

“Writing Like Shakespeare” seminar – ABSTRACTS

Jennifer Andersen, California State University, San Bernardino

PARODIC CAREERS: *THE PARNASSUS PLAYS*

The Parnassus Plays provide a tantalizing insight into the reception of contemporary vernacular Elizabethan authors by university students. The trilogy of plays offer an extended spoof on Renaissance notions about humanist education as preparation for active citizenship in the English commonwealth. Written by university students, they were performed at St. John’s College, Cambridge at Christmas festivities during the 1590s. Even though Spenser’s *Faerie Queene* was relatively hot off the presses, published in two installments in 1591 and 1596, the plays confidently parody Spenser’s central trope of the chivalric quest and allegorical portrayal of characters and locations. *The Parnassus Plays* provide a sort of prequel to Spenser’s chivalric quests by courtiers in service of the elusive fairy queen. They reframe the journey of would-be Elizabethan courtiers around the path to and from the university. Parnassus, the home of the muses in classical mythology, stands in for university, nursery of Renaissance humanist education. *The Pilgrimage to Parnassus* (1596) dramatizes the hazards and temptations of university study and life. Two years after the Pilgrimage comes a sequel, the *Journey From Parnassus* (1598) and a *Journey from Parnassus, part 2* in 1602. The two sequels picture the plays’ central duo of university students, Studioso and Philomusus, seeking employment after graduation. These plays humorously, repeatedly deflate the Spenserian ideal of honorable service to the commonwealth as the graduates seek meaningful, gainful employment. The plays mimic, lampoon, riff on, and burlesque a series of Renaissance and classical authors. I argue that the point of these parodies is not simply to display familiarity and facility with the latest literary styles, but also to critique fictions of career advancement in contemporary vernacular literature.

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Jonathan Burton, Whittier College

WRITING LIKE OPHELIA: PAUL GRIFFITHS’ *LET ME TELL YOU*

On the face of it, Paul Griffiths’ *let me tell you* dazzles with its formal experimentation. Working with only the 483 words assigned to Ophelia in Shakespeare’s second quarto and first folio editions of *Hamlet*, Griffiths crafts a backstory and prequel to Shakespeare’s play that moves between genres and styles with the kind of facility we tend to associate with James Joyce, William Carlos Williams, Jean Toomer and Anne Carson. Across the novella’s mere 139 pages we encounter narrative prose, song, stream of consciousness, sonnets, free verse and play-like passages of dialogue. For Griffiths, who is best known as a music critic and librettist, these generic shifts function like harmonic variations, rehearsing in various registers a common refrain: Ophelia thinks; Ophelia decides; and Ophelia acts. The protean formalism of Griffiths’ slim volume helps us to see anew Ophelia’s alleged incoherence while refusing to sustain a history of appropriations and re-visions that either emphasize the subordination of her tragedy to Hamlet’s or seek to detach Ophelia entirely from Shakespeare’s prince. In this paper, I argue that Griffiths’ repurposing of Shakespeare’s words in *let me tell you* serves two key objectives. First, the authority of Shakespeare’s language underpins every word spoken by his re-made Ophelia. And second, his Oulipian mode of rewriting Shakespeare attends to problems of appropriation and ventriloquism long ago identified by Elaine Showalter by shedding light on Ophelia’s self-actualization rather than attempting to rescue or remake her. Whereas Showalter revealed that even the most well-meaning feminist attempts to rethink Ophelia “have overflowed the text” and “reflected the ideological character of their times,” *let me tell you* returns us to the Shakespearean text better equipped to see a creative and defiant Ophelia who has, in fact, been there all along.

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Lezlie Cross, University of Portland

ROMEO AND JULIET 1869: FAILED LEGITIMATE, SUCCESSFUL PARODY

In New York in the late 1860s there was a craze for burlesque performances in the popular theatres. These theatrical parodies, mounted at downtown theatres, mocked the pretensions of the “legitimate” uptown theatres. Working-class audiences in the Bowery experienced upper-class cultural content transposed into their colloquial language. This paper will investigate the 1869 production of John F. Poole’s *Romeo and Juliet; or the Beautiful Blonde who Dyed for Love* at Tony Pastor’s Opera House located in Tammany Hall in the Bowery. In this parody of Shakespeare’s play, Poole closely follows the plot of the original, even including some of Shakespeare’s lines verbatim (or punning on them hilariously). The burlesque had “few pretensions toward enlightenment” (Susan Katwinkel, *Tony Pastor Presents: Afterpieces from the Vaudeville Stage* [Greenwood Press, 1998], 2) and was written in approachable, even slangy, language. Poole adapted the Shakespearean characters into types recognizable for working-class audiences. The play was transmuted into a musical farce – with a comically tragic ending – and placed in a playful context as one event in a three-hour evening of vaudeville. As I argue, mixing Shakespeare with popular song, comic gags, and even minstrelsy-inspired moments was a winning recipe for Pastor’s audience – and proved to be relatively more successful than the “legitimate” *Romeo and Juliet* currently playing at Edwin Booth’s Broadway theatre.

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Kirk Dodd, University of Sydney

THE TRAGICALL HISTORIE OF WOOLLARAWARRE BENNELONG

My “Shakespearean” blank verse drama, *The Tragicall Historie of Woollarawarre Bennelong*, aimed to discover through practice what processes were required to complete a full-length blank verse drama like those of Shakespeare. In 1923, T.S. Eliot declared the tradition of writing “Elizabethan” blank verse dramas “dead”, critiquing the *failed* attempts by Keats, Shelley and Wilde to write verse plays like Shakespeare. Eliot proposed a focus on “poetic drama” was not enough and hinted that formal rhetoric might be the missing component. I uphold this view, as the decline of rhetoric was at its lowest ebb in the nineteenth century, and I find that by using the rhetorical precepts used by Shakespeare (alongside poetics and drama), blank verse gains a logical force that is a hallmark of Shakespeare’s. My play is a history play about Australia’s first governor, Arthur Phillip, and the friendship he developed with an Aboriginal man named Bennelong, who he kidnapped in 1789 to help learn how Indigenous peoples survived in the country he had recently “claimed” for the British. My creative paper includes the prologue, the opening scene (which construes Phillip’s leadership as a Shakespearean court), and the sequence of Bennelong’s kidnapping. By reengaging the rhetoric used by Shakespeare, I suggest we really can write like Shakespeare once did, creating new verse dramas that possess their own unique voice while also being “Shakespearean”. Perhaps the lost tradition of writing “Elizabethan” blank verse dramas can one day be revived through a practical understanding of Shakespeare’s rhetoric.

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Ian Doescher

ADAPTING *THE PRINCESS BRIDE* AS SHAKESPEAREAN PASTICHE

Using modern films to create Shakespearean pastiche has three primary aims: (1) entertaining readers, (2) honoring Shakespeare by rendering as faithful a pastiche as possible, and (3) inspiring curiosity about Shakespeare in younger readers. To entertain, the work must engage readers through the quality of its reimagination of a beloved film, while offering surprise and delight to readers both familiar with and new to Shakespeare. To honor Shakespeare, multiple literary devices must be employed, including writing in iambic pentameter, using Elizabethan grammar and vocabulary, and giving the manuscript the “feel” of a Shakespeare play. To inspire curiosity, the work must be both comprehensible and fun. In pursuit of these aims, such a “mashup” must also give equal weight to both Shakespeare’s style and the source material, in this case the 1987 film *The Princess Bride* (and William Goldman’s novel on which the movie is based). This submission presents a portion of *The Princess Bride* as a scene from a play titled *William Shakespeare’s As Thou Dost Wish*. The excerpt covers nearly roughly minutes of the film, beginning with the kidnap of Princess Buttercup and proceeding to the fencing battle between Inigo Montoya and the Man in Black. Reflections on the process of adapting the piece are included to demonstrate the considerations made in creating a piece that doesn’t just purport to be “Shakespearean,” but employs hallmarks of Shakespeare’s style while remaining accessible to readers of all kinds.

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Patricia Gillies, University Of Essex-Wivenhoe Park

WRITING LIKE SHAKESPEARE: VICTOR HUGO’S PERFORMANCE OF SHAKESPEARE IN *NOTRE DAME DE PARIS*

Antony and Cleopatra, in 1607 an outlier among Shakespeare’s recent tragedies, combines the lyrical evocations of primordial forces more fully explored in later romances like *The Tempest*, with his well-practiced modernization of historical narrative. Compelled by a similar historical problematic that characterizes Romanticism, the modern reconfiguration of historical scenes and narratives, Victor Hugo turns to the structural and linguistic modalities of Shakespeare’s *Antony and Cleopatra* and *The Tempest* to construct his novel, *Notre Dame de Paris* (pub. 1831). Delaying his November 1828 contract, Hugo shifted to an increasingly close engagement with theatre and early modern England to express his world in modern terms. Hugo’s 1827 manifesto of the Romantic movement, the *Preface* to his tragedy *Cromwell*, features Shakespearean theatrical modes in its argument for a liberating and rule-breaking aesthetic. If *Macbeth* and *King Lear* echo in Hugo’s characterization of *Cromwell* as a grotesque hero, Hugo turns strikingly to a closer engagement with the tensions in Shakespeare’s language and modernization of history when he begins his delayed novel, *Notre Dame de Paris*, amid the violence of the 1830 July revolution. For Hugo, the eruption of these primordial forces and their revolutionary resonances have their expressive parallels in *Antony and Cleopatra* and *The Tempest*. Hugo famously asserted that he did not know how to write with an “épinglé” [“pin” cf. V. Geisler *Hugo Chiffonnier*] nor did he have much grasp of Shakespeare’s English. Hugo wrote the Shakespeare that corresponded to his imagination much as Viollet-le-Duc constructed the cathedrals that he imagined.

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Musa Gurnis

BEDLAM: MAKING SHAKESPEARE POP CULTURE AGAIN

In 2020, Eric Tucker, the Artistic Director of Bedlam Theatre, invited me to collaborate on a project that would bring the innovative sensibility with which his experimental, off-Broadway company stages Shakespeare into a genuinely popular medium: television. We wrote scripts for the first season of an HBO-style show that twists together plots and characters from *King Lear* and *The Merry Wives of Windsor* into an altered story that unfolds in new scenes patched together from pieces of dialogue drawn from fifteen other plays and a dozen poems by Shakespeare. We tried to make space in the extended world building of sophisticated contemporary television for Shakespeare’s tonal swerves and social complexity. Our pastiche script underscores how deeply Shakespeare’s plays speak to each other, exploring different versions of conflicts between parents and children, rulers and subjects. Combining theatergrams from multiple sources in a new arrangement creates something like the experience of repertory, in which the previous roles of actors inform their current characters. To counter the straightwashing so pervasive in modern productions of Shakespeare we filled Windsor City with queer people and queer spaces. The excerpts I share here show how we expanded the love story between France (played in the three episodes we filmed by the actress Ashley Bufkin) and Cordeel (played by the nonbinary actor Kaden Kearney), reimagining Dover as a queer squat full of teen runaways, a reparative place of mutual aid and chosen family, where love takes up what is cast away.

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Ronan Hatfull, University of Warwick

MAKING SHAKESPEARE POP: RESHAPING THE NARRATIVE IN WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE’S LONG LOST FIRST PLAY (ABRIDGED)

To write like Shakespeare is a consummation devoutly to be wished because it imparts cultural authority and prestige on that artist, and with this comes the potential of greater economic success and critical respect. From the eighteenth-century forgeries of William Henry Ireland to recent examples of modern verse plays like Mike Bartlett’s *Charles III* (2014) and Abigail Thorn’s *The Prince* (2022), Shakespearean language has been refashioned, imitated and parodied for myriad purposes. This paper explores such work in the Reduced Shakespeare Company (RSC)’s tenth stage play *William Shakespeare’s Long Lost First Play (abridged)*, which premiered at the Folger Shakespeare Library in April 2016, marking the centrepiece of the institution’s celebration of Shakespeare’s four-hundredth deathiversary. The company’s first play *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare (abridged)* (1987) incorporated Shakespearean quotations and condenses the playwright’s narratives but diverged into modern dialogue when actors meta-theatrically interrupted each other, interacted with their audience, or introduced the next scene. It is noticeable that in *Long Lost*, the company attempt to simulate Shakespearean language more directly than in their earlier work. This paper involves analysis of how the RSC’s onstage dynamic has changed and the key difference therein between the approach to writing like Shakespeare taken by the founding members and the current artistic directors. I focus on how and why the RSC wove together skeins of lines, speeches and settings to construct collisions across Shakespeare’s canon in *Long Lost*. The appendix to this paper reflects on the company’s influence on my own attempt to write like Shakespeare in my mash-up play *Henry the Thorth* (2022).

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Joseph Haughey, Northwest Missouri State University

“I COULD A TALE UNFOLD”: TEACHING *HAMLET* AS A GHOST STORY

My paper will tackle our topic of Shakespearean-inspired creative writing from a pedagogical perspective. I’m interested in how teachers can incorporate creative writing elements as part of a study of Shakespeare, and specifically, how I am using such practice in two assignments I have been using for several years in teaching Hamlet in my general education literature course. In the first of these, I do a ghost story activity inspired by a close reading of Hamlet 1.4 and 1.5. One of the joys of teaching Hamlet is that, at its core, it is a ghost story, and most students, and most teachers, too, for that matter, love a good ghost story. Exploring the play’s opening act through the lens of a ghost story, in which students can actively participate, provides a robust frame for beginning a unit on Hamlet. In the second of these assignments, I have students read Margaret Atwood’s poem “Gertrude Talks Back” and then write a creative-critical essay that they start from but add to Shakespeare’s Gertrude’s. What would it mean, for example, to craft a Gertrude drowning in sadness or one who spends all her time planning big social events? They would be very different characters. What about a philosophical Gertrude who is always lost in her thoughts, staring out a window? Or a dotting mother obsessed with trying to make her son whole again? Students’ final work needs to be grounded in the original text (a different kind of writing task than the ghost story). Still, they should take considerable liberties within those boundaries to craft their own reading. These two assignments include written exemplars I plan to share with the group. Both assignments are part of a forthcoming book of strategies for high school and college teachers tackling Hamlet with their students, which I am wrapping up in spring 2024 and hope to see in print with Rowman and Littlefield by summer.

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Sam Kolodezh, University of California San Diego & Bryan Reynolds, University of California Irvine

ABERRANT SHAKESPEARE: RON ATHEY EXCESSES BATAILLE’S “SOLAR ANUS,” BECOMINGS-MACBETHS

In this paper we argue that Ron Athey’s performance *Solar Anus* is an aberrant adaptation of Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* in which the parodic world of abundant excess that the witches catalyze is redemptively captured and transformed through the playful, androgynous, and excessive performance of Athey, who fulfills the witches’ prophecy and continues to live on sovereignly as both Macbeth and Lady Macbeth. Athey is a Los Angeles-based performance artist who practices what is sometimes called “extreme performance,” exploring the limits of aesthetics and the capabilities of the human body to express both beauty and pain. His work *Solar Anus* draws on the works of Georges Bataille, especially his short essay-poem, “Solar Anus,” as well as Paul Molinier, a queer French painter and visual artist who worked on the fringes of the surrealist movement. We work through the combined sociopolitical theory, performance aesthetics, and research methodology of transversal poetics and engage especially with the theories and explorations of aesthetics and sovereignty by Georges Bataille and Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in order to explore the ways in which Athey is capable of realizing the witches’ prophecy of sovereignty without being destroyed by the parodic world that they create and inhabit. Alongside the concepts of sovereignty, we examine how Bataille’s ideas of parody, sacrifice, and excess offer new ways of understanding the world of *Macbeth* and how excess and sovereignty both function within its porous borders.

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Gary Kuchar, University of Victoria

OR BELIEF AND ILLUSION IN SUSAN COYNE’S *KINGFISHER DAYS* (2001)

A mythopoeic parable about the modes of belief proper to aesthetic experience, Susan Coyne’s bestselling memoir *Kingfisher Days* (2001) tells how a series of auspicious events in childhood prepared her to appreciate the visionary themes of *Midsummer Night’s Dream* and *The Tempest*. Taken as a whole, *Kingfisher Days* traces a movement involving three distinct moments in the development of a spiritually inflected form of aesthetic consciousness. First, there is literal, childhood belief in magic and fairies. Second, there is the adult awareness of dramatic illusion as illusion, what Coleridge calls poetic faith. And third, there is a form of second-naivete or “as if” thinking in which artistic illusions, recognized as such, nevertheless serve as equipment for living. In telling its story about the evolution of aesthetic consciousness, *Kingfisher Days* raises some of the troubling questions about the popularization of Shakespeare’s romances that Richard Halpern’s *Shakespeare Among the Moderns* (1997) addresses in its dual critique of the Lamb’s *Tales of Shakespeare* (1807) and Northrop Frye’s *A Natural Perspective* (1965). Following Halpern’s argument, Coyne ostensibly reconstructs a simplified and nostalgic version of Shakespeare’s romances, thus giving us a story in which her childhood interlocuter, Mr. Moir, plays Charles Lamb to her mystified, five-year old, Northrop Frye. Properly understood, however, Coyne’s modest little memoir does not easily reduce to such materialist or psychopathological critique. On the contrary, its exploration of three major phases involved in aesthetic consciousness constitutes a plausible rebuttal of demystifying approaches to mythopoeic storytelling and the concepts of popularity based on them, particularly those involving Shakespearean romance.

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Scott Maisano, University of Massachusetts, Boston

“CAN ANY HARM FROM HARMLESS THOUGHT ARISE?”: WRITING LIKE SHAKESPEARE IN ACT 2, SCENES 1 & 2 OF *ENTER NURSE, OR, LOVE’S LABOUR’S WON*

I’ve recently written a “new” Shakespearean play, *Enter Nurse, or Love’s Labour’s Won*, which is 5 acts, 20 scenes, and 3,089 lines of Elizabethan English. What inspired me to do so was a quote engraved on a 16th-century astronomical clock by its maker, Juanelo Turriano. The Latin inscription reads: “QVI. SIM. SCIES. SI. PAR. OPVS. FACERE. CONABERIS.” Elizabeth King, a sculptor who has researched and written about Turriano offers this English translation: “you will know who I am if *you* try and make this.” I wondered how Turriano’s challenge might apply to attempts to understand and appreciate Shakespeare. I was also motivated by a quote from John Keats in 1818: “I have great reason to be content, for thank God I can read and perhaps understand Shakespeare to his depths.” For a brief time, that quote made me to be content, too, because I thought I could say the same. The more I looked at the quote, however, and thought about Keats’ relationship to Shakespeare, the more I realized how reading Shakespeare as an aspiring poet and playwright differs from reading him as a Shakespeare scholar: Keats wanted to write like Shakespeare; scholars are content to write about him. Since *Love’s Labour’s Won* is not so much an adaptation or an appropriation as it is an imitation of Shakespeare, I am keen to talk with members of this seminar about how imitation requires immersion, and about the effects (both “reinvigorating” and “compromising”) such immersion has on scholarship, as well as how imitation itself might intersect with, inform, and be informed by our teaching practices and artificial intelligence. As the chart above indicates, *Enter Nurse, or Love’s Labour’s Won* was written with Brett Gamboa’s *Shakespeare’s Double Plays* at hand and in mind: in performance, 12 actors play 30 speaking parts, 1 dead saint, and 3 mute angels; a dog plays a sheep. My written contribution to our SAA seminar will be act 2, scenes 1 & 2 of *Love’s Labour’s Won*.

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Kevin A. Quarmby, College of St. Scholastica

SHOEHORNING SHAKESPEARE: LINDSAY KEMP’S *VARIÉTÉ* AS AN HOMAGE TOO FAR

1996, and the Lindsay Kemp Company, starring the mercurial mime dancer himself, opens its genre-defying production of *Variété* at the Hackney Empire, London, prior to an extensive UK and projected world tour. Featuring music by Spanish composer, Carlos Miranda, and, unusually for Kemp, an extensively vocalized libretto, *Variété* reimagines Charlie Chaplin’s 1928 silent movie *The Circus*, resituating it among a touring troupe of misfits in 1930s Nazi Germany. To give voice to the production’s mock-operatic histrionics, an actor with professional Shakespeare acting experience joins Kemp’s company to play Otto Ziegler, the sadistic circus Showman and patriarch to his troupe. That actor was me. Tasked with portraying an excess of impotent rage, and supported by a son with congenital hypertrichosis, a deaf aerialist daughter with mime-accommodating mutism, and a wife whose groundbreaking portrayal of trans positivity was realized by the Italian falsettoist, Ernesto Tomasini, I literally whipped my circus family into quaking compliance. Significant for Kemp’s extravaganza was its reliance on its script, written by ex-partner turned creative collaborator, David Haughton. Best known for portraying Ariel in Derek Jarman’s 1978 movie, *Jubilee*, Haughton created dialogue that accommodated Kemp’s well-documented fascination with Shakespeare. Passing quotes from *Othello* and *As You Like It* are integrated into the text, along with Kemp’s particular favorite, *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. As this essay demonstrates, however, Haughton’s attempt at pseudo-Shakespearean dialogue could not mask the uncomfortable naivety of the resulting script, whose forced archaism was both embarrassing to perform and dissonant to hear.

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Dustin Stegner, Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo

JEN BERVIN’S *NETS* AND QUOTING SHAKESPEARE’S *SONNETS*

In Jen Bervin’s “Working Note” to *Nets*, a 2004 collection in which her poems are excerpts drawn from Shakespeare’s *Sonnets* and printed in bold with the complete original texts in faded typeface, she writes, “When we write poems, the history of poetry is with us, pre-inscribed in the white of the page; when we read or write poems, we do it with or against this palimpsest.” Bervin’s framing of her poems as a palimpsest evokes Genette’s exploration of authorial and intertextual relationships, and, taking her lead, critics have tended to focus on whether she recapitulates themes present in Shakespeare’s *Sonnets*. Yet readers of *Nets* have overlooked that Bervin’s method of selection and superimposition of new poetry over Shakespeare’s texts is closely aligned with what Genette defines as quoting, “the most explicit and literal” form of textual “co-presence,” and that this process of selection parallels what James Simpson has described as the endeavor of many Henrician writers to strip discourse from its textual circumstances. This in turn raises the question of the role of Shakespeare’s language when it is effectively transformed into a fluid semantic archive. This essay will explore how Bervin’s quoting of the Shakespearean original serves the dual function of untethering many of her present poems from the contexts of the Shakespearean original even as they use this distance to reinject the source texts with contemporary, often anachronistic, ranges of meaning.

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Laura B. Turchi , Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies at Arizona State University

IN OTHER WORDS, IN OUR WORDS: PARAPHRASING SHAKESPEARE IN PURSUIT OF POSSESSING SHAKESPEARE

In secondary school English classrooms, paraphrasing a Shakespeare line, scene, even act – typically by the teacher for the students – provides a shortcut explanation for what is going on or what a character really means. This is an efficient way to transmit, but not necessarily make, meaning. Students can gain more engagement, understanding, and confidence if they puzzle out a text for themselves, but this puzzling is much harder if an individual reader navigates through text alone. Communal meaning-making is more powerful learning. In the Shakespeare and Social Justice project (for which I am curriculum director), group paraphrasing is a key activity. First there is a series of exercises with a text (identified as a signpost scene), work that includes close reading, embodied theater-based practices, and making explicit connections to the students’ worlds. Next, the teacher facilitates student collaborative generation of a line-by-line, usually word-by-word, paraphrase. This paper considers paraphrasing from some perspectives from literary scholarship, acting methodologies, and social science research to examine assumptions about paraphrasing as a learning activity. My further purpose is to articulate how communal paraphrasing prepares students to then “make Shakespeare their own” through performance or social-justice-focused arts action. As a process for owning Shakespeare, sometimes called re-storying or talking back to Shakespeare, paraphrasing appears to become empowering for students, potentially a way back to the text with newly deepened and relevant understanding. The purpose of this paper is to consider how that happens, and why it matters.

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William N. West, Northwestern University

THE TRAGEDIES OF ANTONIO

My project takes its cue from a play performed in seventeenth-century Dresden as *The Well-Spoken Judgment of a Woman Student, or, The Jew of Venice*. As its title suggests, it contains characters, situations, and lines familiar from Shakespeare’s *Merchant of Venice*. At one point, though, the Shylockian villain Joseph soliloquizes about his history: before he came to Venice, he lived in Cyprus as Barabas. In other words, this epigone of Shylock seems to have escaped from a play by Marlowe, perhaps detouring through Dekker’s lost *Jew of Venice* or the German *Joseph, Jew of Venice* before stumbling into a new hybrid identity in Dresden. Many characters and settings in early modern playing show a kind of translucency. We see Marlowe’s Tamburlaine through Greene’s Selimus, and Preston’s Cambises through Tamburlaine. We may see Othello’s Venice in Shylock’s. Shakespeare relocates his own Falstaff to Windsor from Eastcheap. The claim of *The Jew of Venice* is different. It does not simply evoke other representations, it explicitly makes them its backstory. I propose to plot, against the grain, the story of another figure who traverses plays, Antonio. An Antonio appears in Shakespeare’s *Merchant of Venice*, *Twelfth Night*, and *Tempest*, Marston’s *Antonio and Mellida* and *Antonio’s Revenge*, and Webster’s *The Duchess of Malfi*, never as protagonist. What changes if Antonio becomes the hero of his own story? What changes in our understanding of the composition and reception of these plays if we take them as sharing a history outside as well as within the playhouse?