

# The Bard's Speech: Making it Better; Shakespeare and Therapy in Film

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## Abstract

This paper will argue that Shakespeare has become so prevalent and powerful in popular entertainment as a shorthand to signal high culture that his name and his works can be invoked as therapeutic even in circumstances in which, historically, they did not feature. I will first seek to chart the place and power of the process of Shakespearization. I will then examine the prevalence in popular film of figures with disabilities. Finally, I will consider the particular fictional role that Shakespeare can play as a form of therapy for some of these historical protagonists with disabilities, a role that Shakespeare did not fill in their real lives.

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## Shakespearization as Civilization

It is a commonplace for Shakespeare to be used to signal high culture in works that are intended for a popular culture audience, both in print and on screen.<sup>1</sup> For example, in the 1996 thriller *A Matter of Honor*, by disgraced former politician and writer of popular fiction Jeffrey Archer, the central character uses a simple device to maintain his grip on sanity and to avoid being forced to reveal secrets under torture by the KGB: he recites the names of the plays of Shakespeare. So powerful does this device become for him that the practice builds to a climax: the more excruciating the torture, the more obscure are the plays that the plucky British agent is able to recall. Eventually, after *Two Noble Kinsmen*, his torturers give up: he has beaten them through Shakespeare. He has demonstrated his cultural superiority (Archer 2004, 285).

In literary narratives, being in control or being "civilized" is quite frequently represented as the same as being Shakespearized — a term that Emerson seems to have coined (see Bristol 1990). However, this term is by no means entirely positive in its valency, even in its earliest usage. In a footnote to a 2010 essay, Ronan Ludot-Vlasak observes:

As the title of Michael Bristol's book *Shakespeare's America, America's Shakespeare* indicates, "the interpretation of Shakespeare and the interpretation of American popular culture are two mutually determining practices" (Bristol 3). The verb "shakespearize" is used by Ralph Waldo Emerson in "The American Scholar," an essay in which he calls for the advent of an American literature that breaks from European literary models: "The English dramatic poets have Shakespearized now for two hundred years." (Ludot-Vlasak 2010, n. 2, 11).

To quote that 1837 speech a little more fully, what Emerson writes is this: "Genius is always sufficiently the enemy of genius by over-influence. The literature of every nation bear me witness. The English dramatic poets have Shakespearized now for two hundred years" (Emerson 1837, 28). In Edna H. L. Turpin's 1907 edition of the essay (which is the basis of the Gutenberg version from which I have quoted), she adds this note to the first of the two sentences quoted above: "The conventional is the continual foe of all true art," and this note to the second:

Emerson is continually stimulating us to look at things in new ways. Here, for instance, at once the thought comes: "Is it not perhaps possible that the transcendent genius of Shakespeare has been rather noxious than beneficent in its influence on the mind of the world? Has not the all-pervading Shakespearian influence flooded and drowned out a great deal of original genius?" (Emerson 1837, 283)

Turpin's reading of Emerson seems to be that Shakespearizing has a detrimental influence on any succeeding serious literature.

By the late twentieth century, Terence Hawkes was able to identify just how far the influence of Shakespeare had spread, encompassing not only high culture, but many aspects of everyday life. In the introductory pages to *Meaning by Shakespeare*, he spends some time on *Hamlet* and on what that play, that character, and that word had come to represent:

*Hamlet* scores high marks, inevitably. It comes to function as a universal cultural reference point, a piece of social shorthand. Bits of its language embed themselves in everyday speech until it starts to seem like a web of quotations. In the end, it enters our way of life as one of the resources through which that way of life generates meaning. As an aspect of the works of 'Shakespeare', the play helps to shape large categories of thought, particularly those which inform political and moral stances, modes and types of relationship, our ideas of how men and women, fathers and mothers, husbands and wives, uncles and nephews, sons and daughters ought respectively to behave and interact . . . In other words, *Hamlet*

crucially helps to determine how we perceive and respond to the world in which we live. (Hawkes 2012, 4)

In this essay, we shall consider whether this "social shorthand" signifies any less pernicious a practice than Emerson's "Shakespearizing."

I should like to turn to the idea of Shakespeare as therapy, starting with an illustration from a film based on a play, both of which *refer to* Shakespeare. This is a straightforward test case, because, unlike the films discussed later in this paper, this film version is not radically different from the original play on which it is based, although both the play and the film are selective in the history that they represent. Let me pose a question: in which text do the following lines occur?

"His affections do not that way tend."

"The oldest hath borne most."

The answer is that they occur in Alan Bennett's 1991 play *The Madness of George III*, and in the 1994 film version of that play, *The Madness of King George*, for which Bennett himself wrote the screenplay.

In the stage version, as the King loses his sanity, the Prince of Wales has this interchange with his mother:

QUEEN: I am his wife. Do I not care for him too?

PRINCE OF WALES: Perhaps, madam. But in his current frame of mind His Majesty does not seem to care for you. His affections do not that way tend. (Bennett 1992, 32)

In trying to account for his father's behavior, the Prince falls back on *Hamlet*, using the words of Claudius to discount one possible cause of George's insanity. Bennett makes good use of one of Shakespeare's most famous madmen, and his play reverses the roles of fathers and sons, mothers and lovers to add further levels of irony for those acquainted with *Hamlet*.

At the climax of the play, Bennett references Shakespeare's other famous mad role. The madness of George has been characterized as a failure to control language, and the turning point in his progress to sanity comes when Thurlow, the Lord Chancellor, visits the King and finds him acting out a scene from *King Lear*. He returns to Westminster with the news:

THURLOW: I've been with His Majesty and have had two hours' uninterrupted conversation with him.

DUNDAS: Oh God, you mean he's talking again?

THURLOW: No dammit. Well, yes. But not fifty to the dozen, and not nonsense either. He's actually a damned clever fellow. Had me reading Shakespeare. Have you read *King Lear*? Tragic story . . .

DUNDAS: Lord Chancellor . . .

THURLOW: The point is, the King is better.

DUNDAS: Better than he was?

THURLOW: No. Better in every respect. (Bennett 1992, 83)

Perhaps the two points to bear in mind from this conversation are that Shakespeare figures both as an index of the King's intelligence and as the means of judging that the King is "better." George remains sane for the remainder of the play and regains control of his kingdom. Thurlow, on the other hand, is ignorant of *King Lear*, and therefore does not appreciate the significance of the scene which he has witnessed. He is represented as not having been Shakespearized, and therefore as being inferior to the King. The acquisition of Shakespeare conveys superiority: intellectual superiority, certainly, but perhaps also moral superiority. Thurlow is as ignorant of Shakespeare as are the KGB torturers in Jeffrey Archer's novel; it is common in narratives that those who are in possession of Shakespeare are represented as heroes.

The King has played Lear in 4.7, the scene in which Cordelia is re-united with a father who has apparently recovered his sanity. The difference between the Lear we see in this scene and the one we met in the previous scene is very pronounced, almost as marked as that between the George we see acting out Shakespeare and the jabbering George earlier in the play. George demonstrates his sanity through his command of Shakespeare, acting out the part of a recovered lunatic; he signals his new resolution at the end of the play, as he prepares for the service of thanksgiving for his recovery, by referencing the closing lines of *King Lear*:

The oldest hath borne most. You that are young  
Shall never see so much nor live so long (5.3.319-320).

This is not, of course, a direct quotation, because these lines are not Lear's: he is dead by the time these lines, whether they are spoken by Albany or by Edgar, are voiced on behalf of the survivors: "*We that are young*" (my italics).<sup>2</sup>

In his 2002 essay, Brian Gibbons argues that Bennett's treatment of *King Lear* is closer to Tate's version than to Shakespeare's. Bennett follows the plot of "King Lear" as revised by Tate, but preserves the language of Shakespeare, rather than inserting the much less familiar language of Tate. Gibbons also argues in this essay that there are echoes of *Measure for Measure* and *Richard*

*II* in Bennett's play. It is true that Bennett gives a more optimistic version of *King Lear* than Shakespeare, just as his version of King George's story is more optimistic than the reality of history. In Bennett's play, King George's version of *King Lear* ends with Lear reunited with Cordelia and able to speak the closing lines of the play; his King George closes the play in 1789 (Bennett 1992, xiv), a sane man. In reality, he had a relapse in 1802 (xiv), was totally insane from 1810 onwards, and died in 1820.

Before considering the two films that are at the center of this paper, I want to turn briefly to Emma Thompson's 1995 screen adaptation of Jane Austen's *Sense and Sensibility*, an example of a subtle and extended use of referencing Shakespeare as what Hawkes might term "a social shorthand" (Hawkes 2012, 4), a method to indicate high culture. In Chapter 10 of Austen's novel (1995, 28), Marianne and Elinor discuss Mr. Willoughby's opinions on Cowper, Scott, and Pope, but, in the comparable scene in Thompson's film, Marianne and Mr. Willoughby, by turns, recite Shakespeare's Sonnet 116 (Thompson 1995, 97). Nora Stovel has provided a detailed examination of the differences between Austen's novel and Thompson's screenplay in her article for *Persusasions* (Stovel 2011). I believe that the implication of this particular change is that modern cinema audiences cannot be guaranteed to recognize the names of Cowper, Scott, and Pope, whereas they most definitely can recognize the name of Shakespeare. Indeed, the sonnet becomes a pivotal feature of the film, because, at the climactic moment of the narrative, Marianne declaims it through her tears to a silent landscape (Thompson 1995, 177) — a scene that has no equivalent in the novel.<sup>3</sup> There is, however, a reference to *Hamlet* in the novel that is not included in the film. In Chapter 16, Mrs. Dashwood takes up a volume of Shakespeare and exclaims: "We have never finished *Hamlet*, Marianne; our dear Willoughby went away before we could get through it. We will put it by, that when he comes again . . . But it may be months, perhaps, before *that* happens" (Austen 1995, 51; emphasis in original). It is ironic that this text, in both novel and film formats, should be one of the few to include a character, in the shape of Willoughby, who is in possession of Shakespeare but who behaves badly.

The novel is greatly interested in literary sophistication. In Chapter 22, Lucy is described as being "naturally clever": "Elinor frequently found her agreeable; but her powers had received no aid from education; she was ignorant and illiterate" (Austen 1995, 76). The film has two other moments when poetry is quoted — one quotation from Cowper (Thompson 1995, 50) and one from Spenser (187) — but in neither case is the poet identified: the poetry speaks for itself, and the audience need not be distracted by attributions. If attributions were included, they might suggest that Ferrars (a Cowperite) and Brandon (a Spenserian) really had outshone the Shakespearean Willoughby.

## Shakespearization as Therapy

"Shakespearizing," as we have seen, is a long and ingrained habit, so we should not be surprised at the ways in which Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is used in two films separated by more than twenty years, from the late 1980s to 2010: *My Left Foot* (1989) and *The King's Speech* (2010). Specifically, I will examine changes between the original events on which these films are based and the films themselves, in terms of their representation of Shakespeare as therapy. First, however, I would like to comment upon that phenomenon of actors frequently winning Oscars for playing characters with disabilities. On 2 February 2009, in her witty article for ABC News, "10 Surefire Ways to Score Oscar Recognition," Sheila Marikar placed at the top of her list this category: "No. 1 Star a Handicapped/Disabled/Mentally Ill Character" (Marikar 2009). She notes that so frequently are Oscars awarded on this criterion that it becomes the material for parody: "On a recent episode of NBC's '30 Rock,' the self-absorbed Jenna Maroney wailed about wanting to win an Oscar playing a disabled version of '60s crooner Janis Joplin: 'The academy loves dead singers and the handicapped, and Janis was both!'" (Marikar 2009). Although Janis Joplin's "handicap" was confined to excessive drug-taking, Maroney's point is well made. The list of such Oscars is long and goes back at least to 1970, when John Mills won the Oscar for Best Supporting Actor for his role in *Ryan's Daughter*. The films include *Rain Man* (1988), *The Piano* (1993), *Forrest Gump* (1994), and *Shine* (1996). The film *Shine* is a particularly telling instance of how disability figures in the Oscar process. Its star, Geoffrey Rush, won a Best Actor Oscar for his portrayal of the disturbed pianist David Helfgott, although he had less screen time than Armin Mueller-Stahl, who played the younger Helfgott and received only the award for Best Supporting Actor. Those films nominated for Oscars that did not win include Leonardo de Caprio's first Oscar nomination in 1993 (*What's Eating Gilbert Grape*), Billy Bob Thornton's nomination for *Sling Blade* (1996), and Russell Crowe's 2001 nomination for *A Beautiful Mind*.

Marikar quotes from this speech from the 2008 film *Tropic Thunder*, in which Kirk Lazarus suggests to another character that it has been an error to choose a role based on too great a disability:

Check it out. Dustin Hoffman, "Rain Man," look retarded, act retarded, not retarded. Count toothpicks to your cards. Autistic. Sure. Not retarded. You know Tom Hanks, "Forrest Gump." Slow, yes. Retarded? Maybe. Braces on his legs. But he charmed the pants off Nixon and he won a ping-pong competition. That ain't retarded. You went full retard, man. Never go full retard. Don't believe me? Ask Sean Penn, 2001, "I Am Sam." Went full retard. Went home empty handed. (Marikar 2009)

This phenomenon of able-bodied actors winning Oscars for their portrayal of disabled characters has proved an irritation for disability groups. At the time when Colin Firth won his 2011 Oscar for his role in *The King's Speech*, "Disability Bitch," the anonymous author of the opinion page *Ouch* on the BBC website, wrote this: "[G]enerally speaking, I do hate all non-disabled actors who try to play us a lot. They're just slightly rubbish, in my considered experience, and disabled actors often get upset that abled folk are stealing jobs away from them, despite apparently being born to play certain roles" ("Disability Bitch" 2011). We shall return to the views of "Disability Bitch" in a little while, but it may be worth noting one exception to her observation. Harold Russell, a U.S. army veteran, lost both hands during World War II and won two Oscars for his role in *The Best Years of Our Lives* (1946), one for Best Supporting Actor and an honorary Oscar for "bringing hope and courage to his fellow veterans": he is the only actor to receive two Oscars for the same role. It is also the case that a different form of inequality is practiced within this phenomenon; there are many more men than women in these roles, and men are in the featured roles of both films we are about to consider.

Having considered the general processes of "Shakespearization" and the popular appeal of films that have disability at their center, I want to turn to my two specific test cases. My first instance is the 1989 film *My Left Foot*, the account of the life of Christy Brown and his "progress" from an inarticulate man suffering from cerebral palsy to award-winning writer. Although Shakespeare does make an appearance in Brown's book, *My Left Foot* (1954), on which the film is based, the film considerably alters the nature of this appearance. In Chapter 15, Christy is in the Clinic and is given his copy of the complete works of Shakespeare by Sheila, a girl who has visited the Clinic and with whom Christy has formed a deep friendship. She gives him the book just before she leaves for America to be married:

I remember how, on the morning she left the Clinic for good, she got me to recite for her Hamlet's heart-breaking speech, "To be or not to be." As I spoke it all the children were shouting and laughing around us . . . Discovering all the beauty of Shakespeare gave me an almost physical sense of joy. Often in the middle of one of his plays I'd pause, breathless, and wonder at the incredible loveliness of his imagination and the soundness of his reasoning. (Brown 1954, 176-77)

What is noteworthy here is that Christy understands what he is reading: there is no sense that he struggles to perform the speech from *Hamlet*; moreover, he reads it in public before an audience of delighted children.

In the award-winning film version of *My Left Foot*, Shakespeare makes an altogether different kind of entrance. He appears when Christy is at his lowest ebb, and his entrance comes in private, at Christy's home. This is a professional intervention of Shakespeare — smuggled into Christy's bedroom by a doctor in a tailored suit. The suit and Shakespeare are in stark contrast to the clothing and the setting of Christy's home. "I've brought you a speech I would like you to learn," says the doctor — and what a speech it is that she brings: the most famous of all Hamlet's soliloquies, and the very same speech that features in Brown's autobiography. Within the context of the film, the speech is, on the one hand, a piece that is easily recognizable to the audience, even as Christy makes his first halting attempts to recite it. Without that quality of instant recognition, the speech would have much less impact because the cinema audience has to see immediately that Christy is being subject to the process of Shakespearization: that recognition cannot be left to chance.

It is, furthermore, a speech that, in the film, is recognized even by Christy's parents, who have not been represented as likely to enjoy or appreciate Shakespeare. Indeed, so strong is the antipathy of Christy's father that, although he has been Shakespearized enough to recognize the speech from *Hamlet*, and to join in the "reading," his "performance" quickly metamorphoses into this parody: "Whether tis nobler in the mind to have to suffer this fucking rubbish." By this stage in the film, the position of the father has been clearly established: he is a wicked father who spends any available money on drink and who disapproves of his wife's efforts to save to buy Christy a wheelchair. He further alienates the sympathies of the audience through this crude response to Shakespeare, and we are encouraged to feel no great sense of loss at his death. He is a more extreme version of the KGB torturers in the Archer novel or of Thurlow in *The Madness of George III*, all characters who have failed to acquire Shakespeare.

In the film, unlike the autobiography, Christy struggles to learn this unfamiliar and decontextualized speech, which he performs in private for the doctor, not in public before a delighted audience. The only access that his family has to his performance is via eavesdropping: they are not to be allowed access to this new part of Christy's work — the Shakespeare part, the high-culture part. It is, perhaps, strange that the film's writers and director chose to select this speech as a test for Christy, the educational hurdle over which he must jump. This is a speech that weighs up the merits of life and death, existence and suicide, scarcely material for the therapy of a young man in depression. No thought is given to what the speech might mean in the context of *Hamlet*, in terms of the transaction of ideas from actor to audience: what is at stake is a demonstration that Christy can speak the words of the Bard, and the speech needs to be the best known of Shakespeare's speeches, whatever that speech might mean.

The use of Shakespeare in the film, as opposed to the autobiography, is a shift away from a joyful, shared experience, accepted as perfectly natural by all those involved, to a rite of passage, a test, the outcome of which is represented as surprising. It is a watershed in the depiction of Christy's life because it confers on him an extraordinary status, that of the "cripple" who can appropriate Shakespeare, or be appropriated by Shakespeare. In the film, Christy's ability to master this decontextualized speech has all the hallmarks of a freak show, so great is the apparent gap between what he might be expected to achieve and what he has done in "achieving" Shakespeare. Christy's ability aligns him with those child actors so popular in the nineteenth century, or the children on YouTube videos in the twenty-first century: their ability to perform Shakespeare is lauded and applauded, not because of the intrinsic value of the words they say, but as an astonishing and extraordinary feat — it is felt to be remarkable that they can do this at all. One of the most celebrated of these child Shakespeareans was William Henry West Betty, known by the stage name of the Young Roscius (Kahan 2010). Born in 1791, he became so well-known that the January 1805 edition of *The Monthly Review, Or, Literary Journal* (edited by Ralph Griffiths and G. E. Griffiths) refers to no fewer than four biographies and memoirs of this "theatrical phænomenon" (Griffiths and Griffiths 1805,100). The review concludes that some of Betty's "biographers consider him as a phaenomenon almost miraculous, and are inclined to think that Nature broke the mould in which she had formed him, in order that there should never be another like him"(100). Dickens later satirized the whole business of child performers in *Nicholas Nickleby* (1838-39), in that the daughter of Vincent Crummles takes the stage as the Infant Phenomenon.

The film version of *My Left Foot* additionally demonstrates through the Shakespeare speech a desire to change Christy, to "normalize" him, and it also demonstrates a fear of what that change might bring. As Dr. Cole starts to work with Christy, his mother asks the potent question, "Is that our Christy?" On the one hand, the question signals her awareness that a change in her son could mean a loss of her power over him, the power of the caregiver; on the other hand, it is a recognition that Christy has an identity of which his disability is only a part, that a Shakespearized Christy is a different Christy and not "our Christy." Perhaps, also, there is a questioning of the value-system implicit in what Dr. Cole is doing: she is teaching Christy to declaim Shakespeare. Is that what "our Christy" would do of his own volition, even a Christy not born with cerebral palsy? After all, this is not what his siblings are doing. His father may produce that Shakespeare parody as he listens to Christy's first stumbling efforts to recite Shakespeare, but he is willing to condone the exercise "so long as he gets better" — a tellingly ambiguous comment which encompasses not only an improvement in Christy's physical well-being, but a whole range of other

possible "improvements," as well. We might recall that Thurlow, in *The Madness of George III*, also believed that, by acquiring Shakespeare, the King had become "better in every respect."

The disabled hero in films of this kind has to become more than ordinary; he has to move to be a genius or savant. Moreover, he has to achieve this status within the parameters of an abled culture: Christy acquires Shakespeare (even with a Northern Irish accent), and thereby acquires Literature with a capital "L." The climax of the film is an awards ceremony at a high-culture event, complete with tuxedos and classical music. In this film, Christy is at the boundary between "abnormal" as disabled and "abnormal" as genius. He is for painting what the heroes of *Shine* and *Amadeus* are for music. After all, in terms of his representation in *Amadeus*, is not Mozart insane? Tom Hulce was nominated for an Oscar for playing this role in the 1984 film; he did not win.

There was, however, an awful irony in having Christy played by Daniel Day-Lewis. This film was one of two occasions within a relatively short period of time on which this actor delivered Hamlet's lines. The other was on stage at the National Theatre in 1989, and the strain of playing the central character in *Hamlet* proved so great for him that he left the production and has never appeared on stage again. In reality, perhaps ironically, Shakespeare did not prove to be good therapy for this particular actor. As I was in the process of writing this paper, Daniel Day-Lewis won his third Oscar for his performance as a Shakespeare-quoting Lincoln. Geoffrey O'Brien had this to say about those quotations:

Kushner's script is more than just elegant in its compression and exposition. It is steeped in the traditions of a political dramaturgy that were familiar to Shakespeare and Schiller but that have not often been practiced in American historical films. The moments when Lincoln quotes Hamlet ("I could be bounded in a nutshell and count myself a king of infinite space, were it not that I have bad dreams"), Banquo ("If you can look into the seeds of time, / And say which grain will grow, and which will not"), and Falstaff ("We have heard the chimes at midnight, master Shallow") are a way of nodding to that ancient bond of theater and politics. Acknowledging the need at every turn for shorthand and quick characterization to fit the events into the available time, the film never pretends that the whole story has been laid out. (O'Brien 2012)

Once again, Shakespeare proves a useful shorthand.

Like Christy Brown, Bertie, the future King George VI, had difficulties with his speech. It might seem that the disability at the center of *The King's Speech* is of a different order from that at the heart of *My Left Foot*: after all, cerebral palsy and stammering are hardly in the same league. But the stammer would prevent the future King from doing his job and achieving his potential, and

therefore is a major hurdle for him to overcome. Bertie is faced with the one of the difficulties that beset Claudius in Robert Graves's 1934 novel, *I Claudius*, but Claudius did not have Shakespeare, whereas, in *The King's Speech*, Bertie does.

On 3 March 2011, "Disability Bitch," in the web page cited above, wrote this about her positive reaction to *The King's Speech*: "Maybe this . . . was helped by the fact that its writer, David Seidler — now an Oscar winner in his own right — was himself a stammerer in childhood." He most certainly was, and the interview of David Seidler, conducted by Tommie L. Robinson, Jr. for *The Leader*, the online journal of the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA), was one of my starting points in writing this section of my paper. Thanks to the fact that Robinson and his colleagues were so generous with their time, I was able to discover something of the truth about the methods used by Lionel Logue in his treatment of Bertie, and to find that the truth was very different from the narrative presented in the film.<sup>4</sup> The film is shot through with Shakespearean allusions, which were charted on a blog on Tuesday, 4 January 2011 by "KJ," Keith Jones, Associate Professor at Christian College, University of Northwestern St. Paul, Minnesota. KJ's entry, "Shakespeare in *The King's Speech*," notes that the allusions are wide-ranging: "Othello, Hamlet, The Tempest, Macbeth (one character mentions "The Scottish Play"), King Lear (possibly), and, most notably, Richard III." KJ helpfully singles out three particular Shakespearean references. The first, which is also the first allusion in the film, is a quotation from *Othello*, spoken by Logue to the Duchess of York on her first visit to Logue's office. KJ observes that this reference serves to "establish Logue's character as a man educated in and apt to use the works of Shakespeare in his everyday conversation."

The second allusion comes as Logue auditions for a play, and chooses, as his audition piece, the opening speech from *Richard III*, complete with withered arm. The third occurs as Logue begins to treat Bertie's stammer, and, as part of that treatment, requires the Duke to recite Hamlet's soliloquy, "To be or not to be." The first of these allusions is a shorthand to establish Logue as being Shakespeareized: the quotation from *Othello* — "Poor and content is rich enough" — is immediately attributed by Logue to Shakespeare. The second quotation introduces the notion of a deformed King of England. The third takes us to the familiar ground of Shakespeare as therapy.

In considering first the use of Shakespeare as therapy, I have found no evidence that Logue ever used Shakespeare as therapy, either with Bertie or with any of his patients. Caroline Bowen, an acknowledged expert on Logue, told me in an email that:

Lionel Logue kept records of appointments and payments, but did not record what he did in his sessions with clients. The Shakespeare scenes in *The King's Speech* screenplay are pure

David Seidler, and not based on anything found to date in archives, notebooks, letters and diaries. Many people who saw Logue either as his (speech and drama/elocution) students, or as his clients with speech impairment, have written to me since 2002, and none have mentioned Shakespeare or anything "literary" for that matter. (Bowen 2012a)

On her own website, Dr. Bowen cites the recollections of Duncan C. M. Smith as being typical of those of Logue's patients; those recollections describe a treatment largely based on breathing exercises, and with no mention of Shakespeare (Bowen 2012b).

In the book *The King's Speech*, there are references to Logue's acting and his therapy, but almost nothing about Shakespeare. This book is not, as one might expect, the script of the film, but instead an account of the life and career of Lionel Logue published before the film was made, with a preface updated after the filming. We learn of Logue performing Dickens (*A Christmas Carol*, Logue and Conradi 2010, 17) and of his founding a "school of acting" at which students performed *One Summer's Day* and *Our Boys* (27), but nothing of Shakespeare.<sup>5</sup> The closest we come to the therapy used in the film is when Logue is quoted as believing that stammerers "tended to have fewer problems with poetry than with prose" (Logue 2010, 42), and when he writes that "Few people know their own voices because it is difficult to 'hear' oneself. Therefore I advise all who can manage it to hear their own voices reproduced. People are usually surprised when they do this, so seldom do they know how they sound" (Logue and Conradi 2010, 99-100). The only occasion in the book when Shakespeare is mentioned is in this reminiscence from Logue's grandson Mark in the prefatory pages: "I became fascinated by a scene in which Rush's character hovers over my father and his elder brother, Valentine . . . while they are made to recite Shakespeare. It reminded me of a similar scene when I was a boy and my father obliged me to do the same" (Logue and Conradi 2010, xii). What is noteworthy here is that the film sets off a memory for Mark Logue, but not a memory of Lionel, his grandfather, the speech therapist, but of Lionel's son. Mark Logue never knew his grandfather.

To return to the second allusion in the film, Logue's use of the opening of *Richard III* as his audition piece, KJ spends some time in carefully tracing all the allusions to *Richard III* in *The King's Speech* and concludes that together they work to develop a view of George VI as the antithesis of Richard III, or, perhaps more specifically, as the antithesis of Shakespeare's representation of Richard III. When Logue fails his audition, he is told, "I'm not hearing the cries of a deformed creature yearning to be King." Shakespeare's Richard was deformed, and suffered from a range of disabilities much closer to those of the Emperor Claudius than to those of Bertie. The allusions to *Richard III* in *The King's Speech* help establish just how limited Bertie's deformities really are.

It is, perhaps, not inappropriate that Shakespeare should figure so prominently in narratives as a form of therapy because madness, disability, and disease figure so prominently in his plays. As we have seen, madness features prominently in *King Lear* and in *Hamlet*. It is taken seriously in those plays, as it is in *Measure for Measure*, *Macbeth*, and *Cymbeline*. As we know, insanity was not always treated sympathetically in Shakespeare's time, and visiting asylums for entertainment continued to be a popular pastime well into the eighteenth century, as Jonathan Andrews has recorded (Andrews 1997). It is unsurprising, therefore, to find comic treatments of madness in *Twelfth Night* and in *The Comedy of Errors* that are every bit as grotesque as anything in Middleton and Rowley's *The Changeling*. The insanity of Titus in *Titus Andronicus* is also played frequently for comic effect. The word "madness" occurs on sixty-two occasions in Shakespeare, sometimes figuratively, but predominantly in a literal sense, and there are doctors in several of the plays. In addition to madness, Shakespeare includes epilepsy in *Othello* and in *Julius Caesar*, and as we have seen, a mixture of deformities in his representation of the character of Richard III. Despite all this, Shakespeare's plays continue to figure as a means of therapy in popular films, because, it seems, even the words of a madman can make you better, as long as those words are written by Shakespeare.

What is, perhaps, surprising is the shift that has taken place in the representation of the relationship between doctor and patient in the centuries between Shakespeare's time and our own. In both *My Left Foot* and *The King's Speech*, the writers and directors are as interested in Dr. Cole and Lionel Logue as they are in the men being treated. The epiphanies that take place in these films are revelations for the therapists as well as for their patients, and this is also evident in a radio play about George VI that preceded the film: *A King's Speech*, written by Mark Burgess and broadcast by BBC Radio 4 in April 2009. In this version of the narrative, which focuses on a different event, the King's preparation for his radio broadcast on Coronation Day, 12 May 1937, Lionel Logue (played by Trevor Littledale), who has left his antipodean accent behind in Australia, uses Tennyson rather than Shakespeare to help the King (played by Alex Jennings) to overcome his stammer. Perhaps the audience for a radio play might be expected to be familiar with the works of Tennyson, whereas a film has to play safe and represent the therapy of high culture through the citing of Shakespeare, whether or not Shakespeare was indeed the therapy in real life, and, as will be clear from essays elsewhere in this issue, whether or not Shakespeare's works in reality function very often as an effective therapy.

## Notes

1. Some of the ideas behind this paper were included in my 1999 article, "Shakespeare as Therapy," in the journal *Acta Universitatis Nicolai Copernici*. I am most grateful to the editors of that journal and to the authorities of UMK for permission to revisit that article.
2. The lines are Albany's in the first quarto and Edgar's in the first Folio. See Warren 1989, 148-49.
3. The novel's several references to Harley Street, simply as a residential address, also show how social shorthand can shift in meaning. These references are not included in the film, because "Harley Street" now has a particular and different meaning.
4. I am most grateful to Tommie L. Robinson Jr., Gary Dunham, Margaret Roger of American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA), and especially to Caroline Bowen.
5. The plays referred to here are probably *One Summer's Day*, the 1900 play by Henry V. Osmond, and *Our Boys*, the 1875 comedy by Henry James Byron.

### Online Resources

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