Introduction

Creating Shakespeare

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This special issue of *Critical Survey* borrows its headline from the title of the 2016 World Shakespeare Congress, which is ‘Creating and Re-creating Shakespeare’.

Though it may seem perverse – Shakespeare being synonymous with creativity itself – to speak of ‘creating’ that which is already so manifestly and abundantly created, Shakespeare criticism and scholarship is tending increasingly towards the view that every act of scholarly reproduction, critical interpretation, theatrical performance, stage and screen adaptation, or fictional appropriation produces a new and hitherto unconceived Shakespeare. This volume presents discursive evidence to support this hypothesis in relation to the fields of transcultural reproduction, screen adaptation, theatrical improvisation and fictional re-writing.

Mahmoud Al-Shetawi explores the substantial corpus of Shakespeare in Arabic translation and adaptation. As Al-Shetawi demonstrates, ‘Arab Shakespeare’ scarcely existed in the West as a field of inquiry until the first decade of this century, and was excluded or ignored in the study of postcolonial literature. In 1996 the World Shakespeare Congress addressed ‘postcolonial Shakespeare’ without glancing at the history of Shakespeare in the Arabic world. By contrast in 2006 the WSC opened with a panel on Arab Shakespeare, and since then scholarship and criticism in this area have grown exponentially. This journal gave significant assistance to that process by publishing the first collection of critical essays on ‘Arab Shakespeare’, edited by Margaret Litvin, in 2007 (*Critical Survey* 19, 3). Litvin followed this initiative in 2011 with the publication of her book *Hamlet’s Arab Journey* (Princeton University Press, 2011), and this year will see the publication of Sulayman Al-Bassam’s *Arab Shakespeare Trilogy*

(Bloomsbury/Methuen Drama, 2014). Al-Shetawi reviews translations and adaptations of Shakespeare in Arabic from the late nineteenth century, and convincingly demonstrates that Arabic adaptations of plays such as *Othello* and *Hamlet* by Arab poets and dramatists should be recognised as ‘postcolonial’ drama.

Anna Blackwell addresses manifestations of Shakespeare in contemporary popular culture via the methods of adaptation studies. Her topic is the signifying capability of the celebrity actor, exemplified by Kenneth Branagh. Blackwell shows that Branagh’s stage and screen associations with Shakespeare have made his very existence ‘Shakespearean’, so that his work in quite unrelated fields carries with it Shakespearean traces, which are then available to be perceived and decoded. When Branagh directed the Marvel comic book adaption *Thor*, his artistic influence irredeemably Shakespeareanised the cultural product. Critics and reviewers could not help but see Branagh’s work as a form of Shakespearean adaptation. Using innovative cross-cutting methodologies, Blackwell shows this process at work, and indicates how permeable are the barriers between high and popular culture, stage and screen, literature and its appropriations in popular culture.

Recent Shakespeare scholarship, with its postmodern scepticism and interest in alternative explanations, has seen the burgeoning of certain areas of inquiry that previously remained marginal for most of their history. One of these is the ‘Shakespeare Authorship Question’, debated in this journal in ‘Questioning Shakespeare’, *Critical Survey* 21, 2 (2009); and the ‘Catholic Shakespeare’ question – was Shakespeare’s background recusant? Was Shakespeare himself a crypto-Catholic? The latter hypothesis has been strongly promoted as genuine field of scholarship and criticism by scholars such as Richard Wilson, and popularised by the historian and broadcaster Michael Wood. Stephen Greenblatt’s best-selling biography *Will in the World: How Shakespeare Became Shakespeare* (2004) gave particular attention to the evidence for Shakespeare’s Catholic background, and went so far as to construct an imagined meeting between the young Shakespeare and the Jesuit missionary and martyr Edmund Campion. Here Rowan Williams adapts this speculation into a dramatic ‘fantasia’, set in the Catholic household of Alexander Hoghton in Lancashire. Williams brings to life the world of northern recusancy, and explores the possible ways in which Shakeshafte/Shakespeare might have encountered the dangerous and exciting world of Jesuit

faith and Catholic conspiracy. In this previously unpublished play, the critical methods of historical scholarship and theology are enlivened by the exercise of a brilliantly inventive historical imagination. This is truly ‘creating Shakespeare’.

Finally, the possibilities for pursuing critical, historical and theoretical arguments in creative form are tested by Graham Holderness in his imitation of H.G. Wells’s *Time Machine*, ‘The Seeds of Time’. Underpinned by a cultural materialist study of the presence of Shakespeare in a series of great national festivals – the great Exhibition of 1851, the Festival of Britain in 1951, and the London Olympics of 2012 – Holderness uses imaginative methods to pursue the inquiry, combining documentary evidence and critical argument with imaginative speculation. To study Shakespeare diachronically through a time-line of national commemorations, the kind of work featured in *Critical Survey* 22, 2 (2010), *Shakespeare and the Cultures of Commemoration*, is analogous to travelling in time. Here Wells’s Time Traveller, scientist, engineer, and devotee of progress, returns to the past in search of Shakespeare, and finds in the Great Exhibition a Shakespeare surprisingly assimilated to the priorities of mechanical engineering and industrial design. Shuttling forward to 1951, he discovers similar evidence, including a steam locomotive named William Shakespeare. Inadvertently coming across the London Olympics in 2012 (by carelessly setting his GPS navigation system to ‘Stratford’), the Time Traveller encounters lines from *The Tempest* spoken by an impersonation of Isambard Kingdom Brunel. In this story historical, critical and scholarly questions are explored imaginatively in fictional form. For a critical account of the same material, see Graham Holderness, ‘Remembrance of Things Past’, in *Celebrating Shakespeare: Commemoration and Cultural Memory*, edited by Clara Calvo and Coppelia Kahn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

The diverse contributions to this volume have a common aim, that of dismantling barriers: between languages and cultures; between high and popular cultures; between stage and screen; between history and imagination; between intellectual inquiry and imaginative recreation. In their different ways the contributors offer to create, as well as re-create, Shakespeare.