair with the Dark Lady; allowing Susanna to travel abroad at thirteen with no companion but a boyfriend).

**Meyer** – a boy and young man for most of Loving Will Shakespeare; “bright, funny, mischievous,” a “talented boy who didn’t quite know what to do with himself” in Warwickshire (Meyer, “Loving Will Shakespeare”); handsome; friendly; likeable; precocious; keenly intelligent; observant; a good sense of humor; enthusiastic; enterprising; gallant; socially adept; cheerful; honest (he is always open with Anne about

his dream of acting/writing); responsible (he hesitates only slightly before asking the pregnant Anne to marry him); determined to pursue his goals; never tells Anne why he loves her . . . if indeed he does love her; no hint of homosexuality or bisexuality.

**Freeman** – perhaps mid-twenties (though already balding); slightly built; an open, friendly face; kindly; gentle; courteous; an animal lover; “sings from the heart” (Freeman); a favorite of his fellow players; intuitive/intelligent; hardworking (writes at night after work at the theater); annoyed when something (e.g., bad quills) interferes with his writing.

**Rogers** – ageless (although his clownish hair is red, not gray, and he is able to run *very* fast); seemingly irate or at least highly upset; cartoon-like; a harmless comic villain who only wants to regain his magic cape—and perhaps a soccer ball.

**Francis** – mid-thirties (the Globe, opened in 1599 is new); “a player, a man of emotion, a storyteller, a devoted father and a man capable of great empathy on the stage and thus in his own life” (Francis, “Thesis”); “There is hardly any mention of his son’s death, and I felt it much [sic] have had a huge influence on his life” (Francis, “Thesis”); appears stiff and stern, but can be kind; busy; not very concerned with Sam and his problems until Sam reminds him of his dead son; a grieving father; a strict but fair taskmaster; a sensitive, generous teacher.

**Koscielniak** – seems middle-aged in body of book but young and rather delicate in the portrait on the back cover; contented; playful; cheerful; obliging; childlike (leads parade of players wielding his garden rake as a baton).

## The Tables and How to Read Them

The two tables condense the attributes listed above still further and also render similarities, dissimilarities, and trends more apparent. In them, authors of all the works covered are listed on the left, one to a row, in the order in which they were discussed in the body of the paper, while each attribute occupies its own column across the top.

An “X” for any attribute indicates possession of that attribute; a double “X” indicates heightened presence of it. Parentheses around an “X” indicate that there are qualifications regarding the possession of the attribute (e.g., we hear about it from other characters in the book but see only equivocal demonstrations of it in Shakespeare’s behavior). A minus sign in place of an “X” indicates the opposite of that attribute (e.g., a minus sign in the “Cons” column indicates that this Shakespeare has shown liberal or freethinking tendencies).

The abbreviation “n. a.” in a column indicates that the attribute would be out of place in this work or works and that its absence thus has no bearing on this Shakespeare’s character (e.g., an “n. a.” in the “DGP” Column of William Sanders’ story about a Shakespeare who is a captive of the Cherokee would indicate that since a girl disguised as a boy player would have been out of place in the story, her absence should not be considered revelatory).

An explanation of the abbreviations used in the tables may be found in the List of Abbreviations on pages xiii-ix.

## Findings

As clumsy a diagnostic tool as these tables concocted by a student of English

admittedly are, they do make a couple of things instantly apparent. Table 1 shows, for example, that the Shakespeares who inhabit the great majority of the twenty-seven works considered here (24 out of 27, to be exact) are at least generally “positive” characters—i.e., characters their *authors* seem to want readers to like. Though many of these Shakespeares engage in behavior that most contemporary, middle-class American readers have been taught is wrong or immoral—six are outright adulterers, for example—the circumstances surrounding their “sins” are always extenuating ones. Grace Tiffany’s Will is misunderstood and made fun of by his wife and family; Harry Turtledove’s Shakespeare is saddled with a “sour” wife (Turtledove 155) as the result of a youthful mistake any man might make; and Sarah Hoyt’s poor young Bard is actually seduced by an elf. There is the sense, trickling down from the authors, that readers ought not only to forgive these Shakespeares but also to take their misbehavior almost as evidence of their normality.

In only two cases does Table 1 show Shakespeares whose misbehavior is either not excused sufficiently enough to render them “positive” or inexcusable. These are, respectively, Pamela Rafael Berkman’s blithe philanderer, whose Anne is so sympathetic that it is difficult to make allowances for him, and Robert Nye’s abuser of a boy player, whose behavior is far enough outside the acceptable norm to render him morally alien to most readers. Yet even these last two Shakespeares are not without their good qualities: Berkman’s Bard is poignantly regretful at not having understood homely Mary Mountjoy’s feelings for him, and Nye’s “Mr Shakespeare” is so courteous that when he sees the then-young narrator spill food on his shirt at dinner, he instantly smears his own as well.

Also clear from Table 1 is that, among the books discussed here, the Shakespeares created for young adults and children differ from those aimed at adults in at least three important respects. The first of these (to which the data in the “Adu,” “Hom,” and “Bi” columns testify) is that there is far more emphasis on various aspects of the Bard’s sexuality and sexual behavior in the adult books than in the YA, J, and picture books. The second is that the Shakespeares in the YA and children’s books are clearly kinder than those in the books for adults, with no fewer than nine YA, J, and picture books boasting notably kindly Bards as compared with only a single adult title (Harry Turtledove’s Ruled Britannia), in the Shakespeare of which, moreover, the trait is qualified. The third is that, based on the greater number of their unmixed positive ratings in the “Overall” column (seven as opposed to three) as well as on their greater number of “Kindly” ratings, it seems that the YA and J Shakespeares are also freer of faults or more purely good than their more complex adult counterparts. The low incidence among them of such negative characteristics as “Neglectful” (Table 1), “Cowardly,” (Table 1), and “Drinker” (Table 2) may corroborate this.

The “DGP,” (“Disguised Girl Player”) column of Table 2 speaks to the effect the film Shakespeare in Love (1998) may have had on authors and publishers. Gary Blackwood’s The Shakespeare Stealer (1998), Mary Pope Osborne’s Stage Fright on a Summer Night (2002), and Grace Tiffany’s My Father Had a Daughter (2003) all contain girls disguised as male players who act in Shakespeare’s company, just as the older, disguised Viola de Lesseps does in the movie (though Twelfth Night’s Viola, on whom the film character of Viola de Lesseps is based, is disguised as a male in the play, she is Orsino’s page and not a boy player).

Both the list and the tables attest to the influence of the work of scholars on the authors considered. Writing in 1963, Louis Marder commented that “clever scholars” had by then already made Shakespeare out to be, variously, a “poor husband”; a “poor father”; a “poacher”; a “fornicator”; an “adulterer”; a “drunkard”; a “homosexual”; a “hoarder”; a “literary thief”; an “anti-Semite” (as the creator of Shylock); a “perjurer” (regarding his testimony in the Bellot case); and a “poor actor”—among other things.

All of these characteristics have found their way into the Shakespeare fiction of the past decade: Berkman (and others) have created Bards who are both poor husbands and neglectful parents; Gooden, Blackwood, and Meyer have all touched in some way on the poaching story; Meyer’s youthful Bard is an engaging and enthusiastic fornicator; Berkman’s, Tiffany’s, Turtledove’s, Hoyt’s, Nye’s, and Hassinger’s Shakespeares are all adulterers; Hawke’s young Will repeatedly drinks to stupefaction; Tiffany’s is so frightened by his attraction to Henry Wriothsesley that it drives him into the arms of Emilia “Lanyer,” while Nye’s sodomizes the red-headed earl in a bed in which he later does the same to his wife (Nye, *Mrs. Shakespeare*); Turtledove’s well-heeled Bard is stingy enough to bargain shrewdly with a bookseller over sixpence; Blackwood’s is an unabashed borrower of plots; Hawke’s is an unwitting anti-Semite who creates Shylock to outdo Marlowe’s Jew of Malta; Berkman’s perjures himself in memory of a Mary Mountjoy he has misunderstood; and Turtledove’s is merely a “steady” actor (37) rather than a really good one.

When taken together with the tables and list of dominant characteristics, the reviews of the books in the body of this paper suggest a number of recurring themes. One, which seems to turn up most often in YA and children’s books, is that of

Shakespeare as an emblem of human perfection—a veritable fount of wisdom, kindness, intelligence, intuitive understanding, and empathy. Susan Cooper’s Bard of the mesmerizing eyes, who in a single week heals the spirit of a boy who has lost both his parents; Mary Pope Osborne’s playwright who almost magically imbues a boy on the point of bolting from stage fright with the confidence to face “three thousand” playgoers (29); and Don Freeman’s picture-book Will who is so intuitive he can read the mind of a goose are all examples of this Shakespeare who seems to be one part Merlin and one part Messiah.

Another Shakespeare who surfaces repeatedly in this fictive sea is the Enigmatic Genius, who seems to slip with almost equal frequency into novels for young adults and adults. Gary Blackwood’s ingenious Shakespeare who was once “a good companion” (*Stealer* 116) but who has for a long time been unaccountably irritable and melancholy; J. B. Cheaney’s soft-spoken Master Will, whose seemingly overdrawn characters and cryptic advice to boy players always make sense after the fact; and Philip Gooden’s sophisticated WS, who plays his cards so close to the vest that Nick Revill continually suspects him of murder, are all variations on this theme.

A final Shakespeare whom we meet more than once in these books published since 1998 is the Ordinary Man in Extraordinary Circumstances. Arguably the most interesting of the lot, he is often a not-especially-courageous Everyman thrust unexpectedly into frightening situations armed with only his native wits and grit. Simon Hawke’s bumbling aspiring playwright is one of these ordinary Shakespeares. A physically timid fellow, he nevertheless clouts a sword-wielding villain with a pub bench to save his friend Tuck on one occasion; on another, he successfully defends an accused

murderer before a literal “den of thieves” because he considers it the right thing to do. Harry Turtledove’s inoffensive Bard who must help foment a revolution under the twitching nose of an Anglo-Spanish Inquisition and Sarah Hoyt’s brave-but-inexperienced young nursery school teacher who has to outwit a crew of conniving elves holding his wife and baby captive are two others of the same type. Even William Sanders’ Spearshaker, whose adaptability and courage see him through every battle except his last against despair, is cast in the same mold.

It may also be worth noting that there seems to be an inverse relationship between the ordinariness of this Everyman Shakespeare and his homosexuality/bisexuality: the more ordinary or “normal” he appears, the less likely he seems to be to be gay or bisexual (Table 1).

## Conclusions

It is impossible to tease out all the factors that make a given fictional character who he is. There are simply too many of them, and they often have too much to do with the individuality of their creators to be discernible to outsiders. Moreover, they are necessarily influenced, in ways even the authors themselves may not be aware of, by the cultures in which those authors grew up and now live. As Gary Taylor notes of no less a writer than Shakespeare himself, “Drawing attention to the holes and displacements in Shakespeare’s texts, the blind spots and distortions in his vision, reminds us that he was human, therefore limited, therefore specific to a time and place” (395).

Nevertheless, the very act of poring over so many fictional versions of one man does have the effect of throwing recurring themes or patterns such as the ones described



in the previous section into relief. Given that they *are* patterns, it is clear that they must reflect influences broader than the experience of a single author. Though it is impossible to identify all of these influences, one can at least guess at what some of them may have been, hoping that having paid close attention to the Bards considered and having lived all one's life in the culture exerting the influences may help to educate one's guesses.

The most obvious of all the other-than-personal influences on the Shakespeares considered here is the film Shakespeare in Love, which appears to have had an impact on both the number of titles in which Shakespeare is a character produced over the past decade and, in some cases, on the works' contents as well. As discussed in the Introduction, the significant spike in such titles that followed the release of the film in 1998 attests to its influence on their number. Its influence on their contents may be inferred from such facts as that the covers and blurbs of Simon Hawke's four Shakespeare and Smythe mysteries refer prominently to their similarity to Shakespeare in Love, and his Will resembles the Shakespeare of the movie in certain key respects; that three other titles considered here (My Father Had a Daughter, The Shakespeare Stealer, and Stage Fright on a Summer Night) have girls disguised as boy players in them; and that Anthony Horowitz remarked in a letter to the author that he had been "thinking a little" about the film when he wrote The Devil and His Boy (Horowitz, *Letter*).

The appearance of Shakespeare in Love was not the only event that may have moved fiction writers to begin conjuring up Bards, however. Another was the opening of the new Globe Theater on June 12, 1997 in London, as well as the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the old one, which was celebrated in 1999 (Aliko 45). Regarding the possible influence of the film and the theater's opening on writers and publishing, Megan Lynn Isaac noted, "With Shakespeare experiencing a modern, cultural renaissance in film, in the opening of

the New Globe Theater in London, and in other aspect of popular art, we can probably expect more children's and young adult novels and picture books reinterpreting Shakespeare and his work" (145-46).

Writers with ties to the U. K. seem to have been especially attuned to what was happening at the New Globe. Oxford-educated Susan Cooper's YA novel King of Shadows, which appeared in 1999, tells the story of a young, modern-day American actor who travels back in time to perform at the old Globe after arriving in London to play Puck at the new one. And British writer Pauline Francis's picture book Sam Stars at Shakespeare's Globe (2006) tells the story of an Elizabethan boy hired as an apprentice at the old Globe when that just-built theater "on the south bank of the river" was considered "the new playhouse" (Francis).

If the British were more aware of the New Globe and its history than Americans were, their culture may also have put a somewhat different stamp on its fictional Shakespeares than ours did. An amusing example of this possible difference in outlook may be seen in the two mystery-series Bards considered here. One the creation of American Simon Hawke and the other that of Englishman Philip Gooden, they could hardly be more unlike. Hawke's is a comical bumbler, a brash, young, hard-drinking aspiring writer full of high hopes and big plans, while Gooden's is a wry, sophisticated, understated gentleman who drinks wisely and takes in a great deal more information than he gives out. Virtual stereotypes, respectively, of the American and the "Brit," they remind one that (as S. Schoenbaum recalls Desmond McCarthy saying) "trying to work out Shakespeare's personality" is "like looking at a very dark glazed picture in the National Portrait Gallery: at first you see nothing, then you begin to recognize features,

and then you realize that they are your own” (viii). Or those of your culture, Mr. McCarthy might have added.

Arguably, culture has influenced the nineteen Shakespeares in the works discussed here in other ways as well. American Pamela Rafael Berkman’s philandering Shakespeare, whose chief characteristic seems to be a breezy disregard of his wife and children, may, for example, be seen as the child of an American culture in which high divorce rates and “deadbeat dads” are common. He isn’t the only such Shakespeare in the twenty-seven works considered. As a result of his psychological neglect of his son Hamnet, Grace Tiffany’s *Will* indirectly causes the boy’s death *My Father Had a Daughter*; Peter Hassinger’s Shakespeare unabashedly rekindles an affair with an old girlfriend in *Shakespeare’s Daughter*; Carolyn Meyer’s young Will leaves a loving wife and three toddlers behind seemingly without a thought in *Loving Will Shakespeare*; and one of the first requests Harry Turtledove’s makes of Queen Elizabeth after the revolution in *Ruled Britannia* is that she enable him to shed a wife he dislikes and daughters he has hardly wasted a thought upon for over four hundred pages.

Just as these Bards who are such “poor husbands” and “poor fathers” (Marder) may display the stamp of the culture that produced them, so may Grace Tiffany’s sympathetic young Will, who falls in love with Henry Wriothesley. For whatever the truth is regarding the sexuality of the historical Shakespeare, the fact that Tiffany’s publisher brought out a book about a likeable character with homosexual inclinations may mean that our own cultural perception of gays and bisexuals is changing—that what would once have been so wholly unacceptable as to be unnamable is now acceptable enough to attach to a cultural icon, a figure almost always portrayed in a positive light.

(Interestingly, this particular cultural shift, if there has indeed been one, seems not yet to have been completed: Tiffany's Will, though attracted to Southampton, never acts on his attraction in the book, and though Sarah Hoyt's young Shakespeare beds a sexually shape-shifting elf in Ill Met by Moonlight, that startling creature is in female form when he does so. Taken together with the fact that the ordinary-seeming, "normal" Bards of Harry Turtledove and others appear always to be heterosexual in these books[Table 1], this may be an indicator of homosexuality's only partial acceptability in contemporary America.)

The mere fact that so many of the nineteen Bards considered here are so likeable also speaks cogently to the influence of culture. Seven out of the eleven YA and J Shakespeares considered here are wholly positive characters, after all—that is, their authors have ascribed no negative traits to them whatever (Table 1). Part of the reason for the squeaky cleanliness of the majority of these Shakespeares for the young may be that, increasingly, the kinds of books they inhabit are being used as supplementary materials in classrooms. In an e-mail to the author, J. B. Cheaney noted that her belief that "historical fiction has an important role in introducing students to Shakespeare" had been one of the reasons she wrote The Playmaker and its sequel, The True Prince ("Re: Website Inquiry"). And Megan Lynn Isaac recommends both Cooper's King of Shadows and Blackwood's The Shakespeare Stealer, with its somewhat more complex, grumpy Bard, as useful teaching tools. Both of these last two titles, she writes, "offer particularly meaningful insights into the period" (Isaac xii).

But the fact that the Shakespeares in six of the eight works for *adults* considered here were also at least generally positive characters (two wholly and four generally

positive, to be exact) points to a broader influence. One suspects, in fact, that something similar to what we do when we equate beauty with goodness occurred in the cases of both the YA/Children's and the Adult works. All of the authors whose works are considered here share their readers' culture with regard to Shakespeare, after all—that is, they share a culture that attests often and loudly to his greatness. It seems quite possible that these authors responded to cultural “pressure” to approve of Shakespeare by turning what we all have been taught is great writing into (in their case) sixteen good men.

J. B. Cheaney mentioned the phenomenon, which she candidly admitted may have influenced her own books about Shakespeare, in a second e-mail to the author. She wrote, “I try to resist the conventional wisdom, but Shakespeare-as-genius (in the archaic sense of the word) rubs off, I'm sure. I've read my share of bardolatry books, and even though I know he was just a man, I bow to his stupendous achievement” (Cheaney, “Re: Shakespeare”). Cheaney's Shakespeare in The Playmaker received a wholly positive rating in Table 1, as did Susan Cooper's and Anthony Horowitz's.

As mentioned earlier, only two of the authors of works for adults, Pamela Rafael Berkman and Robert Nye, created Bards who were more nearly negative than positive characters. Ms. Berkman's Shakespeare in Her Infinite Variety seems a response to what Annalisa Castaldo calls a “key cultural issue”—that of the unfaithful husband and neglectful father. But Robert Nye's Bard in The Late Mr. Shakespeare is of a different order, though he, too, seems to have a cultural origin. Not merely an annoying philanderer, he is a man whose immoral actions have had a disastrous effect on the life of the book's narrator, who so far forgives them that it is questionable whether he considers them transgressions at all.

Nye's book presents obvious problems to readers raised to admire Shakespeare, among the knottiest of which are to understand how the author wants us to judge his Bard and what he means by inventing a Shakespeare who is—whatever else he may be—a child molester. One way to understand the work may be to see it in relation to the culture of bardolatry that produced the sixteen attractive Shakespeares discussed above.

If we agree that the “conventional wisdom” of “Shakespeare-as-genius,” in J. B. Cheaney's words, is constantly “rubbing off” on us (“Re: Shakespeare”), then it is easy to see how it may have produced not only what Gary Taylor terms “the concretion” of the playwright's “talent,” (385), but also a similar petrification of his image as a man, which is naturally related to it in our minds. Thus Mr. Nye's narrator Pickleherring, who insists that he intends to prove Shakespeare is still alive or to restore him to life (Nye 117; 192; 40), may be said to be writing to free the still-living man beneath a dead, stiff, “concretized” reputation and image.

To do so of course requires drastic tactics: the petrified object must be transformed somehow into its opposite. Put another way, it must be turned upside down. (As Gary Taylor writes, “The upsidedown inevitably comments upon the rightsideup. In fact, turning the world upsidedown may be one of the only ways to make us see it at all. It defamiliarizes what had seemed inevitable, the artificiality of what had seemed natural” [402]).

If the “familiar”—the “rightsideup,” in terms of Shakespeare's accepted image—is something like a composite of the sixteen likeable, civilized Bards produced by the writers considered here, then Mr. Nye's is indeed “upsidedown.” His perhaps-raped, sexually dysfunctional, child-molesting Shakespeare is the polar opposite of the

housebroken others. He is not a character who fades quickly from memory, whom the eye recognizes and slides easily past. On the contrary, he is as bothersome as a hangnail. He is not as he should be, and so we keep thinking about him and trying to “figure him out.” Which is also to say—to use Pickleherring’s word—that he is once again “alive.”

In fact, most of the recurring “types” of Shakespeare found in the twenty-seven works considered here may, like Robert Nye’s Bard, be understood in terms of their relationship to the adulatory Shakespeare culture in which we live. The Flawless Bard and the Enigmatic Bard, for example, are both useful tools with which to build culturally mandated positive characters. In The Playmaker, J. B. Cheaney’s particular version of the Enigmatic Shakespeare serves as a metaphor for the “worthwhile” difficulty of his own works: though Richard Malory never understands the plays at first any better than he does the cryptic words of advice this Shakespeare offers, they always turn out to have meaning for his life—just as Ms. Cheaney clearly hopes they will for the lives of the students who read her series (Cheaney: “Re: Website Inquiry”).

Other Bards may embody specific cultural issues, as Pamela Rafael Berkman’s self-deceiving sexual cheat does. Simon Hawke’s, Harry Turtledove’s, and Sarah Hoyt’s *Wills* may also be counted among these issue-embodying Shakespeares. All *Ordinary Men in Extraordinary Circumstances*, they may reflect a kind of cultural preoccupation with the danger and uncertainty of modern, post 9-11 American life. None of them is physically imposing, and two (Hawke’s and Turtledove’s) are even rather cowardly. Yet they are all placed in dangerous situations, with only their ready wits, determination, and the odd small dagger to protect them—and they all manage to prevail. Though Hawke’s books are mysteries, Turtledove’s alternative history, and Hoyt’s fantasy, they are all

fast-paced, occasionally comical, and ultimately reassuring tales of Bards whose ages and looks may vary, but whose essential decency is comfortably constant.

There is one such Shakespeare, however, who both fits this mold and shatters it. He is William Sanders' Spearshaker, a hardworking actor/playwright whose regrettably poor head for drink leads him down a circuitous path to captivity among the Cherokee. While the other Ordinary Men in Extraordinary Circumstances are essentially only flawed-but-likeable Everymen in dangerous situations, this one is concerned with larger issues. Instead of personifying the angst of contemporary America and reassuring us by triumphing in the end, this Shakespeare embodies (perhaps) the assumptions of the West concerning the primacy of its culture, or (again perhaps) the assumptions of Art itself. This Shakespeare does not win out in the end: instead, he learns the bitter truth that there are whole cultures of people in the world to whom his poetry has nothing to say.

Even when this Shakespeare's words, so often called "immortal" and "universal" in our culture, are translated for the tribe in the story, they are misinterpreted, because the assumptions about human nature and existence that underlie them are ones the Cherokee do not share. Faced with this reality when he attempts to stage his Indian-ized Hamlet, Sanders' Shakespeare loses heart and eventually dies. Unlike so many of the fictional Bards examined here, he neither knows all the answers to Life's questions nor triumphs against all odds. Rather, he finds that he can no longer do at all the one thing that he had counted on being able to do supremely well.

It is a polite but devastating lesson to a hitherto dominant culture in a changing world. *Don't assume that others understand or endorse your views simply because you translate them into their tongues*, this Shakespeare's experience teaches. *You haven't the*



*right to make up others' minds about the world. Or alternatively, Don't be so certain that Art is other than ephemeral and tied to a particular time and place, or that there is a single "human nature" to which it speaks.*

Shakespeare, Gary Taylor writes, "no longer transmits visible light; his stellar energies have been trapped within the gravity well of his own reputation. We find in Shakespeare only what we bring to him or what others have left behind; he gives us back our own values" (411). Annalisa Castaldo echoes him, writing, "It seems that . . . Shakespeare's character depends mainly on who's watching."

For the most part, I would agree with them. Fifteen fictional Shakespeares who seem to say more about their authors and a Western, Bard-worshipping culture than they do about the actual man from Stratford attest to it here. Yet one likeable Shakespeare—William Sanders'—does not. Though the story in which he finds himself certainly reflects the background of its creator, it is also that of the historical playwright.

It is a story, in other words, of the failure of an icon—call it Art or Western Culture—to accomplish what we believe it will. We believe that it can demolish human barriers, and sometimes it cannot. We believe its message is universal and immortal, and it is not. In contemporary America, where he embodies this flawed icon, no figure could tell such a tale with more authority than William Shakespeare. Because it is his own story, and because it is a true one, he still does transmit "visible light" when he tells it.

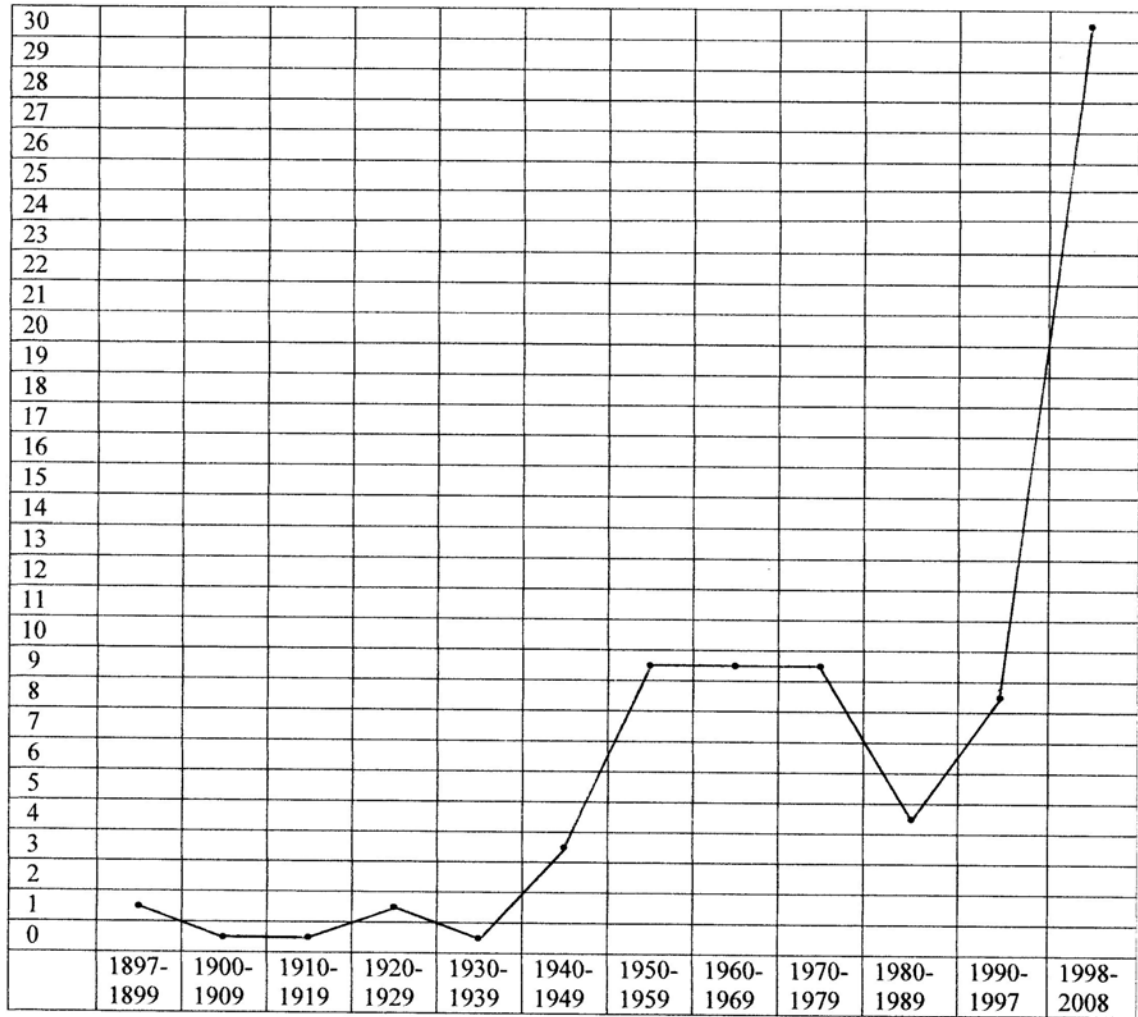


Figure 1: Number of Fiction Titles in Which Shakespeare the Man is a Character, by Decade.

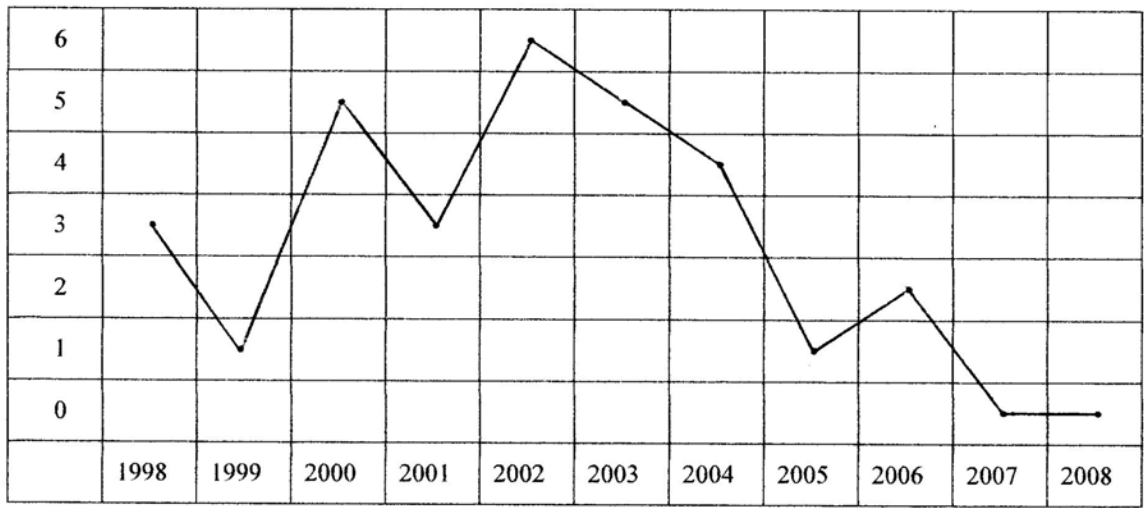


Figure 2: Number of Fiction Titles in Which Shakespeare the Man is a Character, Year by Year, 1998-2008.

Table 1

## Twenty Shakespeares Evaluated for Possession of Thirteen Attributes

	Over	Ext	Ord	Risk	Enig	Negl	Kind	Cou	Wk	Ad	Hom	Bi	Ma
1. Hawke	+ (-)		X	X				(+) -					X
2. Gooden	+	X			X					(X)		(X)	
3. Berkman	(+) -					X				X			
4. Tiffany	+ (-)	X				X				X	(X)	(X)	X
5. Sanders	+							+		n.a.			
6. Turtledove	+ (-)		X	X			(X)	(+) -	X	X			X
7. Hoyt	+ (-)		X	X				+	n.a.	X	(X)	(X)	
8. Nye	(+) -	X							X	X	(X)	X	X
9. <u>S. in L.</u> (film)	+		X	X						X			
10. Blackwood	+ (-) grumpy	X			X	(X)		+	XX				(X)
11. Cooper	+	XX					XX						
12. Horowitz	+						X		(X)				
13. Cheaney	+	X			X		(X)		XX				
14. Osborne	+						XX	+	(X)				
15. Hassinger	+ (-) ad.	X gifts	X probs	X			X			X			X
16. Meyer	+ (-) negl.	X				(X)	X	+					(X)
17. Freeman	+	X gifts	X probs				XX		(X)				
18. Rogers	(+) - comic villain												
19. Francis	+	X gifts	X probs				X						
20. Koscielniak	+	X gifts	X home life				X						

Table 2

## Twenty Shakespeares Evaluated for Possession of Twelve Additional Attributes

	Hum	Intel	Intuit	Hwrk	Cons	LF	Grief	Guilt	Prag	Drin	Mol	DGP
1. Hawke	X	X					n. a.		X	XX		
2. Gooden		X		X					X			
3. Berkman						(X)	X	X	X	X		
4. Tiffany		X		X	X	(X)	X	XX				X
5. Sanders	X	X		X	X	n. a.	n.a.		n. a.	X		n. a.
6. Turtledove	X	X		X	X				X			
7. Hoyt		X		X		X	n. a.			X		n. a.
8. Nye		X		(X)			X			XX	X	
9. <u>S. in L.</u> (film)	X			(X)					X			X
10. Blackwood	X	X		X			(X)	(X)	X			X
11. Cooper		XX	XX			X	X					
12. Horowitz				X	X		n. a.	n. a.				
13. Cheaney		X	X	X					X			
14. Osborne			X	X	-							X
15. Hassinger	X					X	X	X				
16. Meyer	X	X		X		-						
17. Freeman			XX	X								
18. Rogers	X											
19. Francis			X	X		X	X					
20. Koscielniak	X											

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