

“As Best Shall Serve thy Use:”

Quoting the Shakespearian Maxim from 1600 to the Present

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The date was April 22nd, 2004—the approximate four hundred and fortieth anniversary of Shakespeare’s birth--and Sen. Gordon Smith (R-Oregon) deemed it necessary to honor the occasion on the floor of the United States Senate. “Mr. President,” he rose to say, “Shakespeare’s name is undoubtedly the most recognized in English literature.” After a few moments of praise, he asked his colleagues a question: “Who among us does not have their favorite line from one of Shakespeare’s many works? Mine, which all of us in this chamber should pause to consider from time to time, comes from ‘Hamlet Prince of Denmark’: “This above all: to thine own self be true...”¹

Readers of Shakespeare will immediately recognize the reference. We are half way into Act 1 of Shakespeare’s play, and Polonius, chief counselor to the king, delivers a speech that has long been subject to mockery and scorn. Speaking to his son Laertes, who is about to embark on an overseas trip, he earnestly spews forth an endless stream of “precepts,” which he tells his son to “keep” in his “memory.” Beginning with “give thy thoughts no tongue, / Nor any unproportioned thought his act,” he builds, over the course of twenty lines, to the immortal “to thine own self be true,” evidently the personal favorite of Senator Smith. Across centuries, readers and audience members alike have gleefully mocked Polonius for what they see as his vapid bromides, his facile sayings that in fact hold no wisdom at all. In academic settings, it is commonplace for a Shakespeare professor or teacher to characterize the figure in such an unfavorable manner. In this context, the senator’s exclamation would seem to be a fundamentally misguided one.

Yet the singling out that Smith enacts here has an important precedent, one that comes to us from Shakespeare’s own contemporary moment: the concerted highlighting of Polonius’ words in the play’s first printed edition. In the 1603 first quarto, the chief counselor’s lines are

¹ 150 Cong. Rec. S4297 (2004).

set apart in a clear and direct fashion. Placed beside each of his sententious exclamations—and most notably next to the personal favorite of Senator Smith—are pairs of inverted commas, or little marks meant to capture the reader’s attention. And these signs, it should be noted, were decidedly *not* set in place for the sake of mockery. Far from it, these signs in fact worked to endow Polonius’ speech with an air of wisdom and prestige. On closer inspection, we can see that this initially surprising sight reflects a well-established early modern practice: throughout the sixteenth century, and into the next, poems and plays were routinely marked for their sententious wisdom and proverbial matter. First in ancient literature, and later on—as is the case with *Hamlet*—with homegrown poems and plays, publishers made a concerted effort to single these sayings out. An ideal reader, after spotting the markings, would dutifully copy the *sententiae* into his commonplace book, placing sayings like Polonius’s under such headings as “love,” and “justice,” “beauty,” and “art.” The proverbs spewed by the King’s chief counselor, so easily mocked in our own time and in previous centuries, were, for a large swath of early modern readers, gems of inestimable value.

This rather surprising revelation—that sayings mocked for their pedantry across centuries were once and are once again thought of as extractable, and invaluable, nuggets of wisdom—lays bare the tensions that will animate this study. Both of these instances of proverbial excerption, and the two eras that they represent, bear witness to a central conflict in the reading and interpretation of Shakespeare’s plays. In both of these instances, we see a tension emerge between what I will call narrative and paradigmatic modes of reading. In the first of these two modes, the narrative-centric approach, the reader takes into account the *entirety* of the Shakespearean poem or play. When considering an individual scene or even a fleeting textual moment, the reader is constantly contextualizing, reading the excerpt in relation to the entire rest

of the work. This is the mode of reading that remains operative in any standard high school or college English class. From this academic view, Polonius is often and easily categorized as a buffoonish pedant. Read in the context of a play in which he is—for most “academic” readers--exposed as a hypocritical fool, his precepts read as anything but invaluable pieces of wisdom.

Directly conflicting with this interpretive mode is what Jeff Dolven has described as “paradigmatic understanding.”² Whereas the former way of reading is relentlessly contextual and narrative-focused, this interpretive strategy is firmly resolute in its eschewing of context and narrative. Material like previous and subsequent scenes, as well as further character and narrative exposition, is rendered completely irrelevant as the reader places sole focus on the line or two at hand. In an important sense, it doesn’t even matter which character is in fact speaking. With the two instances I have outlined--Senator Gordon Smith and 17th-century publisher of Q1 *Hamlet*--we are given two perfect examples of this practice. As the former’s selective quotation and the latter’s scrupulous markings make clear, these figures are dedicated hunters of isolated pieces of wisdom. Whether such sayings are dramatically undercut elsewhere in the text becomes for them a matter of no importance.

Beyond this conflict between narrative and paradigmatic modes of interpretation, a history of Shakespearean proverbial quotation introduces another central tension in literary history: that between disinterested and use-driven modes of reading. The selective quotation enacted by Senator Smith, as well as the marking present in the commonplace book, reveal an unyielding concern on the part of the reader with practical utility. Where the politician, as he makes clear, wishes his Senate colleagues to incorporate Polonius’ saying into their everyday lives, the early modern publisher signals to the reader that they should incorporate it into their

² Jeff Dolven. *Scenes of Instruction in Renaissance Romance*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 202.

everyday discourse. In both cases, the excerptors strive to accomplish a very tangible end. Their interest in Shakespeare's play derives solely from its practical use-value.

So, one should ask, what makes this readerly strategy so surprising in the first place? Why does such an emphasis on practicality, on the part of readers across time and space, ultimately merit examination? Firstly, this practice can be seen to completely fly in the face of a long tradition, most famously espoused by Oscar Wilde yet borne out of the work of such thinkers as Kant and Hume, that great art is anything but useful. On this view, it is fundamentally debasing, if not outright wrong, to take a text like Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and mine it for what it can practically accomplish in the life of the reader. For an example, let us consider a crucial passage from *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, in which Kant describes the necessary qualities of the proper beholder of art: "One must not be in the least biased in favor of the existence of the thing, but must be entirely indifferent in this respect in order to play the judge in matters of taste."³ Borne out of such sentiments is the concept of disinterestedness, the notion that the reader brings to the truly beautiful text no concern with "use-value" whatsoever.

Perhaps the most influential expression of these sentiments can be found in the writings of Oscar Wilde, who powerfully outlined the central tenets of aestheticism in the late nineteenth-century. While his thoughts are most famously found in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*—which begins, after all, with the bold declaration that "all art is quite useless"—it is in his body of critical work that his opposition to artistic utility is most vividly expressed. About halfway through his landmark essay *The Critic as Artist*, these issues powerfully come to the fore:

"There is no country in the world so much in need of unpractical people as this country of ours...Thought is degraded by its constant association with practice. Who that moves in the stress and turmoil of actual existence, noisy politician, (like our Oregonian Senator, for instance...) or brawling social reformer, or poor,

³ Immanuel Kant. "The Critique of the Power of Judgment. *The Norton Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism*. Ed. Vincent B. Leitch. (New York, London: W.W. Norton, 2010). 415.

narrow-minded priest, blinded by the sufferings of that unimportant section of the community among whom he has cast his lot can seriously claim to be able to form a disinterested intellectual judgment about any one thing?...The sure way of knowing nothing about life is to try to make oneself useful.”⁴

To live a life concerned with practical action, Wilde argues here, is to remain blinded by illusions and a false sense of right and wrong. In his view, there exists an inevitable path of causation between a preoccupation with practice and a distorted worldview. So what does this say about our consideration of use-driven proverbial excerption? How does this illuminate, or comment on, the actions of those who invoke Shakespearean adages to support their individual—and not to mention highly practical—ends?

It seems, I would argue, that Wilde offers the most powerful critique possible to this practically minded and use-driven mode of reading. Where a work like Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, in the view of Wilde and his fellow aestheticists, derives its “greatness” from its supposed transcendence of practical day-to-day life, the excerptors would seem to degrade it to a more lowly position. While the beautiful work of art, in Wilde’s view, supposedly speaks from a universal standpoint, the proverb-hunter insistently drags it down into the world of contingent human speech-acts and partial perspectives. What is, when read from a “disinterested” perspective, a transcendent work of art, becomes, in the hands of Senator Smith or the Renaissance publisher, a fundamentally diminished thing.

While this tension in literary history might seem relentlessly binary in nature, it is important to note that there also exist important intermediate positions. Friedrich Schiller, for instance, in his 1793 essay on dramatic theory titled “The Pathetic,” crafted a position that was remarkable for the way in which it combined the central tenets of these two warring camps:

⁴ Oscar Wilde. “The Critic as Artist” *The Norton Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism*. Ed. Vincent B. Leitch. (New York: W.W.. Norton, 2010). 807.

It is no doubt a very honorable aim in a poet to moralize the man, and excite the patriotism of the citizen, and the Muses know better than anyone how well the arts of the sublime and of the beautiful are adapted to exercise this influence. But that which poetry obtains excellently by indirect means it would accomplish very badly as an immediate end. Poetry is not made to serve in man for the accomplishment of a particular matter, nor could any instrument be selected less fitted to cause a particular object to succeed, or to carry out special projects and details. Poetry acts on the whole of human nature, and it is only by its general influence on the character of a man that it can influence particular acts. Poetry can be for man what love is for the hero. It can neither counsel him, nor strike for him, nor do anything for him in short; but it can form a hero in him, call him to great deeds, and arm him with a strength to be all that he ought to be.⁵

In this statement on literature's purpose, Schiller forges a vision that combines the fundamental tenets of aestheticist and utilitarian reading. From this latter group, he borrows the notion that literature can both be of use in the world and lead to a brighter future. From the former, he takes the notion that it is fundamentally wrong, if not outright degrading, to use literature in the service of practical ends. The difference here is in the *nature* of what that use entails. In Schiller's view, the utility of literature comes not from pithy lessons but from a general affective jolt to the reader. Every practical goal that is achieved after this is a mere byproduct of this prior encounter with the text. As opposed to the utilitarian model, which emphasizes literature's direct pieces of advice, this model emphasizes the *indirect* counsel resulting from a powerful emotional response. In laying out this notion, Schiller provides an important shade of grey in an otherwise black and white literary conflict.

In sum, these two tensions—that between narrative and paradigmatic understanding on the one hand, and disinterested and utilitarian modes of reading on the other—are the two central themes that this study will track. A survey of Shakespearean proverbial quotation—something that might initially seem to be no more than a merely amusing trifle-- becomes a more worthwhile undertaking when we consider these rich central conflicts. To organize the

⁵ Friedrich Schiller. "The Pathetic." *Dramatic Theory and Criticism: Greeks to Grotowski*. Ed. Bernard Dukore. (Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich College Publishers, 466.) 1974.

discussion, the study is built around two temporal poles. The first time period spans the final few decades of the sixteenth century, when proverbial extraction becomes an increasingly important element in early modern culture. The endpoint of this section will fall at around the midpoint of Shakespeare's career, when his poems and plays had become popular source materials for such sententious anthologies. After a brief survey of Shakespearean proverbial excerption in the intervening centuries, we will consider our second major case study: the astonishing "Bard in the Boardroom" craze of the 1990s, in which authors offered proverbial selections from Shakespeare's plays to incorporate into their work lives.

PART 1: John Bodenham, Nicholas Ling, and the Art of the Published Commonplace Book

This first section will examine a variety of popular commonplace books and proverbial anthologies, all of which were borne out of the vibrant commonplacing culture of early modern England. The two primary examples, and the ones with which we will begin our discussion, are John Bodenham's *Belvedere* or *The Garden of the Muses*, published in 1600, and Nicholas Ling's *Politeuphuia Wit's Commonwealth*, published three years earlier. Compiled when Shakespeare was at the height of his powers, these works provide a rich early chapter in the history of Shakespearean proverbial quotation.

The bulk of these two works are the sententious sayings themselves. Across their several hundred pages, thousands of proverbs are culled from the likes of Shakespeare, Sidney, Marlowe, and Spenser. Typical headings include "Of Hope," "Of Love," "Of Beautie" and "Of Wit and Wisdom." For our purposes, the most telling aspect of these volumes are the prefatory sections, in which an assortment of poems and commendatory material broach the central issues that we have been considering. Let us consider, for example, the letter to the reader that begins

John Bodenham's *Belvedere* or *The Garden of the Muses*. Even at its outset, the issues of utility and paradigmatic reading are brought to the fore:

Thou which delight'ft to view this goodly plot,
Here take fuch flowres as best shall serve thy ufe..⁶

In the opening two lines, this commendatory epistle proudly announces its preoccupation with literary use-value. Evoking the central concern of every historical episode in the history of Shakespearean proverbial quotation, the poet envision the volume's reader as a selective flower picker, only choosing those specimens that best serve his needs. His words here lay bare the central premise of both commonplace culture and Shakespearean proverbial excerption: that a) the literary work is good for its *sententiae*, and b) that the *sententiae* are good for their *utility*, for what they can practically accomplish in the life of the reader.

Of the subsequent commendatory letters, none is more relevant to these issues than Anthony Munday's words to John Bodenham, the collection's compiler and publisher. Writing in an exultant tone, the poet heaps praise on the prolific anthologist:

To thee that art Arts louer, Learnings friend,
Firft caufer and collectour of thefe floures:
Thy paines iuft merit, I in right comment,
Cofting whole years, months, weeks, & daily hours.
Like to the Bee, thou euery where didft rome,
Spending thy fpirits in laborious care:
And nightly broughtst thy gather'd hony home,
As a true worke-man in fo great affaيرة..⁷

Munday's imagery here is remarkable for how vividly it channels one of the most crucial of all early modern topoi: the notion of the reader as bee, flitting around the text to extract the most important bits of sententious nectar. Perhaps the most famous expression of this is in the work of the English churchman and author Francis Meres. As Rebecca Bushnell points out, "In his

⁶ John Bodenham. *Belvedere: Garden of the Muses*. By F K for Hugh Astley, dwelling at Saint Magnus corner Imprinted at London 1600.

⁷ Ibid.

Palladis Tamia, under the heading of the “reading of books,” ... Meres most frequently associates texts with flowers used by bees or man, for as ‘out of herbs and plants the best things are to be extracted: so the best sayings are to be gathered out of authors.’”⁸ In this treatment, it is not the actions of the reader to which this metaphor refers but rather the actions of the professional anthologist, the figure who mines a variety of texts for inclusion in a published compilation. It is in this cultural framework that Bodenham is figured as proverb-hunter *par excellence*. In a sense, he is praised for having already done the reader’s work for him, by already “flitting” to disparate texts and compiling the choicest pithy sayings. As Anthony Munday lays out in the volume’s preface, his project is the supreme manifestation of sententious usefulness. The ideology behind proverbial extraction, still operative centuries later, is here powerfully outlined.

In taking pragmatic *use-value* as the most salient quality of the texts, the compilers of this collection are building upon a long tradition in literary theory, dating back to Horace in his *Ars Poetica* of the early first century. In that text, the Roman poet first spelled out what would become known in later centuries as the “Horatian Platitude:” the notion that poetry should both teach and instruct. When considering the language used in the poem, the links to early modern commonplace culture—and, most especially, these published works—become immediately apparent: “poets aim either to do good or to give pleasure—or, thirdly, to say things which are both pleasing and serviceable for life...” Briefly following this, in a particularly revealing passage, Horace builds on these ideas to describe what characterizes the most successful of poets: “the man who combines pleasure with usefulness wins every suffrage, delighting the reader and also giving him advice; this is the book that... gives your celebrated writer a long

⁸ Rebecca Bushnell. *A Culture of Teaching: Early Modern Humanism in Theory and Practice*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), 136.

lease of fame.”⁹ So here we have arrived, then, at what for Horace, and for countless thinkers extending down to John Bodenham and beyond, is the basic purpose of imaginative literature. A true poem, so the argument goes, must offer its reader multiple units of “usefulness,” or what is elsewhere conceived of as “profit” or practical utility. And to do so effectively, it must be capable of doling out pleasure along the way.

When considering the anthologizing impulse of early modern England, it is not hard to detect the Horatian platitude as a driving force. Take, for example, the preface to Tottel’s Miscellany, which—although it precedes the main texts of this study by several decades—was nevertheless a crucial work in developing the early modern culture of excerption. First published by Richard Tottel in London in 1557, and republished on many occasions after that throughout the sixteenth century, the anthology comprised mostly the poetry of Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey and Thomas Wyatt. The work’s prefatory material—titled “The Printer to the Reader”—is remarkable for how explicitly it foregrounds a Horatian outlook:

It resteth now (gentle reader) that thou think it not evil done to publish, to the honour of the English tongue and for profit of the studious of English eloquence, these works which the ungentle hoarders up of such treasure have heretofore envied thee. And for this point (good reader), *thine own profit and pleasure*, in these presently and in more hereafter, shall answer for my defense.¹⁰
(emphasis mine)

In such a statement, it becomes eminently clear how closely related are the anthological form and the Horatian platitude. The work of the anthologist, as it is imagined here, is one that is driven by an overriding goal: to somehow convey profit—in general but also in a specifically material/financial sense—unto his English readership.

⁹ Horace. “Ars Poetica.” *The Norton Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism*. Ed. Vincent B. Leitch (New York: W.W.. Norton, 2010). 130.

¹⁰ Richard Tottel. *The Printer to the Reader*. The Broadview Anthology of Sixteenth-Century Poetry and Prose. Eds. Marie Loughlin, Sandra Bell, Patricia Bell. (London: Broadview Press, 2012), 189.

When we turn our attention back, then, to the commonplace collections published later on in the sixteenth century, we witness an adherence to Horace's mantra that is rather extreme in its implications. Running with the idea that a text's *raison d'être* is to be of practical service—or of use—to its reader, publishers like John Bodenham and Nicholas Ling effectively cut the work down to its supposedly “useful” core. Where a broader, more complete consideration of a text might yield more opportunities for philosophical or meditative reflection, their commonplace format invariably privileges the small unit of practical usefulness. Taking Horatian literary theory as their driving motivation, these publishers go to great lengths to actualize the Roman poet's wishes. If it means dismembering the poetic and dramatic texts before them, such a move is simply a necessary part of the process.

Having considered the manner in which Bodenham's volume presents an aesthetics of usefulness, we would now do well to consider the way in which the work advocates paradigmatic modes of understanding. We have already begun to touch on this idea, yet I would now like to consider it in greater detail. In particular, I will argue that Munday's garden imagery—which, as I showed above, draws upon a humanist vocabulary to support an aesthetics of usefulness—also emphasizes the mode of reading which emphasizes a text's parts over its whole. In making this connection I am drawing heavily on the work of Rebecca Bushnell, who has made several crucial observations on the links between garden and textual imagery during the sixteenth century. In much early modern garden imagery, Bushnell points out, an emphasis on the whole was very much superseded by a concern with a desire for extractable parts. The result—when transferred from the realm of gardens to the realm of texts—is a perfect manifestation of strictly paradigmatic reading:

Above all, in the garden, such variety, delight and “invention” were valued over the pleasures of the design of the whole, just as the text was seen as brimming

with remarkable, beautiful, or unusual stuff ready to be admired, plucked out and *used*.¹¹ (emphasis mine)

In such a garden, flowers can be plucked with abandon without any deleterious effect on the larger space. One can, and is indeed encouraged, to admire and extract various elements. In such a framework, one is able to do so freely, without doing any violence unto the whole. The move from gardens to texts, then, should now be very apparent: just as the garden enthusiast is free to pluck individual flowers at his will, so is the reader free to extract useful proverbs or *sententiae*. In both cases, it is the *parts* that matter, and to remove them is to do no literary (or horticultural) damage whatsoever.

This selective mode of reading also finds a powerful imagistic expression in the humanist bee metaphor. We already glanced at the way in which this imagery evokes the extraction of use-value from literary texts. It would also, moreover, seem to support the kind of selectivity that undergirds paradigmatic understanding. This becomes very apparent in the opening pages of Ling's *Politeuphuia*. In a commendatory poem, penned by the prominent Elizabethan poet Michael Drayton, the bee topos resurfaces once again. In this instance, the imagery proudly advocate selective textual extraction:

The curious eye that ouer-rafhly looks,
And giues no taft nor feeling to the mind,
Robs it own felfe, & wrongs thofe labored books
Wherein the foule might greater comfort find;
But when that fence doth play the bufie Bee,
And for the honey, not the poyfon reeds,
Then for the labour it receaues the fee,
When as the mind on heauenly fweetnes feeds;¹²

In this expression of the classic trope, it is the readers' eye that is figured as a bee, making its way around a text in a quest for valuable material. This much isn't new, and seems like a rather

¹¹ Bushnell, *A Culture of Teaching*, 138.

¹² Nicholas Ling. *Politeuphuia: wit's commonwealth: newly corrected and amended*. Printed by R. Young for J. Smethwicke and are to be sold at his shop ... London 1642. A4.

standard application of the image. What makes this particular instance noteworthy is the description of the bee's action: "and for the *honey*, not the *poyfon* reads, then for the labour it receaues the fee..." In such a rhetorical move, Drayton effectively divides the hypothetical text into valuable and useless sections, where the former is to be extracted and the latter discarded. We see this exact trope surface in earlier, more formative texts as well, such as Timothy Kendall's 1577 volume *The Flowers of Epigrams*. Describing the work of the first-century Roman poet Martial, he provides a highly revealing image:

Yet though his verbes fome be vile,
 Yet fome doo much auaile:
 And though his matters fome be fond,
 Yet fome of follie faile.
 His wookrs are like a garden good,
 With weedes miche ouergrowen
 Lo reader here the fragrant flowers
 The weedes
 Awaie are thrown.¹³

In a manner that gels with the ubiquitous bee metaphor, the reader is instructed to read for the nutritious jewels of the text while tossing aside less useful material. In a powerful sense, then, this is not a textual "garden" where every nook and cranny is necessary and worthy of one's attention. Indeed, proper reading, as Drayton and Kendall before him conceive it, is predicated on a necessary degree of selectivity. Respect for a literary whole, a rather foreign concept in this commendatory poem, is replaced with a concern for a work's most salient parts.

2: Continuity in the Intervening Centuries

As stated at its outset, this study is a highly selective one. The two eras that are taken as case studies—the English Renaissance as well as the close of the twentieth century—are but two

¹³ Timothy Kendall. *Flouvers of epigrammes, out of sundrie the moste singular authours selected, as well auncient as late writers. Pleasant and profitable to the expert readers of quicke capacitie: in Poules Church-yard, at the signe of the Brasen Serpent*, by Ihon Shepperd Imprinted at London 1577.

temporal points in a vast history of Shakespearean proverbial quotation. While these two moments are, as I will argue, the ones best suited to explore our central thematic concerns, we would do well to briefly consider the intervening years. The battles between aesthetic and use-value, narrative and paradigm, are still indeed operative in the interim.

We can first see this at work not in an anthology but in an actual edition of the plays themselves: Alexander Pope's classic collection of the complete works, first published in 1725. While putting the plays together, Pope made a significant editorial decision: as Marjorie Garber writes, he had marked the "'beauties' of Shakespeare so that readers could find them easily." Moreover, in the volume's preface, he notes, "some of the most shining passages are distinguish'd by commas in the margin," "and where the beauty lay not in particulars but in the whole, a star is prefix'd to the scene."¹⁴ Echoing his predecessors in the early modern era, Pope gives voice here to the cause of paradigmatic understanding. With his editorial maneuver of adding the marginal commas, he joins the commonplace collectors in emphasizing parts over wholes and *sententiae* over narrative. And all the attendant ironies of this practice are present in Pope's edition as well. For instance, Polonius's sententious outburst—which, as we have already observed, is almost always derided as hopelessly vapid by more contextually-minded readers—is here graced with one of Pope's inverted commas, his sign of utility and of value. What is, in a narrative-centric reading of *Hamlet*, so often mocked as insufferable pedantry, is here paradigmatically isolated as one of the work's "most shining passages." This central tension that we have considered is thus once again brought to the fore.

This philosophy carries over to the work of William Dodd, whose 1752 *The Beauties of Shakespeare* recalls the modern commonplace books in its excerption of proverbs and reliance on topic headings. Like those earlier compilers, Dodd is most fundamentally

¹⁴ Marjorie Garber. *Shakespeare After All*. (New York: Pantheon Books, 2004). 15.

concerned with a play's most useful parts, and completely eschews narrative and contextual information in his editorial process. Indeed, he goes as far as to explicitly rule out quotations that are too strongly embedded in a larger narrative: "there are many passages in Shakespeare so closely connected with the plot and characters, and on which their beauties so wholly depend, that it would have been absurd and idle to have produced them here..."¹⁵ In such a statement, the rejection of narrative understanding in favor of the paradigmatic approach could not be more clearly expressed.

As a final example before our focus point of the 1990s, John Bartlett's *Shakespeare Phrasebook* also demonstrates the recurring nature of our central thematic tensions. First published in 1881, the book was, in Bartlett's words, intended to "be an index of the phraseology of Shakespeare," a "concordance of phrases rather than of words. Its plan is to take every sentence from his dramatic works which contains an important thought, with so much of the context as preserves the sense, and to put each sentence under its principal words, arranged in alphabetical order." The bit on context here is vitally important. Allowing for some of it—to "preserve the sense," to allow the reader to find her bearings—he also evinces a profoundly paradigmatic outlook. No more contextual material will be included than what is absolutely necessary. Something as large as a narrative arc would surely have not made the cut.

3: "The Bard Has Hit the Boardroom"

This study's second and final temporal focus falls at the very end of the twentieth century, when several writers honed in on Shakespeare's supposed business and managerial acumen. Informally dubbed the "Bard in the Boardroom craze," this phenomenon consisted of several books, academic articles, and even university courses. This paper will examine the three

¹⁵ William Dodd. *The Beauties of Shakespeare*. (Halifax, UK: Milner and Sobwery, 1752), v.

most widely circulated and influential of the “Bard in the Boardroom” texts. The earliest is Jay M. Shafritz’s *Shakespeare on Management*, published in 1992 by the HarperBusiness division of HarperCollins publishers. The book’s author is a highly prolific one, and has written countless books on management and business-related matters. While an academician—indeed, at the time of the book’s publication, he was a professor of public and international affairs at the University of Pittsburgh—he is working very much outside the realm of literary studies. As we will see shortly, *Shakespeare on Management* is decidedly and palpably *not* the work of a literary critic.

The two co-authors of our next case study—the 1999 *Shakespeare in Charge: the Bard’s Guide to Leading and Succeeding on the Business Stage*—are no less removed from the world of formal literary study. Norman Augustine has a long and storied history in the corporate arena, having served as Chairman and CEO of the Lockheed Martin Corporation and on the boards of Procter & Gamble, Black & Decker, and Phillips Petroleum. Additionally, his writings on business have appeared in such publications as *The New York Times* and *Harvard Business Review*. Kenneth Adelman, the work’s second author, was deputy ambassador to the U.N., as well as U.S. Arms Control Director, before cofounding “Movers & Shakespeares,” an organization that teaches “critical business skills through Shakespeare’s greatest works.”

The last of these three major volumes—*Power Plays: Shakespeare’s Lessons in Leadership and Management* from 2000—was authored by an especially accomplished duo: John O. Whitney, esteemed Columbia University Business School Professor, and Tina Packer, founder of the Berkshire’s *Shakespeare and Company*. The central concerns tackled by Whitney and Packer are quite reminiscent of what we find in the two earlier volumes. Moving from play to play and quotation to quotation, the authors extract dozens of pithy insights on how to successfully lead a business.

Among the many things one might first notice when comparing the three texts is their strikingly similar layout. With minor variations in presentation, the books are all organized by topical headings and sections, very much echoing the structure of the early modern commonplace book. Indeed, the layouts from both eras evince a preoccupation with a reader's ease: across all cases, the compiler/publisher is aiming for quick proverbial extraction that requires little mental effort. Take, for example, the structural justification that Shafritz offers in his book's introduction:

Unfortunately, today's busy managers seldom have the time to read through all of Shakespeare's plays to gain the insights he offers modern business. But not to worry—I have done this work for them by creating this assembly of all his thoughts that apply to the twentieth-century business world.... Now they need only read the appropriate chapter in *Shakespeare on Management* to learn what the great Bard's advice is on dressing for success, mergers and acquisitions, motivating employees, office politics, performance reports, portfolio theory, systems analysis and much else.¹⁶

Or consider the equivalent passage from Augustine and Adelman's introduction:

Throughout we offer Shakespeare's plots and words in a user-friendly way, tailored to the busy corporate executive. Aside from our readings and personal interpretations of key Shakespearean scenes, we present crisp business lessons drawn from the play at hand.¹⁷

And finally, consider the list of headings utilized by Whitney and Packer in their chapter on "The Trusted Lieutenant," which is one of the book's most memorable sections:

"competence," "commitment," "honesty and candor," "communication."¹⁸

Clearly, we are not far here from the headings of *Belvedere* and *England's Parnassus*. All three of the above examples very much mirror their early modern counterparts in structural layout. In all these texts, the structure reflects a paramount focus on the *ease* of the reader's experience.

¹⁶ Jay M. Shafritz. *Shakespeare on Management*. (New York: Harper Business, 1992), xii-xiii.

¹⁷ Norman Augustine and Kenneth Adelman. *Shakespeare in Charge: The Bard's Guide to Leading and Succeeding on the Business Stage*. (New York: Hyperion, 1999). xvi.

¹⁸ John O. Whitney and Tina Packer. *Power Plays: Shakespeare's Lessons in Leadership and Management*. (New York: Simon & Shuster, 2000). 90.

Rather than taking the time to thumb through a full *Richard III*, *Othello*, or *Macbeth*, the reader of these volumes can simply identify the relevant sub-heading and quickly scan its contents. Whether one is a busy, social climbing merchant living in Renaissance London, or a modern corporate executive with a hopelessly packed schedule, using a Shakespeare compilation—especially one that is organized in such a way—can save a great deal of precious time.

Due to their user-friendly structures, the “Bard in the Boardroom” books are just as vulnerable as their early modern counterparts to accusations of facileness and unthinking ease. For the more aesthetically minded reader, what is lost in such a process is the fundamentally *productive* difficulty that comes from a long and sustained engagement with a text. This is precisely what Harold Bloom has called literature’s “difficult pleasures,” the insights from great canonical literature that are invaluable yet invariably hard to come by.¹⁹ For Bloom and others, the abandonment of such rigorous demands on the reader--and the concomitant emphasis on readerly ease that one sees in the “Bard in the Boardroom” books—are a cause for real concern. Susan Maushart, describing her own experience as a reader, argues that Bloom’s “difficult pleasure of reading at full length—and at full depth,” is “becoming a rarity,” and that, at a certain point she was “literally forgetting” how to read in such a way.²⁰ On another level, Maushart, Bloom, and other likeminded aestheticist readers take issues with the very notion of paradigmatic understanding. Compromising as it does a text’s full narrative span, this mode, in their view, leads to an unacceptable sacrifice of literary depth. Along with the belief that the reader’s engagement should be arduous is the notion that the text should be taken no less than in its entirety. To borrow the imagery laid out in the early modern garden manuals, a true reader, in this view, engages with a unified textual garden rather than one brimming with extractable parts.

¹⁹ Harold Bloom. *How to Read and Why*. (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000), 122.

²⁰ Susan Maushart. *The Winter of Our Disconnect*. (Sydney: Random House Australia, 2010), 168.

When the “Bard in the Boardroom” authors extract pithy sayings from their source texts, they are, in Bloom and Maushart’s view, depriving their readers of Shakespeare’s most salubriously challenging pleasures. Splicing up the playwright’s works in the name of their readers’ convenience, these writers, for many, would seem to be completely missing the point.

And indeed, upon closer inspection, many of these books’ excerpts lose their more nuanced—and less obviously *useful* significance—when they are detached from their narrative context. One classic example of this process is the use of Shakespeare’s Iago. In both Shafritz’s and Augustine and Adelman’s texts, his words are used in such a manner that severely contradicts a contextually conscious reading of *Othello*. In the former of these two books, Shafritz includes a section titled “Spotless Reputation,” which he begins with the following sentiments:

Reputation in business, whether of an individual or organization, is a highly valued asset. Indeed, when businesses are sold they often sell for sums far in excess of their book value because of their intangible “good will” or reputation in the community.²¹

This is very typical of the kind of “lessons” that Shafritz has been imparting throughout the work. Further, the author, in keeping with his established practice, brings in the proverbial words of a Shakespearian character to illustrate his counsel. In this case, he brings in one of the most heavily quoted lines from *Othello*, in which Iago is manipulating the play’s titular protagonist into believing that his wife has been unfaithful:

Good name in man and woman, dear my lord,
Is the immediate jewel of their souls.
Who steals my purse steals trash; ‘tis something, nothing;
‘Twas mine, ‘tis his, and has been salve to thousands;

²¹ Shafritz, 121-122.

But he that filches from me my good name
Robs me of that which not enriches him,
And makes me poor indeed.

The sentiments expressed here are straightforward enough, and seem to aptly support the general theme of Shafritz's section. For someone concerned with narrative and context, however, it is simply impossible to take the passage seriously as a piece of advice. The reader who has considered the play in its entirety will immediately recall a moment in the previous act, in which Iago consoles an upset Cassio: "reputation is an idle and most false imposition; oft got without merit, and lost without deserving." In this mode of reading, it becomes clear that such maxims are presented as facile agents of persuasion and manipulation. As deployed by Iago, the sayings are shown to be situational, contingent, and thus detached from any claim of universal application or truth-value.

Strikingly, in the case of Augustine and Adelman's *Shakespeare in Charge*, the quote from Iago serves as the very last statement in the work's epilogue. As the ninth and final lesson of this short, concluding treatise on "the business of life," the quote is placed under the authors' own summarization: "Prize reputation as *the* core competency in accounting of corporate and professional life."²² Once again, the less obviously "useful" lesson that is gleaned by the contextually conscious reader—that pithy truisms are contingent, manipulative, and detached from universal applicability—is replaced with a lesson that is much more simple to digest and to apply.

Beyond their controversial furtherance of paradigmatic understanding, the "Bard in the Boardroom" books also revive the tension between disinterested and use-driven modes of reading. As was the case with the early modern commonplace books, these texts all open with prefatory materials that proudly announce a concern with utility. The language that we've grown

²² Adelman and Augustine, 218.

accustomed to spotting in *Belvedere* or *England's Parnassus* is here expressed once again: “we can all benefit by learning more of his time-tested and truly classic executive philosophy—you never know when it might come in handy”;²³ “for business leaders find that Shakespeare’s plays offer deft and gripping explorations of the world of power which remain as relevant today as they were in the sixteenth century. The lessons they teach are remarkably useful in today’s tough corporate universe;”²⁴ “it perhaps confirms that the wisdom of one of the world’s greatest minds can be made useful to a smart executive in a risky world.”²⁵

With these introductions and the material that follows them, one would be hard-pressed to find a more extreme endorsement of utilitarian reading. These “Bard in the Boardroom” books—all of which lay out a strikingly similar roadmap at their outsets—take as their central mission the corporate and financial success of their readership. Their most fundamental concern is as far away from the disinterested ideal as can possibly be. In a manner that completely flies in the face of the perennial, romantic ideal of reading, these works focus in on the most practical of all concerns: the quest for monetary profit.

It is with this last point that we identify the most powerful connection with the earlier commonplace books. As we observed in those renaissance prefaces, publishers insistently returned to the Horatian notion of “profit and pleasure,” or “profit and delight.” The great play or poem, as their argument went, provided the reader with both enjoyment *and* something useful to take away. When we turn our attention to the “Bard in the Boardroom” books, we see that the “profit half” of the Horatian platitude is astonishingly literalized: profit, here, becomes the literal *profits* of the readers’ corporations, the financial earnings that they wish to gain. In this sense, the move to materiality that we see the Horatian platitude undergo in the early modern era is

²³ Shafritz, xiii.

²⁴ Augustine and Adelman, xii.

²⁵ Ibid, xviii.

strikingly extended. Building on the work of the early modern anthologist, these writers take the centuries-long proverb-hunting project to its most extreme and practical expression.

Conclusion

Above all, this project has attempted to show that a history of Shakespearean proverbial quotation amounts to far more than a merely amusing trifle. While tracing this centuries-long story, we have borne witness to two crucial tensions at the heart of the history of reading. Looking at an array of prefatory material, as well as famous moments from plays like *Hamlet* and *Othello*, we have seen how the same bits of Shakespearean text can be treated in wildly divergent fashions. The saying from Polonius that, in a university lecture hall setting, is taken as part of a larger narrative, is in a proverbial anthology presented in splendid isolation. The assertion from Iago regarding “good name in man and woman,” so often used in the real world as a practical nugget of wisdom, becomes in the classroom a potent example of the contingency and slipperiness of all human speech-acts. In all these cases, the age-old conflicts between disinterested and use-driven reading and narrative and paradigmatic understanding are powerfully brought to the fore.

Ultimately, I would hope that neither mode of reading be met with stern disapproval from the opposing camp. After all, there is no reason why a Shakespearean text cannot be appreciated for both its dazzling narrative structure and extractable parts. Likewise, it is perfectly reasonable to appreciate a work of art as an instrument of both practical action and contemplative reflection. What is needed, I would argue, is an appreciation of the *multiplicity* of ways that one can read one of these oft-cited Shakespearean sayings. That a single sentence from *Othello* can be used as both a corporate executive’s most prized tool on the one hand, and as a case study of the fragmentariness of language on the other, should be cause not for conflict but for celebration.

By seeing the unique worth in these antithetical modes of reading, we serve to enrich our appreciation of the poems and plays themselves.

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