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Quoting Shakespeare in the British Novel from Dickens to Wodehouse

Daniel Pollack-Pelzner

Hem! Shakspeare

Toward the beginning of the nineteenth century, Jane Austen could have a character in *Mansfield Park* remark offhandedly ‘We all talk Shakespeare, use his similes, and describe with his descriptions.’¹ By the end of the century, ‘[w]e all’ encompassed a far broader set than Austen’s leisured gentry. Expanded access to Shakespeare on stage and page arose from the end of the patent theatres’ monopoly on straight Shakespeare performance; the rise of touring and regional productions outside London; the publication of cheap editions of the complete works, often illustrated; and the circulation of Shakespeare in periodicals and proverb books.² Talking Shakespeare became widespread through organisations both voluntary (working men’s institutes, women’s study clubs) and compulsory: the 1870 Education Act required English schoolchildren to recite Shakespeare passages for their exams, establishing Shakespeare quotation as a form of nationally socialised identity (see Chapter 9).³ As the cult that George Bernard Shaw – half sceptically, half enviously – dubbed ‘Bardolatry’ gained converts, talking Shakespeare diffused through space and time: outward, under the worrisome banner of the British Empire Shakespeare Society (‘Using no other weapon but his name’), and backward, thanks to the historical project of the *Oxford English Dictionary*, whose editors told researchers that if they found a word in the Shakespeare concordance, they

¹ Jane Austen, *Mansfield Park*, ed. John Wiltshire (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 190–1.

² For an overview of these changes, see Gail Marshall (ed.), *Shakespeare in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); and Kathryn Prince, *Shakespeare in the Victorian Periodicals* (New York: Routledge, 2008).

³ Andrew Murphy, *Shakespeare for the People: Working-Class Readers, 1800–1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Katherine West Scheil, *She Hath Been Reading: Women and Shakespeare Study Clubs in America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2012); Catherine Robson, *Heart Beats: Everyday Life and the Memorized Poem* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012).

need not look for an earlier source – effectively turning the act of speaking English into the practice of quoting Shakespeare.⁴

If everyone was quoting Shakespeare, could everyone claim his burgeoning authority? For British novelists, this social question had a formal corollary in the distribution of Shakespearean speech between character and narrator, between quoted dialogue and authorial discourse. The critic Peter Bayne invoked a commonplace conjecture in an essay on Shakespeare and George Eliot: ‘It has been said that if Shakespeare had lived in the Victorian age, he would have written novels.’⁵ Yet the absence of a narrator from Shakespeare’s plays puzzled Victorian critics who tried to imagine Shakespeare as a novelist. What would a narrative voice sound like for an author whose plays only give the voices of his characters?⁶ And how could quoting Shakespeare help to establish that voice?⁷

Novelists heralded as Victorian Shakespeares frequently navigated the varied nineteenth-century practices of Shakespeare quotation (in the classroom, in compilation books, in stage spoofs) to construct the relationship between narrator and character, and to negotiate the dialogue between Shakespeare’s voice and the voice of the novel. This chapter looks at three novelists whose practices intersect and contrast: George Eliot, who resists the Bardolatrous imputation of a Shakespearean character’s wisdom to its author by distinguishing her own characters’ inept Shakespeare quotations from her narrative voice; Thomas Hardy, who claims the authority of Shakespearean pastoral, regional language against the glib quotations of his more cosmopolitan characters; and a latter-day Victorian, P. G. Wodehouse, who plays the irreverent, defamiliarising gambits of Victorian Shakespeare burlesques against the educational and commonplace authority that Shakespeare quotations accrue.

As novelists developed a contemporary narrative voice, they also negotiated the distance between Shakespeare quotation as a relic of literary history and as a force of everyday speech. Charles Dickens, for

⁴ George Bernard Shaw, ‘Better than Shakespear?’, in Edwin Wilson (ed.) *Shaw on Shakespeare*, (New York: Applause, 1961), p. 217; British Empire Shakespeare Society quoted in William Greenslade, ‘Shakespeare and Politics’, in Marshall, *Shakespeare in the Nineteenth Century*, pp. 229–50 (p. 244); John Willinsky, *Empire of Words: The Reign of the OED* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), pp. 57, 72.

⁵ [Peter Bayne], ‘Shakespeare and George Eliot’, *Blackwood’s Magazine* 133:810 (1883), 524–38 (p. 524).

⁶ Adrian Poole discusses this question in his introduction to Adrian Poole (ed.), *Great Shakespearians*, Vol. v: *Scott, Dickens, Eliot, Hardy* (London: Continuum, 2011), pp. 1–9.

⁷ See Kate Rumbold’s conclusion to her *Shakespeare and the Eighteenth-Century Novel: Cultures of Quotation from Samuel Richardson to Jane Austen* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), pp. 181–3.

instance, saturates his novels with Shakespeare quotations and with his characters' self-referential speech tags, so that his phrases would circulate as Shakespearean 'household words', in the quotation from *Henry V* that he chose for the masthead of his weekly journal (iv.iii.52).⁸ Yet Dickens also mocks the nineteenth-century ideal that anyone could claim Shakespeare's quoted authority, or that anyone's words could boast a Shakespearean pedigree, through his use of a curious interjection, 'Hem! Shakspeare'.

The phrase pops up oddly in *The Pickwick Papers* (1836–7) when Mr Pickwick's roguish cell-mate in the Fleet Prison notices him waking up: "Why, bless the gentleman's honest heart and soul!" said the Zephyr, turning round and affecting the extremity of surprise; "the gentleman is awake. Hem; Shakspeare. How do you do, Sir? How is Mary and Sarah, Sir? and the dear lady at home, Sir – eh, Sir?"⁹ The Zephyr is mocking Pickwick with this excessively solicitous display, but it's not clear how Shakespeare plays into the joke. Is Shakespeare here in the vocative, a playfully honorific term of address for Pickwick parallel to 'Sir', or in the nominative, a faux citation for some unidentified quotation preceding? The perplexity recurs in *Bleak House* (1853), when the out-of-work Jobling is about to interrupt a job proposal from his friend Guppy, but their mutual friend 'the sagacious Smallweed checks him with a dry cough, and the words, "Hem! Shakspeare!"¹⁰ Again, no obvious quotation has occurred to elicit this attribution; instead, it seems almost as if 'Shakspeare', with its guttural, plusive consonants, is the continuation of a cough.

When this phrase occurs in other Victorian writers, it's clearly an attributive tag for a preceding quotation. Gustave Louis Maurice Strauss, in his *Reminiscences of an Old Bohemian* (1883), explains that: '[i]n the olden days which I am now writing about, a kind of mania seemed to have taken possession of many of our set to deal in Shakespeare quotations on every occasion, in and out of season, always tacking to the tail, "hem – Shakspeare"'.¹¹ Whether Smallweed – a legal apprentice – or the Zephyr – a prison inmate – would have fallen into Strauss's bohemian set seems improbable; part of the humour of their citational coughs consists in the class pretension of their purporting to cite Shakespeare at all. The comic

⁸ For an account of how Dickens's narrative strategies trade on Shakespeare, see Daniel Pollack-Pelzner, 'Dickens and Shakespeare's Household Words', *ELH*, 78:3 (Fall, 2011), 533–56. Valerie L. Gager catalogues and analyses hundreds of Shakespeare quotations in *Shakespeare and Dickens: The Dynamics of Influence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

⁹ Charles Dickens, *The Pickwick Papers*, ed. Mark Wormald (London: Penguin, 1999), p. 553.

¹⁰ Charles Dickens, *Bleak House*, ed. Nicola Bradbury (London: Penguin, 1996), p. 325.

¹¹ Gustave Louis Maurice Strauss, *Reminiscences of an Old Bohemian*, rev. edn (London: Downey, 1895), p. 285.

potential of tacking the abbreviated 'ahem' where no quotation exists seems also to have occurred to Dickens's contemporaries. In *Punch*, in author Francis Cowley Burnand's 'More Happy Thoughts' (1870), one Captain Dyngwell mocks a German professor researching the etymology of the word *Cockalorum*: 'it's "Whatever you please, my little dear, only blow your nose and don't breathe upon the glasses."' To which he gives an air of authority, very confusing to the Professor, by adding, "hem! Shakspeare", which causes the good Herr another sleepless night in his library.'¹²

Dickens's joke seems to be casting his characters as Captain Dyngwells to their interlocutors' (or to the reader's) Professor, trading on Shakespeare's authority by hemming Shakespeare without, in fact, quoting him. But even if there's no Shakespearean quotation to cite, the form of the citation itself might bear a Shakespearean pedigree. In *As You Like It*, Celia tries to comfort her lovesick cousin Rosalind, who mourns that amorous woes have caught burs in her heart. 'Hem them away', Celia counsels, and Rosalind replies in kind: 'I would try, if I could cry "hem" and have him' (1.iii.14–15). Rosalind's longing cough becomes a punning speech-act, if a throat-clearing 'hem' could become a heart-filling summons for Orlando, the homophonic partner 'him'. Perhaps 'Hem; Shakspeare' sometimes echoes Rosalind's wish to possess the absent figure, willing Will into everyday speech. Eliot, Hardy and Wodehouse all work through the desire that Dickens summons to settle – or unsettle – who can speak in Shakespeare's voice.

The Shakespearean Narrator

In nineteenth-century reviews, George Eliot's narrative voice was often evaluated in relation to Shakespeare's, exemplifying that curious counterfactual assumption that Shakespeare would have been a Victorian novelist. That narrative comparison, in turn, conditioned Eliot's own use of Shakespeare quotations, which test the limits of commonplacings practices to represent authentic emotion. In a review of *Daniel Deronda* (1876), Edwin Whipple, a leading Boston critic, raised the common concern that Eliot's narrative voice interrupts the action of her novels; she 'ever appears on the scene as a looker-on', Whipple wrote, 'pouring forth a stream of remarks, wittily wise or tenderly wise'.¹³ This riff on the title of Alexander Main's anthology, *Wise, Witty, and Tender Sayings in Prose and Verse Selected*

¹² Francis Cowley Burnand, 'More Happy Thoughts', *Punch*, 58 (5 March 1870), 89.

¹³ Edwin P. Whipple, 'Review: *Daniel Deronda*', *North American Review*, 124:254 (1877), 31–52 (p. 34).

from the Works of George Eliot (1871), suggests the extent to which, as Leah Price has argued, the process of excerpting sayings from Eliot's works made her write further novels with an eye toward what could be excerpted.¹⁴ (See Chapters 2 and 4 for Shakespeare's own use of this practice.) For Whipple, the adjectives with which Main describes Eliot's work, 'witty' and 'tender', have become adverbial modes of practice for Eliot herself. And in *Daniel Deronda*, Whipple sees this practice run amok: the novel 'so overflows with thoughts that an ordinary novel-reader, dazzled by the blaze which is intended to enlighten him, is tempted to complain that he is impeded rather than assisted by the subtle meditation which is brought in to reinforce clear representation'. The 'blaze' of Eliot's narration risks blinding her reader.

By what standard, then, should Whipple assess Eliot's voice? The answer may not be surprising: 'A reference to the greatest creator and delineator of human character that the world has ever seen is always in point.'¹⁵ A familiar figure comes to Eliot's defence, transformed from a dramatist to a novelist:

Shakespeare is open to the objection that, considered strictly from the point of view of the dramatist, he laid upon his characters a heavy burden of superfluous thought, which retarded the action of the play, and at the same time added nothing to our knowledge of the *dramatis personae*. Whatever violation of the rules of dramatic art Shakespeare may have committed, and however superfluous much of his thinking may appear to dramatic critics, the great body of his readers could ill spare the undramatic thinking he so profusely poured into his dramas; but if we could imagine Shakespeare as a writer of novels after the modern fashion, it is easy to conjecture that he would have retrenched some of the maxims of general wisdom which he put into the mouths of his characters to be spoken from the stage, and used them in commenting on his personages and on the incidents in which they appeared.¹⁶

Like Eliot, Shakespeare slowed down action with non-narrative thought, and just as *Daniel Deronda* 'overflows with thoughts', so many characters' thoughts in Shakespeare's plays could appear 'superfluous'. 'profusely poured'. Yet, Whipple contends, most readers would not sacrifice those thoughts for a more streamlined plot, perhaps because they furnish the beauties for which Shakespeare and Eliot alike were cherished. Thus, 'if we

¹⁴ Leah Price, *The Anthology and the Rise of the Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 105–56.

¹⁵ Whipple, 'Review: *Daniel Deronda*', p. 34.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 34–5.

could imagine Shakespeare as a writer of novels after the modern fashion', he would sound a lot like George Eliot. Whipple adds an orthodox caveat, 'George Eliot is no Shakespeare', but in going on to compare *Daniel Deronda* to *Hamlet*, Whipple establishes that the maxims that adorn Eliot's narrative possess Shakespearean pedigree.¹⁷

When Shakespearean maxims themselves appear in Eliot's novels, however, their status is much more conflicted. A central way that Bardolatry affected reading practices was in the frequent reattribution of maxims from Shakespeare's characters to Shakespeare himself, recasting characters' speech as authorial wisdom. That shift, which Whipple imagined as transforming Shakespeare into a novelist, characterised most nineteenth-century collections of Shakespeare quotations and proverbs, from Mary Cowden Clarke's to John Bartlett's.¹⁸ George Eliot, who shared G. H. Lewes's scepticism toward the cult of Shakespeare worship, distanced herself from the Bardolatrous conflation of author and character by carefully distinguishing her narrator's speech from that of her characters. In particular, like her precursor Henry Fielding in the previous century, she reserved the power to quote Shakespeare persuasively for herself, exposing the aridity or absurdity of her characters' attempts.¹⁹

In *Middlemarch* (1871), for instance, Eliot reveals the hollowness of characters who supply Shakespeare commonplaces in lieu of authentic expression. When Dorothea Brooke, the heroine of *Middlemarch*, is described as a 'beauty', the term evokes those admirable literary extracts that appeared in collections of 'beauties' from the end of the eighteenth century (see Chapter 5). It also evokes the more quotidian ways in which archaic quotations circulated in contemporary prose: her plain attire threw her appearance into relief and 'gave her the impressiveness of a fine quotation from the Bible,—or from one of our elder poets,—in a paragraph of to-day's newspaper'.²⁰ So described, she becomes disturbingly collectable by one such as Mr Casaubon, who frequently substitutes fine quotations

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 35. Eliot, of course, famously questioned the ethical and social authority of 'men of maxims' in Book VII, Chapter 2 of *The Mill on the Floss* (ed. A. S. Byatt (London: Penguin, 1979)).

¹⁸ On this practice, see Margreta de Grazia, 'Shakespeare in Quotation Marks', in Jean I. Marsden (ed.), *Appropriating Shakespeare: Post Renaissance Reconstructions of the Works and the Myth* (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991), pp. 57–72; and Marjorie Garber, 'Bartlett's Familiar Shakespeare', in Marjorie Garber (ed.), *Profiling Shakespeare* (New York: Routledge, 2008).

¹⁹ For more general accounts of Eliot denying her characters the maturity and breadth of vision her narrator attains, see J. Hillis Miller, *Victorian Subjects* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), p. 82; and Franco Moretti, *The Way of the World: The 'Bildungsroman' in European Culture*, 2nd edn, trans. Albert Sbragia (London: Verso, 2000), p. 222.

²⁰ George Eliot, *Middlemarch*, ed. Rosemary Ashton (London: Penguin, 1994), p. 7. Subsequent references are to this edition and are given in parentheses in the text.

for emotional disclosure. When, in their courtship, Dorothea offers 'expressions of devout feeling', Casaubon assents, 'usually with an appropriate quotation' (p. 33), just as he offers quoted judgements of the art of Rome in lieu of the personal preferences Dorothea seeks. Perhaps his most distressing appropriation of a beauty comes when Dorothea begs him to forgive her for questioning his working methods: "My dear Dorothea—'who with repentance is not satisfied, is not of heaven nor earth'.—You do not think me worthy to be banished by that severe sentence", said Mr Casaubon, exerting himself to make a strong statement, and also to smile faintly' (p. 210). Casaubon's quoted sentence is 'severe' not only in the absoluteness of its edict but in its impersonal, negative construction. Rather than deliver the personal utterance 'I forgive you', Casaubon offers an extract that defines the abstract pronoun 'who' would not accept repentance. Worse, this quotation comes from the troubling conclusion to Shakespeare's *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, when Valentine finds his beloved Silvia being raped by his friend Proteus, and then abruptly forgives his apologetic friend with these words and, shockingly, offers to relinquish Silvia to him (v.iv.79–83). This passage prompted Eliot to write in her journal: 'That play disgusted me more than ever in the final scene where Valentine, on Proteus' mere begging pardon when he has no longer any hope of gaining his ends, says: "All that was mine in Silvia I give thee"!—Silvia standing by.'²¹ Casaubon is no Valentine – he is most unwilling to relinquish his bride to any rival lover – but his use of Valentine's line conveys a similar indifference to his bride's emotional state. The beauties of Shakespeare fade when they stand in place of real feeling, the product of exertion and a faint smile rather than Dorothea's 'quick sob' (p. 210).

Eliot brings out this tension between lived experience and citational emotion in other characters, too. For a young woman like Mary Garth, Shakespeare might well furnish the emotional experience of love, as in her playful catalogue of her 'experience' deflected into literary examples from *Romeo and Juliet* through *Waverley* (p. 138). The gradual replacement of literary commonplace with lived experience forms a classic novelistic education, from Don Quixote through Catherine Morland to Emma Bovary – a shift, as well, from romance to realism. What makes Casaubon disturbing is that he continues to take refuge in quotation even after he is married; he has become, in the narrator's own phrase, 'a lifeless embalment of knowledge' (p. 196). Whereas Eliot as a narrator can draw animating mottoes from *Troilus and Cressida* (Chapter 26), *The Tempest* (Chapter 32), *2 Henry*

²¹ Quoted in Gordon Haight, *George Eliot* (London: Penguin, 1986 (1968)), p. 178.

VI (Chapter 33), *Twelfth Night* (Chapter 41), *Henry VIII* (Chapter 42), 2 *Henry IV* (Chapter 60), *Measure for Measure* (Chapters 66 and 71) and *Henry V* (Chapter 77), Casaubon's sense of quotation filters out life:

If [Dorothea] spoke with any keenness of interest to Mr Casaubon, he heard her with an air of patience as if she had given a quotation from the *Delectus* familiar to him from his tender years, and sometimes mentioned curtly what ancient sects or personages had held similar ideas, as if there were too much of that sort in stock already. (p. 361)

Critics have associated Shakespeare with feminine sympathy in Eliot's novels, but the sympathy that Eliot frequently elicits for Casaubon does not extend to his practice of quotation.²² Even Shakespeare's Sonnets, which Eliot cites as mottoes for Chapters 24, 58 and 82, only emphasise Casaubon's sterility when he derives his ideas of masculinity from their conventional reproductive imperative: 'no sonneteer had insisted on Mr Casaubon's leaving a copy of himself' (p. 278).

Eliot's anti-Bardolatrous demarcation between author's and characters' quotations extends, in certain cases, to the mottoes themselves.²³ Whereas Walter Scott, Eliot's precedent for reviving the practice of chapter epigraphs, attributes his Shakespearean epigraphs in *Waverley* directly to 'Shakespeare', in keeping with the search for authorial wisdom common to quotation books, Eliot attributes her motto for Chapter 60 of *Middlemarch* to the character from 2 *Henry IV* who speaks it, Justice Shallow.²⁴ This particular epigraph serves up the pretensions of any character to authorial quotability: 'Good phrases are surely, and ever were, very commendable.' That ostensible praise is rapidly deflated by its source – Shakespeare's verbose Justice, appraising a rather pedestrian expression of one of Falstaff's henchmen – as well as its apparent target within the chapter: Eliot's equally grandiloquent auctioneer, Borthrop Trumbull, 'an amateur of superior phrases' (p. 310) like Justice Shallow, who inflates the value of mediocre merchandise with lofty language, jumbled poetic allusions and pretentious pronunciations. Sustaining the Shakespearean foolery, Eliot has Trumbull sell a motley lot to 'a young Slender of the neighbourhood' (p. 607) – alluding to Justice Shallow's dim-witted nephew in *The Merry Wives of*

²² Marianne Novy, *Engaging with Shakespeare: Responses of George Eliot and Other Women Novelists* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1994); Robert Sawyer, *Victorian Appropriations of Shakespeare* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2003).

²³ For an overview of the varied functions of Eliot's mottoes, see David Leon Higdon, 'George Eliot and the Art of the Epigraph', *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 25:2 (1970), 127–51.

²⁴ See, for example, the epigraphs to Chapters 66 and 68 of Walter Scott, *Waverley*, ed. Andrew Hook (London: Penguin, 2004).

Windsor – after he has articulated his oratorical method: ‘It what we call a figure of speech – speech at a high figure, as one may say’ (p. 311). Shallow’s limited profundity, excerpted as a motto, not only jabs at Trumbull’s rhetorical economy, but also undermines the activity of commending ‘good phrases’ that characters like him aspire to practise. Even if part of Eliot’s novelistic project is to extend Shakespearean sympathy to figures such as Trumbull and Casaubon, whose blinkered language impedes their human relationships, she questions the expanding nineteenth-century practice of bolstering dubious speech with a Shakespearean attribution. The power to quote and be quoted successfully is Eliot’s alone.

Return of the Native Tongue

Thomas Hardy shared Eliot’s scepticism toward glib Shakespeare quotation, yet he constructed a different kind of Shakespearean narrative voice: one that rooted Shakespeare’s authority less in the proper application of commonplace mottoes than in regional, sylvan speech, and that negotiated the tension between Shakespeare as a signifier of linguistic urbanity and Shakespeare as the common tongue. For Hardy, Shakespeare’s language seemed closely akin to nature and its traditional inhabitants. When Hardy began to read Shakespeare intensively at the age of twenty-three (in the same edition, by Samuel Weller Singer, that Dickens had first consulted thirty years earlier), he seemed particularly excited to find correspondences between archaic phrases in the plays and idioms from his native Dorset. The marginal notes in his edition become more copious when Hardy encounters an odd phrase that has an equivalent in Dorset dialect: Hamlet’s expression ‘miching mallecho’ (III.ii.124), for instance, which Hardy noted was still in Dorset parlance, or Ophelia’s ‘dipped the chamber door’ (IV.ii.53) as a match to the Dorset idiom ‘do the door’.²⁵ It was as though he were discovering that his native lexicon, which he had thought an impediment to his untutored literary ambitions, might turn out to be his way in; he’d unwittingly been talking Shakespeare all along. And in his early works, particularly *Under the Greenwood Tree* (1872), the sylvan world of Dorset labourers talks Shakespeare as well. Patricia Ingham has argued that the language of nature for Hardy is Darwinian, and were it to reflect a poetic tradition, one might expect Hardy to align his archaic Wessex with Old English verse, as his contemporary Gerard Manley Hopkins does, or,

²⁵ Dennis Taylor reproduces Hardy’s marginal annotations in ‘Hardy’s Copy of *Hamlet*’, *Thomas Hardy Journal*, 20:3 (2004), 87–112.

if in a pastoral mode, then to the classical model of Virgil's Eclogues.²⁶ Hardy, however, marks his pastoral as distinctly Shakespearean. *Under the Greenwood Tree* takes its title from the song in *As You Like It* that beseeches any willing courtier who wishes to 'turn his merry note / Unto the sweet bird's throat' to 'come hither, come hither, come hither' to the Forest of Arden (II.v.4-5); and the nightingale that serenades the wedded couple at the end of the novel sings: 'Tippiwit! swe-e-et! ki-ki-ki! Come hither, come hither, come hither!'.²⁷ Shakespeare's language has become interfused with the sounds of Hardy's native land.

Yet talking Shakespeare for Hardy also meant to participate in the world of literary ambition, sophisticated education and linguistic manipulation that threatened his sylvan ideal. Mastering Shakespeare's language was key to Hardy's own self-imposed programme of literary apprenticeship: he copied out many passages from the plays in his notebooks, glossing unfamiliar words and playing with distinctive phrases. But the characters in Hardy's novels who demonstrate the greatest facility with Shakespearean quotations, as Adrian Poole has argued, are often the least to be trusted.²⁸ Alec d'Urberville, for example, encounters Tess 'sitting like Im-patience on a monument' (a twist on *Twelfth Night*, II.iv.III), 'suited the action to the word' (Hamlet's advice to the players, III.ii.16) 'and whistled a line of "Take O take those lips away"' (*Measure for Measure's* song of a lover's perfidy, IV.i.I).²⁹ Hardy tells us that 'the allusion was lost on Tess', ensuring that it won't be on the reader, but also marking the gap between Durbeyfield innocence of literary conceits and d'Urberville dexterity. Even as Hardy courts a readership that will recognise his own quotational facility, he exposes the danger of those who wield that skill too well.

Hardy's challenge, then, was to develop a narrative voice that could deploy the sophistication of Shakespearean quotation without losing its grounding in native speech. *The Woodlanders* (1887), written in his major period between *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (1886) and *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (1891), brings the conflict between Shakespeare as traditional woodland knowledge and Shakespeare as threatening literary sophistication into dramatic focus. The novel's moral stalwarts, the woodsman Giles

²⁶ Patricia Ingham, 'Introduction', in Thomas Hardy, *The Woodlanders*, ed. Patricia Ingham (London: Penguin, 1998), pp. xvi-xxxiv; subsequent references are to this edition and are given in parentheses in the text. See also Jonathan Wike, 'The World as Text in Hardy's Fiction', *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, 47:4 (1993), 455-71.

²⁷ Thomas Hardy, *Under the Greenwood Tree*, ed. Tim Dolin (London: Penguin, 1998), p. 159.

²⁸ Adrian Poole, *Shakespeare and the Victorians* (London: Arden Shakespeare, 2004), p. 147.

²⁹ Thomas Hardy, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, ed. Scott Elledge, 3rd edn (New York: Norton, 1991), p. 45.

Winterborne and his unrequited admirer, Marty South, are distinguished by their ability to decipher the 'wondrous world of sap and leaves'; they can 'read its hieroglyphs as ordinary writing'. As Giles's beloved, Grace Melbury, consoles Marty: 'You and he could speak in a tongue that nobody else knew— ... the tongue of the trees and fruits and flowers themselves' (pp. 330–1). That tongue is also Shakespeare's. The banished Duke in *As You Like It* fantasises that, in the Forest of Arden, he will gain something like the capacity of Marty and Giles to find 'tongues in trees' and 'books in the running brooks' (II.i.16). And as Marty's and Giles's tongues echo Shakespeare's, the narrator speaks about them in Shakespearean terms. Realising that she has wronged Giles by breaking their engagement, Grace, the narrator tells us, pities him as:

one who, notwithstanding these things, had, like Hamlet's friend, borne himself throughout his scathing
 'As one, in suffering all, that suffers nothing',
 investing himself thereby with a real touch of sublimity. (p. 219)

In his copy of *Hamlet*, Hardy had written his own father's name next to these lines in praise of Horatio (III.ii.64); Grace's appreciation gives Giles a touch of both Horatio and Hardy senior. But this brush with literary pedigree doesn't tarnish Giles's virtue; on the contrary, he is to Grace an exemplar of 'nature unadorned', of 'undiluted manliness', and the best of 'unvarnished men' (pp. 206, 219).

Marty, too, receives a painful touch of Shakespeare. In Sonnet III – a Hardy-esque lament that his lowly profession as a public playwright makes him ill-suited to genteel life – the speaker says 'my nature is subdued / To what it works in, like the dyer's hand' (lines 6–7). An early review picked up the phrase: Havelock Ellis, who also praised Hardy for having created Shakespearean comic peasants, thought the intimate connection between his rustics and their environment deserved particular mention. They 'have grown to have something of the contours of the things among which they live', Ellis wrote; their 'nature is subdued to what it works in, like the dyer's hand'.³⁰ But when Marty helps her ailing father split wood into spars, the narrator reveals that her palm 'was red and blistering, as if this present occupation were not frequent enough with her to subdue it to what it worked in' (p. 10). Marty's plight punningly echoes Shakespeare's simile: the dye that casts its worker's hand becomes 'a cast of the die of

³⁰ Havelock Ellis, 'Thomas Hardy's Novels', *Westminster Review*, 119 (April 1883), 334–64.

destiny [that] had decided that the girl should handle the tool' (p. 10). Giles is ultimately subdued to the woods he works in: though Grace becomes drawn to his earthy appearance in 'leggings dyed with fruit-stains' (p. 206), her appearance at his cabin in a storm forces him outside to die under the inhospitable branches.

Hardy contrasts these steadfast Shakespearean rustics with the fickleness of Edred Fitzpiers, the newly arrived county doctor, who reads poetry assiduously but lacks the woodlanders' knowledge of tongues in trees. 'Casting a die by impulse' leads him to woo Grace away from Giles (p. 163); after he forsakes her for a former actress, he attempts to win back her heart with a smooth tongue, claiming his love has deepened since his infidelity.

'It is a different kind of love altogether', said he. 'Less passionate; more profound. It has nothing to do with the material conditions of the object at all; much to do with her character and goodness, as revealed by closer observation. "Love talks with better knowledge, and knowledge with dearer love."'

'That's out of *Measure for Measure*', said she slyly.

'Oh yes – I meant it as a citation', blandly replied Fitzpiers. 'Well then, why not give me a very little bit of your heart again?'

The crash of a felled tree in the remote depths of the wood recalled the past at that moment, and all the homely faithfulness of Winterborne. 'Don't ask it! My heart is in the grave with Giles', she replied staunchly.³¹ (p. 340)

It's a risky business to prove your wiser affections by quoting the Duke in *Measure for Measure*, who has abdicated his office and disguised himself as a friar and is now reproving a lecher for his ill-informed protestations (III.ii.152–3); it's riskier still to pass off the Duke's glib chiasmus ('Love ... knowledge ... knowledge ... love') as your own. Hardy's quotation marks suggest that he meant his readers to detect Fitzpiers's citation, but the blandness of Fitzpiers's reply hints that he did not intend to be as forthcoming with his source. The 'crash of a felled tree' that brings Grace back to Giles's fidelity overwhelms Fitzpiers's literary language with the language of the woods. Yet Grace, whose expensive education has equipped her to recognise a Shakespearean line – perhaps even better than Fitzpiers, who may take it as a commonplace – ends up returning to the doctor, leaving Marty to pine alone over Giles's grave. Though a country girl by birth, Grace is no Tess; the allusion – in fact, quotation – is not lost on her, and the novel permits her the possibility of a respectable middle-class future, perhaps with a copy of Samuel Weller Singer's ten-volume edition on her bookshelf.

³¹ I am indebted to Heather Brink-Roby for drawing my attention to this passage.

Yet the crash of the tree also resounds with 'the crash of broken commandments' that Hardy later contended was 'as necessary an accompaniment to the catastrophe of a tragedy as the noise of drum and cymbals to a triumphal march'.³² For a novel that longs for the pastoral comedy of *As You Like It* while recognising the stoic tragedy of *Hamlet* (in addition to several references to the self-destructive jealousy of *Othello* and the disturbed ambition of *Macbeth*), the uneasy comedy of *Measure for Measure* (or of 'All's well that ends well', as an old woodlander assures Grace after her husband's departure (p. 211)) may best match the novel's complex tone and genre.³³ And like Eliot's uniquely authoritative narrator, it may be only Hardy the narrator who can achieve the blend of education and empathy to wield Shakespearean quotations without abusing his audience. Toward the end of a century anxious about the power to speak through the Bard's voice, Shakespeare quotation helps Hardy negotiate the challenge of gaining literary sophistication without losing the language of nature.

Shakespeare Burlesque

While Hardy attempts to naturalise Shakespeare's voice, P. G. Wodehouse brings out the defamiliarising comedy of warbling native wood-notes wild. Jumbled allusions, misattributed quotations, high verse cuddled up to street slang – the conventions of Victorian novelists crack open in Wodehouse's frothy novels, especially those narrated in what Richard Usborne has dubbed the 'maggie babble' of Wodehouse's effervescently dim bachelor Bertie Wooster.³⁴ As if in parody of a Victorian recitation curriculum, his mash-up sentences play Shakespeare quotation against half-remembered Victorian schoolboy verse, newspaper lingo and Boy Scout hokum: 'Beneath the thingummies of what-d'you-call-it', Bertie says of his own indomitability, 'his head, wind and weather permitting, is as a rule bloody but unbowed, and if the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune want to crush his proud spirit, they have to pull their socks up and make a special effort'.³⁵ Wodehouse implies that if the 'To be or not to be'

³² Thomas Hardy, 'Candour in English Fiction', *New Review*, 2:8 (January 1890), 15–21.

³³ Frederick S. Boas, *Shakespeare and His Predecessors* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1896), pp. 344–5.

³⁴ Richard Usborne, *Plum Sauce: A P. G. Wodehouse Companion* (New York: Overlook, 2003), p. 60.

³⁵ P. G. Wodehouse, *Jeeves and the Feudal Spirit* (New York: Scribner, 2000 (1954)), p. 219. Subsequent references are to this edition and are given in parentheses in the text.

soliloquy wants pride of place in Bertie's patois, it'll have to take up arms to get it.

Wodehouse is seldom placed among British novelistic royalty with Dickens, Eliot and Hardy, but focusing on the role that Shakespeare quotation plays in constructing a narrative voice helps to reveal Wodehouse's role as a jester in that court. Shakespeare suffers slings and arrows in the Jeeves and Wooster novels (as Bertie's accounts of his adventures with his gentleman's personal gentleman are known), arising frequently from Bertie's inability to recognise Shakespeare when he appears, an Eliotic gap between knowing author and clueless character. 'There is a method by means of which Mrs. Travers can be extricated from her sea of troubles. Shakespeare', Jeeves informs Bertie in *Jeeves and the Feudal Spirit* (1954), attributing his brief *Hamlet* quotation, but Bertie mistakes the nominative for the vocative: 'I didn't know why he was addressing me as Shakespeare, but I motioned him to continue' (p. 126). (Were Dickens's Zephyr to accost him with a 'Hem! Shakspeare', Bertie would probably offer to shake hands.) When the phrase next surfaces in a conversation with said Mrs Travers, Bertie attributes it to Jeeves: 'We've got to get you out of your sea of troubles, as Jeeves calls it. Everything else is relatively unimportant. My thoughts of self are merely in about the proportion of the vermouth to the gin in a strongish dry martini' (pp. 148-9). This alcoholic definition of self-consciousness could account for Bertie's sloshed appropriation of Shakespeare for his better half, were it not so pervasive. The joke presumes the reader's greater literacy, but literature itself comes under redefinition. Pondering the course ahead, Bertie again summons his Bartlett's Familiar Jeeves:

'If it were ... what's that expression of yours?'

'If it were done when 'tis done, then 'twere well it were done quickly, sir.'

'That's right. No sense in standing humming and hawing.'

'No, sir. There is a tide in the affairs of men which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune.'

'Exactly', I said.

I couldn't have put it better myself. (pp. 128-9)

Jeeves adroitly channels Macbeth and Brutus to Bertie's horseback cliché, but the effect is less of dramatic poetry entering the novel than of companion adages holding a conversation.

Wodehouse's fictions play on all sorts of Shakespeare quotation practices, from half-remembered touchstones ('sleep which does something which has slipped my mind to the something sleeve of care') to misattributed catchphrases ('Did [Archimedes] say Eureka? I thought

it was Shakespeare') to maxims reassigned from the Bard to the butler. (A pal's vacillation is 'rather like that of the cat in the adage, which, according to Jeeves, and I suppose he knows, let "I dare not" wait upon "I would."')³⁶ In *Joy in the Morning* (1947), Jeeves functions explicitly as an index of Shakespeare quotations, supplying thematically grouped beauties on demand. 'What did Shakespeare say about ingratitude?', an angry Boko Fittleworth asks Jeeves after being spurned for a well-intentioned deed. '“Blow, blow, thou winter wind”, sir', Jeeves replies, '“thou art not so unkind as man's ingratitude”. He also alludes to the quality as “thou marble-hearted fiend”' (p. 121). This is AskJeeves.com *avant la lettre*; it's also an enactment of the compilations, from the seventeenth century through Thomas Dolby's *The Shakespearean Dictionary* (1832), that list extracts under alphabetised topic headings. (Dolby includes both Amiens's song from *As You Like It* and Lear's curse at Goneril under 'Ingratitude'.)³⁷ Bertie applies Matthew Arnold's famous praise of Shakespeare to Jeeves – 'Others abide our question. Thou art free' – but the effect is less to cast Jeeves as Shakespeare the poet than to frame him as the Victorian Shakespeare-function: the embodiment of wisdom, captured in iterable phrases.³⁸

Why such relentless riffs on the cultural sanctity of Shakespearean quotation? Wodehouse brings the Shakespearean negotiations of Dickens, Eliot and Hardy to a head: his narrative voice summons the authority of Bardolatrous quotation while also spoofing the reverential practice of attributing everyday speech to the Bard. It's a dialectic common to nineteenth-century Shakespeare burlesques, which irreverently dug up the now-hallowed ground of Shakespeare's language. In his study of these popular Victorian entertainments, Richard Schoch proposes that 'burlesque continually shifts its focus from Shakespeare's texts as dramatic masterpieces to Shakespeare's texts as objects of canonization' – echoing Eliot's scepticism toward Bardolatry.³⁹ Wodehouse acted in at least one such burlesque during his last year at Dulwich School – W. S. Gilbert's

³⁶ These three examples come, respectively, from P. G. Wodehouse, *The Code of the Woosters* (New York: Vintage, 1975 (1938)), pp. 222 and 199; and P. G. Wodehouse, *Joy in the Morning* (New York: Perennial, 1983 (1947)), p. 19. Subsequent references are to these editions and are given in parentheses in the text.

³⁷ Thomas Dolby, *The Shakespearean Dictionary* (London: Smith, Elder, 1832), pp. 154–5.

³⁸ P. G. Wodehouse, *Thank You, Jeeves* (New York: Overlook Press, 2000 (1934)), p. 144. Subsequent references are to this edition and are given in parentheses in the text.

³⁹ Richard W. Schoch, *Not Shakespeare: Bardolatry and Burlesque in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 67.

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern (1874) – and his own Shakespeare games could be read in the Victorian burlesque tradition.⁴⁰ The school paper singled out for praise a scene from Gilbert's burlesque in which Wodehouse, as Guildenstern, partnered with Rosencrantz to frustrate Hamlet's 'To be or not to be' soliloquy by taking his rhetorical questions literally.⁴¹

HAM: For who would bear the whips and scorns of time –

ROS: (*as guessing a riddle*) Who'd bear the whips and scorns? Now, let me see.

Who'd bear them, eh?

GUIL: (*same business*) Who'd bear the *scorns* of time?

ROS: (*correcting him*) The *whips* and scorns.

GUIL: The whips and scorns, of course.

(HAMLET *about to protest.*)

Don't tell us – let us guess – the *whips* of time?⁴²

Victorian Shakespeare burlesques point out the gap between reverent Shakespeare quotation and commonplace speech, a gap Wodehouse never fails to mind. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's quizzical repetition of Hamlet's culturally enshrined words ('the *whips* of time?') echoes throughout Bertie's dialogues with Jeeves, Shakespearean soliloquy turned to contemporary banter. A speech from *Twelfth Night*, for instance, gets teased in *Thank You, Jeeves* (1934), when Bertie explains a hitch in an American heiress's prospects for marrying his friend Chuffy:

'And what is worrying her is that he does not tell his love, but lets concealment like ... like what, Jeeves?'

'A worm i' the bud, sir.'

'Feed on his something ...'

'Damask cheek, sir.'

'Damask? You're sure?'

'Quite sure, sir.' (pp. 50–1)

A set-piece description from the eighteenth-century novel onward, Viola's account of unexpressed love is defamiliarised as a line Bertie feels he ought to know but can neither quite remember nor quite credit.⁴³ A few pages

⁴⁰ For an account of this tradition, which turns to Dickens instead of Wodehouse, see Daniel Pollack-Pelzner, 'Shakespeare Burlesque and the Performing Self', *Victorian Studies*, 54:3 (Spring, 2012), 401–9.

⁴¹ Robert McCrum, *Wodehouse: A Life* (London: Viking, 2004), p. 36n427.

⁴² W. S. Gilbert, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern* (1891), in W. S. Gilbert, *Original Plays* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1924), pp. 81–2.

⁴³ See Rumbold, *Shakespeare and the Eighteenth-Century Novel*.

later, he has absorbed the Shakespearean diction into his personal slang, but remains skeptical:

‘But suppose the sale of the house does not go through?’
 ‘In that case, I fear, sir ...’
 ‘The damask cheek will continue to do business at the old stand indefinitely?’
 ‘Exactly, sir.’
 ‘You really are sure it is “damask”?’
 ‘Yes, sir.’
 ‘But it doesn’t seem to mean anything.’
 ‘An archaic adjective, sir. I fancy it is intended to signify a healthy complexion.’
 ‘Well, Chuffy’s got that.’
 ‘Yes, sir.’
 ‘But what good’s a healthy complexion if you don’t get the girl?’
 ‘Very true, sir.’ (pp. 54–5)

Wodehouse as Guildenstern worried over ‘whips’ and ‘scorns’; here, through Bertie, he challenges the damask Elizabethan lexicon that we accept as natural in applying Shakespearean wisdom to our own situation. While Dickens spoofed the ‘Hem! Shakspeare’ tag as an empty signifier of cultural authority, an invocation of Shakespeare’s status for meaningless speech, Wodehouse’s burlesque patter asks if Shakespearean language itself has become meaningless, a set of adages devoid of any specific referent. When we all talk Shakespeare, as Austen’s Edmund Bertram posited, are we really saying anything?

‘Shakespeare’s stuff is different from mine’, Wodehouse once remarked, ‘but that is not to say that it is inferior’.⁴⁴ Wodehouse loved Shakespeare; *Love’s Labour’s Lost*, the most verbally pyrotechnic of the comedies, was his favourite play, and when he was briefly interned by the Nazis in 1940, the first book he packed for captivity was *The Complete Works of Shakespeare*.⁴⁵ It’s easy, then, to read the narrator Bertie’s frequent dismissal of Shakespeare as one more ironic feature of his miseducated outlook, even if his narration ultimately provides more canny quotations than the savvy author/duped character dyad might imply.

The novel Wodehouse was drafting when the Nazis captured him, *Joy in the Morning*, lets Bertie loose at Shakespeare’s expense. Bertie takes Shakespeare as the paradigmatic writer, but makes him the lunatic, rather than the poet: ‘One has, of course, to make allowances for writers, all of

⁴⁴ P. G. Wodehouse, ‘Kind Words for Shakespeare’, *Punch*, 230 (1956), 328.

⁴⁵ McCrum, *Wodehouse*, pp. 211, 276.

them being more or less loony. Look at Shakespeare, for instance. Very unbalanced. Used to go about stealing ducks' (p. 55; 'deer' according to legend, but 'ducks' sounds funnier and points to Bertie's misperception). When one particularly loony writer, Boko Fittleworth, recently dumped by his fiancée, asks Bertie 'what construction you place on the words "I never want to see or speak to you again in this world or the next, you miserable fathead"', Bertie comforts him: 'You can't go by what a girl says, when she's giving you the devil for making a chump of yourself. It's like Shakespeare. Sounds well, but doesn't mean anything' (pp. 127–8). This principle guides Bertie's discussion with Jeeves of the Ghost's words to Hamlet (prompted by a request from Boko to insult his Uncle Percy, who objects to his marriage):

'I shall be shortly telling Uncle Percy things about himself which will do something to his knotted and combined locks which at the moment has slipped my memory.'

'Make his knotted and combined locks to part and each particular hair to stand on end like quills upon the fretful porpentine, sir.'

'Porpentine?'

'Yes, sir.'

'That can't be right. There isn't such a thing.' (p. 158)

A moment later, 'porpentine' again receives the 'damask' treatment:

'If I could show you that list Boko drafted out of the things he wants me to say – I unfortunately left it in my room, where it fell from my nerveless fingers – your knotted and combined locks would part all right, believe me. You're sure it's porpentine?'

'Yes, sir.'

'Very odd. But I suppose half the time Shakespeare just shoved down anything that came into his head.' (p. 160)

Yet just as the high–low gag has run its course, Bertie finds the Shakespearean archaism literalised:

It was not immediately that the tired eyelids closed in sleep, for some hidden hand had placed a hedgehog between the sheets – practically, you might say, a fretful porpentine. Assuming this to be Boko's handiwork, I was strongly inclined to transfer it to his couch. Reflecting, however, that while this would teach him a much needed lesson it would be a bit tough on the porpentine, I took the latter into the garden and loosed it into the grass. (p. 224)

One way to read this omnipresent 'porpentine' would be as a kind of schoolboy currency, like Boko's hedgehog: a curio swapped between Oxford and Eton alumni in memory of erstwhile classroom pranks. For Bertie, 'the

old *in statu pupillari* days' justify any fumbled literary quotations that don't get attributed to Jeeves. This is from *The Code of the Woosters* (1938), when a stolen policeman's helmet turns up in Bertie's room, to the shock of all present:

Pop Bassett, like the chap in the poem which I had to write out fifty times at school for introducing a white mouse into the English Literature hour, was plainly feeling like some watcher of the skies when a new planet swims into his ken, while Aunt Dahlia and Constable Oates resembled respectively stout Cortez staring at the Pacific and all his men looking at each other with a wild surmise, silent upon a peak in Darien. (p. 204)

Between Bertie's chipper slang ('Pop', 'chap') and Keats's lyricism ('wild surmise'), there's a delinquent spin to the allusion: Bertie can quote Keats's sonnet 'On First Looking into Chapman's Homer', not because he paid attention in English Literature hour, but because he was punished for trying to subvert it. When Bertie needles Shakespeare's 'porpentine', he can tip his cap to the English prep school curriculum and, in the spirit of Gilbert's burlesque, thumb his nose at the same time.

It's tempting to read this polysemous porpentine as a figure of fugitive language itself. When Bertie tries to turn a prosaic 'hedgehog' into a poetic 'porpentine' out of *Hamlet*, the figural slips away from the literal, inevitably 'loosed' from the constraints of individual usage. In the mode of Victorian Shakespeare burlesque, Wodehouse tests the relationship between Shakespearean phrases and vernacular speech. Earlier in *The Code of the Woosters*, when Bertie expresses doubt over whether to steal a particular silver cow creamer that his aunt has asked him to pinch, Jeeves expresses solidarity through Hamlet's soliloquy:

'I quite understand, sir, and thus the native hue of resolution is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought, and enterprises of great pith and moment with this regard their currents turn awry and lose the name of action.'

'Exactly! You take the words out of my mouth.' (p. 33)

Of course, the chance that Hamlet's words could ever come unfiltered out of Bertie's magpie mouth is slightly lower than the odds on monkeys with a typewriter. But there's the rub: Wodehouse establishes Shakespeare quotations as the voice of omniscience even as he spoofs them as hackneyed archaisms. We're far enough from Shakespeare that his sayings have entered the curriculum but too far for them to pass as the word on the street. A narrating self that speaks Shakespeare is a self always in quotation marks. Put another way, Wodehouse authorises Shakespeare quotations without ever naturalising them. Bertie's favourite attribution for a poetic

line, besides Jeeves, is the genial, general 'as the fellow said', but Wodehouse invites us to question whether Shakespeare could plausibly pass as anyone's contemporary fellow.

If the Victorian cult of Shakespeare established both his singularity and his universality, unique among all writers for being uniquely applicable to everyone, novelists from Dickens to Wodehouse interrogated that cult, even as they traded on its currency. Shakespeare quotation conveyed an authority that could all too easily be traduced or travestied. Although Eliot was regarded as Shakespearean because of the quotable maxims that distinguished her narrative voice, she questioned her characters' impulse to substitute quotation for authentic expression. Hardy found that expression in a narrative language that seemed to quote Shakespeare naturally, in contrast to his characters' manipulative seduction-by-quotation, but Wodehouse channelled the burlesque tradition to ask whether the archaisms of Shakespearean speech could ever sound natural three centuries later, even as they amassed an authoritative force. It may be true that, in a British novel, characters all talk Shakespeare, but not without a higher narrative authority to take the words out of their mouth.