AMERICANS ON SHAKESPEARE

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Abstract: The paper is made up of two main sections: American authors about Shakespeare, including the "great battle" concerning the English bard, the doubters, who thought him either undemocratic and irrelevant, or whose authorship was questionable (Delia Bacon, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Herman Melville, Walt Whitman, Mark Twain, Henry James), and the pro-Shakespeareans, who took him as a founder of American thought, literature and language (Washington Irving, J. F. Cooper, Alexis de Tocqueville, R. W. Emerson, H. D. Thoreau, W. D. Howells, T. S. Eliot, Isaac Asimov, Langston Hughes, Maya Angelou); and a second one on twentieth-century academic scholarship on the relationships between America and Shakespeare (L. W. Levine, M. D. Bristol, K. C. Sturgess, the Vaughans, J. Shapiro).

Keywords: Shakespeare, Americans, influence, criticism, appropriation, assimilation

> "For all the honor Englishmen render onto Shakespeare…,it is the North Americans who have shown the greatest passion of and industry in the production and preservation of Shakespeare…"
>
> Glen Loney and Patricia MacKay

Beginning with the 1800s and continuing for a little over a century, American/s (authors)—Peter Rawlings lists about sixty—may be divided into those who pleaded for new American voices, independent of the British, and for whom Shakespeare appeared as either undemocratic and irrelevant, or even questionable in his very existence (see, for instance, James Shapiro's Contested Will), and another—much larger—category who saw Shakespeare as a founder of American thought in general and American literature (including language) in particular.

A relevant starting point for introducing the first category is offered by an Ohio woman named Delia Salter Bacon (1811-1859) who, in 1857, published The Philosophy of the Plays of Shakespeare Unfolded, an almost unreadable book, long derided by scholars afterwards (n.b.), in which she attempted to prove that Shakespeare—"a stupid, illiterate, third-orate play actor"—could not have been the author of the plays attributed to him; they were written, instead, by a committee headed by Sir Francis Bacon (no relation), and including Walter Raleigh, Edmund Spenser and others. However, Nathaniel Hawthorne, then living in London (where the book was first published), wrote a preface to Delia Bacon's volume, where the great novelist and short-story teller, described her "truly heroic devotion of intellect and heart."

The Hawthorne connection is also present in Herman Melville's response to Shakespeare; in his Redburn (1849) one finds the celebrated quotation: "You cannot spill a drop of American

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blood without spilling the blood of the whole world… Our ancestry is lost in the universal pageantry: and Caesar and Alfred, St. Paul and Luther, and Homer and Shakespeare are as much ours as Washington…" Moreover, Melville used Shakespearean devices (like formal stage directions and extended soliloquies in Moby Dick), plus Captain Ahab, who looks very much like a classic Shakespearean figure, "a great man brought down by his faults" (Carl F. Horde, 20003 Introduction to Moby Dick).

Still, only one year later, Melville proclaimed that America would have its own Shakespeares—one of them like Hawthorne--, but also possibly including himself; not before noting his great praise ("Hawthorne and His Mosses"): "Now it is that blackness in Shakespeare… that so fixes and fascinates me; /it/ furnishes the infinite obscure of his background…, against which Shakespeare plays his grandest conceits… In Shakespeare's tomb /"interred with his bones"/ lies infinitely more than Shakespeare ever wrote…"; however, further down: "Believe me, my friends, that men not very much inferior to Shakespeare, are this day being born on the banks of the Ohio… Shakespeare… is sure to be surpassed…"; and just one step backward: "…I do not say that Nathaniel of Salem is a greater than William of Avon, or as great. But the difference between the two men is by no means immeasurable. Not a very great deal more, and Nathaniel were William."

Also ambiguous, even self-contradictory, is Walt Whitman (see such references as Clifton Joseph Furness' 1932 Walt Whitman's Estimate of Shakespeare, and others by Richard Clarence Harrison and Paul A. Nelson) in a series of essays like "On Shakespeare's Greatness," Democratic Vistas, "A Thought on Shakespeare," "What Lurks behind Shakespeare's Plays?" in Specimen Days," "November Boughs" or his short poem "Shakespeare-Bacon's Cipher." One first becomes suspicious when Whitman describes Delia Bacon (supra) as "the sweetest, eloquentist, grandest woman… that America has so far produced" (she died in an asylum at 48, see Nelson). Still, "Shakespeare…, whoever he was (n.b.), was a great man…; he was a master artist, in a way—not in all ways, for he often fell down on his own wreckage…"; next, he reads Shakespeare's history plays and finds in them a defense of democracy," but "the great poems are poisonous to the life-blood of democracy," and "he will not do for fulfilling and satisfying modern and scientific and democratic American purposes," while "his comedies are altogether non-acceptable to America and Democracy"; consequently, "I am firm against Shakesper /sic/--I mean the Avon man, the actor," because his works were written by "some unsuspected author" (probably Edward de Vere or Francis Bacon): "Scarcely anything that is said of him is authorized."(see Mark Twain, infra) A complete picture of the Whitman-Shakespeare "relationship" may be found in the works (especially the nine volumes of Walt Whitman in Camden) of Whitman's friend, literary executor, and biographer Horace L. Traubel.

An easy passage to the next author is provided by James Russell Lowell, whose stance is rather moderate (in "Shakespeare Once More," for instance): knowing that "a wise skepticism is the first attribute of a good critic" and that "one thorn of experience is worth a whole wilderness

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of warning," the "classroom poet" and Harvard professor (lectured on Dante, Chaucer, Cervantes, and Shakespeare) adopts an ironic tone in the 84 pages of his essay and becomes critical mostly of Shakespeare's "conventional English."

As far as Samuel Langhorne Clemens/Mark Twain is concerned, we may begin by showing that Anthony J. Berret wrote a whole book on Mark Twain and Shakespeare (1993), where he starts from Shakespeare's influence in general (actual, probable and possible) and then focuses on Shakespeare in Twain's masterpiece Adventures of Huckleberry Finn (1884).

Influenced by Delia Bacon, and believing, among others, that Milton, not Bunyan, wrote the Pilgrim's Progress and that Queen Elizabeth was a man, Twain thought Shakespeare did not write Shakespeare, as the man everybody talks and writes about had too limited a life experience, which disqualified him; so the true author of Shakespeare's plays was Francis Bacon.

Except for a lampoon about "The Killing of Julius Caesar 'Localized'" (typical Mark Twain signature), the Shakespeare authorship question is developed in detail in his 1909 "Is Shakespeare Dead?" Twain starts from facts, "verified facts, established facts, undisputed facts" about Shakespeare's birth, his illiterate parents, his marriage to Anne Hathaway and the birth of their first child within six months and of the twins in 1585, his departure to London, where he works as an actor and manager, his return to Stratford in 1610-11 (1613 in fact), the writing of his will and his death, which "was not an event."

Then follows Twain's sweeping rejection of Mr. Shakespeare as an author "who hasn't any history to record: "So far as any one knows and can prove, Shakespeare of Stratford-on-Avon never wrote a play in his life. So far as any one knows and can prove, he never wrote a letter in his life. So far as any one knows, he received only one letter in his life. So far as any one knows and can prove, Shakespeare of Stratford wrote only one poem in his life. This one is authentic. He did write that one—a fact that stands undisputed; he wrote the whole of it out of his own head. /This is outrageous!/ He commanded that his work of art be engraved upon his tomb, and he was obeyed. There it abides to this day. This is it:

Good friend of Iesus sake forbeare,

To dig the dust enclosed heare.

Bleste be ye man yt spares thes stones,

And curst be he yt moves my bones."

Still, the ending of the essay comes with an unexpected twist: "Shakespeare had no prominence while he lived, and none until he had been dead two or three generations… but the Works will endure until the last sun goes down."

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Another Shakespeare-Twain relationship is illustrated in Huckleberry Finn: near the Arkansas-Missouri-Tennessee border, Jim and Huck take two on-the-run grafters aboard their raft—the "Duke" (of about thirty) and the "King"—the "rightful king of France" (about seventy), both of whom immediately advertize a play called The Thrilling Tragedy of the King's Camelopard or The Royal Nonesuch, a bawdy sham, which they rehearse on the raft, followed by their unsuccessful performance in front of the 'uncivilized" folk of Arkansas ("Ladies and children are not admitted" read the poster); and so, in Chapter 21 of the adventure novel, the Duke gives a "parody" of Hamlet's soliloquy in III 1 (mixed with fragments from other plays);

"To be or not to be, that is the bare bodkin

That makes calamity of so long life;

For who would fardels bear, till Birnam Wood do come to Dunsinane,

But that the feat of something after death

Murders the innocent sleep, great nature's second course,

And makes us rather sling the arrows of outrageous fortune

That fly to others we know not of.

There's the respect must give us pause…"

Richard III and Romeo and Juliet are also envisaged by the two frauds or "rapscallions"; thus, Shakespearean masterpieces "appropriated" for mocking purposes.

Our last author in the list of doubters is again more or less ambiguous; in an MA 2009 dissertation defended at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, "Divine William" and the Master: The Influence of Shakespeare on the Novels of Henry James, Amy M. Green demonstrates that James knew and admired Shakespeare, who influenced the shaping of characters and thematic elements of plot in The Aspern Papers, "The Birthplace," The Portrait of a Lady, The Golden Bowl and The American; there is also a comparison between Miriam Rooth, the actress in The Tragic Muse and Constance in King John.

Still, as one critic notes (is it Edmund Wilson?), James had an "envious admiration" of Shakespeare, a mixture of praise and doubt; in this respect, one remembers his recasting (1903) of As You Like It in a Fleet Street setting ("The Papers"), the notations in English Hours (1905), the 1907 introduction to an edition of The Tempest, and—most importantly—the above mentioned story "The Birthplace"(19032), where a young couple get a job at Shakespeare's birthplace only to find themselves telling invented stories about the playwright, resulting in a witty satire on the excesses of bardolatry; Shakespeare is, in fact, never mentioned, except as "the supreme Mecca of the English speaking race." And in one of his Letters (ed. Leon Edel) James

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speaks out: "I am sort of haunted by the conviction that the divine William is the biggest and most successful fraud ever practiced on a patient world."

Let us now hope that our next section can convincingly prove that the pro-Shakespeare trend among American writers (and not only) is much more consistent than that of the doubters. Our survey is, again, more or less chronological; the author of The Life and Voyages of Christopher Columbus (1828), Washington Irving, could not have overlooked how in 1609 "the still vexed Bermoothes" and the shipwreck of flag-ship "The Sea-Venture" gave the subject ("some of the elements of…") for Shakespeare's "wild and beautiful drama The Tempest" ("The Bermudas. A Shakespearian Research"); for him, the Bermudas were both "a most prodigious and enchanted place" and the "habitation of divells," and Irving also refers to Gonzalo's speech, where Shakespeare anticipates "the golden commonwealth"—"Had I a plantation on this isle, my Lord…" But Irving offers still another "research" in The Sketch-Book of Geoffrey Crayon (1820), "The Boar's Head Tavern, East Cheap: A Shakespearian Research," including his "mite of homage to the memory of the illustrious bard…, sweet Shakespeare…"; elsewhere in the book he writes about his visit at Stratford-on-Avon—the house, Shakespeare's chair, the grave and the inscription on it (see supra), then brief comments about Cymbeline, a scene in As You Like It, and the character of Falstaff.

Even more trenchant is James Fennimore Cooper in his 1833 Notions of the Americans (a travel narrative in the form of 38 letters written in praise of American democracy and a correction of the Europeans' mistaken notions): "Shakespeare is, of course, the great author of America, as he is of England, and I think he is quite as well relished here as there"; and again: "…the American has… just as good a right to claim Milton, and Shakespeare… for his countrymen, as an Englishman." (see also Edward P. Vandiver, Jr., "James Fennimore Cooper and Shakespeare," The Shakespeare Association Bulletin, vol.15, no.2, April 1940, pp.110-117). And one may also mention that Russian critic-theorist Belinski saw Cooper's Pathfinder as "a Shakespearean drama in the form of a novel."

Alexis de Tocqueville in his Democracy in America (1835—vol.I, 1840—vol.II) has his French pastoral images of Shakespeare in America: "There is hardly a pioneer's hut which does not contain a few odd volumes of Shakespeare. I remember reading the feudal drama of Henry V for the first time in a log cabin."(I, Ch.5)

Autobiographical—in another sense—is also Edgar Allan Poe's relationship with Shakespeare: in 1809, actor David Poe, Jr. and his wife, Poe's natural parents, were performing in King Lear, so when their son was born the same year, Edgar in the play became one of his names. Otherwise, Poe did not seem to have had much time to think or write about Shakespeare, though there is mention of a review of William Hazlitt's The Characters of Shakespeare, and an 1846 essay where he attacked those who ignorantly stood in awe of and worshiped his genius.

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One of the best American critics of Shakespeare was certainly Ralph Waldo Emerson; there is a bad reproduction (2012) of a 1904 booklet titled Emerson and Shakespeare (De La More Press), which we did not use; what we could use were his Journals, his 1850 Representative Men and his 1856 English Traits (where Shakespeare is casually mentioned three times). Chronologically, the Journals give us Emerson's grand Shakespeare: "The great facts of history are four or five names, Homer-Phidias-Jesus-Shakespeare," and "Shakespeare is immeasurable" (1838); "Shakespeare, the first literary genius of the world, leans on the Bible…"(1839); "Shakespeare and Plato each sufficed for the culture of a nation"(1843); an 1848 lecture in London: "Shakespeare is nothing but a large utterance…; has no rival in the ages"; "There was never anything more excellent came from the human brain than the plays of Shakespeare"(1852); "Shakespeare puts us all out. No theory will account for him."(1864)…

But the relevant commentary (an argument which we do not plan to follow in all its implications) comes in "Shakespeare: or, The Poet," in Representative Men (1850), taken over in an 1864 speech; it was first read as a lecture in Exeter Hall, in London, June 1848. Emerson's "representative" poet, "the subtlest of authors," is "as much out of the category of eminent authors, as he is out of the crowd. He is inconceivably wise; the others, conceivably"; having "fathered… German literature" and "announcing new eras," Shakespeare's "mind is the horizon beyond which we do not see"; anticipating Harold Bloom by one-and-a-half centuries, Emerson thinks "he wrote the airs for all our modern music; he wrote the texts of modern life…; he drew the man of England and Europe; the father of the man in America"; and this seems almost more than enough; only Emerson ends his essay in a characteristically Transcendentalist manner: "Shakespeare, Homer, Dante, Chaucer saw the splendor of meaning that plays over the visible world…"—which is all the great thinkers and writers do.

Emerson's disciple, Thoreau, unsurprisingly wrote a poem, "The Summer Rain," where

"Plutarch was good, and so was Homer too,

Our Shakespeare's life were rich to live again…

Tell Shakespeare to attend some leisure hour…,"

and another one, about the "Avon Stream," where, once more, Shakespeare is seen side by side with Jesus. An 1836 unpublished essay makes again the case for "our Shakespeare": "Milton and Shakespeare… have done and are still doing… much for the advancement of literature, and the establishment of a pure and nervous language, on this as on the other side of the water."

Except for the monumental Complete Works of Shakespeare, edited with Evert Augustus Duykinck, William Cullen Bryant, another "fireside" or "classroom" poet and translator of Homer is often remembered for his 1872 "On the Unveiling of Shakespeare's Statue in Central Park" (erected Nov. 25, 1864—Shakespeare birth anniversary), and where, in 1911, Bryant himself was to have his statue erected; also worth noting is that the money for the statue had

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come from a benefit performance of Julius Caesar at "The Winter Garden Theater," in a distribution including Edwin Booth (Brutus), Junius Brutus Booth, Jr. (Cassius) and (n.b.) John Wilkes Booth (Mark Antony). For the dedication eight years later, Bryant found it fit to compare Shakespeare to the giant Sequoia trees or "the cataract of Niagara," plus other superlatives (immortal, great mind, creative imagination, vigorous reason, comprehensive wisdom…) in a rhetoric that hardly does justice to his subject (Bryant was seventy-eight).

Recluse Emily Dickinson may have had a Shakespeare edition in her father's library in Amherst (Finnerty even believes Edward Dickinson may have purchased the 1842 eight-volume pictorial edition from the editor, Charles Knight), so in her "Drama's Vitalest Expression Is the Common Day" she argues for the obvious, i.e. ordinary life is superior to Shakespeare, so—

"'Hamlet' to himself were Hamlet—

Had not Shakespeare wrote—

Though the 'Romeo' left no record

Of his Juliet…"

Then the same Paraic Finnerty lets us know that Dickinson's letters "abound" with hyperbolic references to Shakespeare and his works and that her poems contain many allusions to his writings; and, for now, we shall just leave it at that.

Abraham Lincoln (like George Washington, John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, John Quincy Adams before him, and like Harry S. Truman, John F. Kennedy, Ronald Reagan and Bill Clinton after) was a great reader of Shakespeare, with a special affinity for Macbeth, and (son Robert's testimony) he constantly carried around a volume of the plays; he had read Shakespeare in his early years, and later used to recite passages from King John (after his son, Willie died), Macbeth or even Julius Caesar, a play that helped shape the thinking of his killer, John Wilkes Booth. As Michael W. Kauffman wrote a whole book about the Booths, we can just mention that the British actors had arrived in California in the 1848 Gold Rush, with versions of The Taming of the Shrew, Othello and Hamlet on a redwood stump; the Shakespeare star Junius Brutus Booth (an admirer of Lincoln) took his Hamlet to San Francisco in 1851; his three sons, John Wilkes (who hated Lincoln and saw him as a tyrant, as a Julius Caesar), Junius Jr. and Edwin also toured in the South and Mid-Atlantic; in April 1865 John Wilkes, who had appeared in many Shakespeare plays, shot and killed Lincoln; the Folger Shakespeare Library houses a lithograph—"The Martyr of Liberty"--depicting Wilkes shooting Lincoln, with this quotation:

"Macbeth: Besides, this Duncan

Hath borne his faculties so meek; hath been

So clear in his great office, that his virtues

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Will plead, like angels, trumpet-tongued, against

The deep damnation of his taking off…" (Macbeth, I 7)

Any observant reader will readily notice that this lengthy paragraph is not about Lincoln on Shakespeare, but rather about the great President and his Shakespearean destiny.

A Shakespeare scholar, clergyman, mystic, and poet, a member of the Emerson/Thoreau Transcendentalist Club, Jones Very (Poems and Essays, 1886, posthumously) was mindful in 1864 and wrote "On the Three Hundredth Anniversary of Shakespeare's Birthday," alongside many Shakespearean sonnets, plus other essays; in fact, his mental breakdown came as he was completing one such essay: "Macbeth is contending with the realities of this world, Hamlet with those of the next."

William Dean Howells (who died in 1920) confessed of an early familiarity with Shakespeare, acknowledged his considerable debt to the English bard, and wrote many "imitations of Shakespeare"; writing about Homer, Dante, and Shakespeare, Howells declared his "worship of Shakespeare," as "the creation of Shakespeare was as great as the creation of a planet"; still, his 1881 novel A Fearful Responsibility, contains an ambivalent remark concerning authorship (see his "Shakespeare" in Shapiro, 2014, pp.239-245).

Along with great authors who borrowed titles from Shakespeare (Faulkner, Steinbeck, Vonnegut…, and with whom we dealt in another paper,), the American twentieth century seems to go beyond this battle over the bard's destiny across the ocean and focus on what was really important in his work for modernists and postmodernists. Quite a number of scholarly writings indicate that Eliot/Shakespeare is the main subject here; these are: T. S. Eliot and Shakespeare by Phillip L. Marcus, T. S. Eliot on Shakespeare by Charles Warren (see also his Shakespeare lectures), John P. McCombe's essay on Eliot's poetic allusions to Shakespeare, Jason Harding's "T. S. Eliot's Shakespeare," David Galeson on "…T. S. Eliot Reads Shakespeare…"; and, indirectly, David Lodge's novel Small World, where a young academic seeks to impress with a pretentious MA thesis on "The Influence of T. E. Eliot on Shakespeare." All these seem to suggest that Eliot invented Shakespeare for the modern world; he recognized Shakespeare as the greatest of poets and dramatists ("Dante and Shakespeare divide the modern world between them. There is no third…"), and there are references to his work throughout Eliot's life; in "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" ("No! I am not Prince Hamlet…"), in The Waste Land and The Four Quartets, with the 1930 "Marina"as a short Shakespearean masterpiece; essay-wise, there is the controversial "Hamlet and His Problems," with the "objective correlative" theory (in The Sacred Wood), an address on "Shakespeare and the Stoicism of Seneca," several comments on Coriolanus a.s.o.

Stray references to Shakespeare come from all corners, as it were, in this century, so an exhaustive survey would require volumes, and would include, at random, F. Scott Fitzgerald, W.

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C. Williams, Robert Frost, James Thurber, George Santayana, Raymond Chandler…; still, our choice/s are three writers who stand out with their striking "hypotheses." First come Isaac Asimov with his 1954 time travel story "The Immortal Bard": a professor of physics, Phineas Welch, can bring back "the spirit" of Shakespeare, who gets enrolled in an evening course about himself given by Professor Robertson; at the exam about his own life and work, Shakespeare (his spirit!?) gets flunked. A little earlier (1942), Langston Hughes writes Shakespeare in Harlem, a book of light verse, with this title poem:

"Hey ninny neigh!

And a hey nonny noe!

Where, oh, where

Did my sweet mama go?

Hey ninny neigh,

With a tra-la-la-la!

They say your sweet mama

Went home to her ma."

And, as if this were not enough, Maya Angelou, after reading "Sonnet 29" ("When in disgrace with fortune and men's eyes/I all alone beweep my outcast state…," plus "curse my fate" and "myself almost despising" further on), in which the speaker bemoans his status as an outcast and failure, concludes, in a January 2013 lecture, that "Shakespeare must be a black girl."

The same twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first come as a period that seems to have been ripe for (academic) scholarship on the subject; this was certainly prepared by the American Shakespeare associations and societies, Shakespeare magazines, conferences, anniversaries, editions…, accompanied by such anthologies and histories of Shakespeare criticism as those of Alfred van Rensslaer Westfall, Ed. E. Bloom, Arthur Eastman, Paul N. Siegel, Dympna Callighan (a "Feminist Companion"), Russ McDonald, Patricia Parker and Geoffrey Hartman, Michael Taylor, Steven Greenblatt…

We will look here at six recent authors who provide, most likely, all the material any scholar on the topic would need; first in our list is Lawrence W. Levine, whose 1984 "William Shakespeare and the American People: A Study in Cultural Transformation" begins with 19th-century Americans "mutilating" (i.e. making their own) such plays as Hamlet (see Twain) or Richard III (lampooned in such versions as Bad Dicky) or travesties of Othello, The Taming of the Shrew, Romeo and Juliet... Levine then goes on to mention "numberless performances" of

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Shakespeare's plays, the bard's position as part of American popular culture, where he was met with both approval and disapproval; and he moves his research into the twentieth century as "Shakespeare's relationship to the American people was always in flux, always changing."(p.48) And this is the "transformation" he had in mind from his very title. Shakespeare in schoolbooks, Shakespeare in American political life, Shakespeare and ideology, problems with editions of his works… and other such "factors" follow, "probing… into Shakespeare's transformation," especially one "from a playwright for the general public into one for a specific audience…"(p.58)Levine proposes next (1988) a Shakespeare between "highbrow" and "lowbrow" forms of American culture (he describes the phenomenon as a "highbrow/lowbrow split"), an elaboration of his previous thesis, in fact: lowbrow and highbrow go more or less together (regarding performances) until the late 1800s (plays accompanied by songs, dances, and farces in minstrel shows) and then Shakespeare becomes a commodity for upper-class audiences and university scholars; Levine is still interested in the process of cultural change in America.

The interaction between Shakespeare and American culture is also the subject of Michael D. Bristol's 1990 Shakespeare's America. America's Shakespeare, a challenging blend of social history and literary criticism, based upon the relationship between ideology and criticism (especially in the 20th-century with its emphases on liberalism and neo-conservatism and with Shakespeare at the center of a complex cultural and ideological production).

The basic claim behind Christy Desmet and Robert Sawyer's 1990 Shakespeare and Appropriation. (Accents on Shakespeare) is also central to the premise of our paper: "The vitality of our culture is still often measured by the status Shakespeare has within it…"; and this status is given by poems, plays, novels, stories…, videos and movies from the 19th- and 20th-centuries in which Shakespeare is culturally "appropriated"; contributors include, alongside the two editors, Ivo Kamps, Terrence Hawks, Georgiana Ziegler, Lisa S. Starks, Richard Finkelstein, Gary Taylor…, who discuss the central topic with reference to the major plays.

And so we move into the 21st century, with other "accents" on the appropriation of Shakespeare in America in Kim C. Sturgess's 2004 Shakespeare and the American Nation. Its first part documents (literary pieces, speeches, newspaper articles, travelers' tales, actors' testimonies…) "the paradox of this appropriation of Shakespeare"(p.8) and its second part analyzes this appropriation in the late 18th and early 19th centuries (Joseph Hopkinson's first edition of the plays in 1795, interest in Shakespeare from such prominent personalities as John Adams and Thomas Jefferson, the Shakespeare addiction in the Jacksonian era, then Lincoln and Shakespeare, Shakespeare in schoolbooks (again), "dissenting voices," like that of Melville, the authorship controversy (Delia Bacon), the coming on stage of Henry Clay Folger and the famous library on Capitol Hill, with "its seventy-nine copies of the important First Folio /that/ help confirm the special position of Shakespeare within the tradition of the American nation."

Eight years later, Alden Vaughan and Virginia Mason Vaughan come out with their Shakespeare in America, and one already expect repetitions of topics and themes: the authors'

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attention to theater history, publication history and criticism, doubled by their emphasis on four America-Shakespeare themes: a utilitarian approach to the plays in the 18th and 19th centuries; collecting, editing and adapting Shakespeare; making Shakespeare accessible by means of education in public schools and theaters; and having fun with Shakespeare (parodies, spoofs, travesties and other kitsch, followed by films, musicals and "radical adaptations" on stage, screen and paper.

At long last, our concise repetition of these repetitions on the topic ends with Shakespeare in America: An Anthology from the Revolution to Now, a massive 724-page volume, edited by James Shapiro in 2014. Shapiro's two main conceptual poles are, chronologically, assimilation and influence (which, might, together, equal appropriation) into/on literature, politics, entertainment. The editor's first asset (also the author of One Year in the Life of Shakespeare, 1599, Contested Will: Who Wrote Shakespeare? and Rival Playwrights…) is, again, the impressive collection of documents of all types (accompanied by informative headnotes) and coming from the most diverse sources (four American Presidents, including the foreword by Bill Clinton, poets, actors, critics, anonymous writers…) Shapiro's anthology (71 pieces) also touches upon the topic of the "battle" over "our Shakespeare" and the "lowbrow/highbrow" dispute as it traces the evolution of a national anxiety as to whether Shakespeare is or is not America's adopted national poet; what seems to be winning the upper hand is Shapiro's implicit argument for a distinctly American Shakespeare, an author who provided Americans with possibilities of reading events in their history through an understanding of his plays:"the history of Shakespeare in America is also the history of America itself."(Introduction/our conclusion).

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