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LOOKING FOR SHAKESPEARE IN YOUNG ADULT FICTION

The phenomenon of intertextuality born by neoclassical philosophy and brought up by postmodernism successfully outlasted its ‘parents’ and entered XXI century’s literature. Intertextual connections can still be observed on the levels of the plot, characters, ideas, symbols, themes and citations. But nowadays intertextuality as a phenomenon undergoes a number of changes. The first one is the reduction of precedent texts. A common reader is aware of a smaller amount of texts than ever and is not able to recognize many classical authors whose works had been learnt by heart through centuries. Moreover, nobody can be sure that the writer and the reader got acquainted with the same choice of books as we live in the age of free choice and are not dictated what to read any more (alas!). To be honest, there are fewer and fewer writers who can deal with citations and are educated enough for it. So the list of active precedent texts tends to become shorter and soon perhaps will consist of the Bible and William Shakespeare’s works only. In the article, we addressed the latter as W. Shakespeare’s canon has always been one of the most powerful precedent texts and remains one of the few which hasn’t been losing this status.

Fortunately, Shakespeare is studied in educational establishments all over the world and is trustworthy to be referred to not in vain. However, the majority of authors do not risk allusions without mentioning the name of Shakespeare or his characters. This transition from hidden allusions to explicit references is the second tendency we notice.

A most evident proof of intertextuality in its original meaning and form can be found in three young adult novels: *Spanking Shakespeare*, *New Boy* and *Saving Hamlet*.

Spanking Shakespeare by Jake Wizner uses a number of Shakespeare’s allusions, all of them used to add a shade of meaning to the narration. The citation from “Romeo and Juliette” ‘What’s in a name?’ hints that the boy named Shakespeare imposes too much of a burden on his name though he himself is responsible for his destiny. The title of the second chapter “The Early Years” implies that it would be devoted to a great man’s childhood though we know that the protagonist is a typical teenager and has not yet become a VIP. So the allusion is used ironically. A lot of other allusions to famous writers and poets are used in the boy’s verse which he devotes to his girlfriend in order to impress her with his knowledge and passion. Here is an extract from it:

“We can start way, way back with the epic bard Homer
Who wrote about Helen while nursing a boner.
And even though Homer was totally blind
He was blessed with something beyond a sharp mind.
Shakespeare (the first) while writing King Lear

Got totally hammered guzzling beer.
And in between poems, word has it that Keats
Liked to cavort betwixt oft-soiled sheets.
Milton himself was a mischievous louse
Whose favorite hobby was to egg Shakespeare's house.
And with whom did Milton engage in this fun?
Sometimes Ben Jonson, sometimes John Donne" [1, p. 176].

New Boy by Tracy Chevalier [2] is Shakespearean on a deeper level and offers intertextuality in the postmodernist tradition of Michel Tournier and Michael Cunningham. Tracy Chevalier, the author of several historical books including the New York Times bestseller *Girl with a Pearl Earring*, was asked by Hogarth Press to take part in their Shakespeare Project, in which, as she explains, "writers were invited to write a novel inspired by a Shakespeare play. I chose Othello, for its timeless themes of jealousy and discrimination. I like writing about outsiders" [3]. The novel is set in a 1970's suburban Washington school where Osei Kokote, an eleven-year-old boy and a diplomat's son, comes to study. He makes friends with the most popular girl Daniela Benedetti. Both of them usually go by the first letters of their names, O and Dee, which we can perceive as Othello and Desdemona. Of course there is a Iago in the face of the bully Ian and his girlfriend Mimi who are old enough to transfer their parents' and teachers' racial prejudices to their schoolmates. The author is pedantic enough to follow her hypertextual idea to the degree of preserving the symbol of betrayal: she just changes Desdemona's handkerchief for Dee's strawberry pencil. The catastrophe is not long to wait for. The irony of Chevalier's novel lies in time management: the whole drama takes place in one day. There are also other markers of the ironical mood. As Rebecca Foster notices in her review for the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, "Dee has a refreshingly innocent curiosity about the exotic: "It was his skin that stood out, its color reminding [her] of bears she'd seen at the zoo." She also likens O's head to a clay pot and his hair to a thick forest. In another context those metaphors might induce a cringe, but here they are a clever re-creation of a childlike perspective" [4]. Perhaps she has a point about the unreliable narrator's viewpoint but the general impression is nevertheless rather ironic. Thus the serious problem field and the plot from Shakespeare combined with the ironical mood of the novel return us to the blooming years of postmodernistic deconstruction. There are some specific points that should be mentioned. Firstly, the novel is cleverly set in the 1970s when otherness was taken as a great drawback. Secondly, the classical conception of otherness is oriented towards young readers for whom jealousy, lies, bullying and betrayal are as fresh and genuine at 11 as they were in the 16th-century's tragedy but far more obvious and raw. Reinvention of well-known Shakespeare's plays in accordance with today's reality can also be found in a number of books such as *The Gap of Time* by Jeanette Winterson being a new *The Winter's Tale* and *Macbeth* by Jo Nesbo.

The third novel also deals with the issue of otherness but of a different kind. *Saving Hamlet* by Molly Booth [5] is a quite ambitious debut novel written by a

young author for young readers about a young girl Emma who has been unexpectedly promoted to the stage manager of a XXI century college Hamlet production but cannot think it up. One night after rehearsal, Emma being in a most pessimistic mood about her unsuccessful beginning falls through the stage's trap door and lands in the Globe Theater of 1601. Naturally they are staging Hamlet at the moment and let Emma enjoy the work as a backstage assistant and then an accountant, hand in hand with William Shakespeare (her being taken for a boy because of her short haircut and trousers). Emma learns things about the way Hamlet should look like and obviously falls for... no, luckily not Shakespeare but an actor named Alex. First of all, it is a historical novel as the narration shifts from nowadays to the beginning of the 17th century. Elizabethan English in the novel adds to the credibility of Emma's communication success and creates the atmosphere of Elizabethan England. Life in Elizabethan England is also represented in such aspects as water pollution, disease, and hygiene. Molly Booth compares lifestyles of the two epochs, highlights the concepts of love and sexuality, and meditates upon a person's place in so different worlds. Much attention is given to stagecraft and interpretations of *Hamlet* but it does not become the main focus. *Saving Hamlet* is not a thorough inquiry into Shakespeare's life and work, but taking into account the author's age it is a very good attempt to express her love for Shakespeare and to attract young amateurs of the Bard. After her first success Ms. Booth wrote a playful adaptation of Shakespeare's *Much Ado about Nothing* under the title *Nothing Happened*.

But as we proceed looking for Shakespeare in young adult books it becomes clear that the relations between two texts often deviate from the decoding of the canon, deconstruction of patriarchal texts, dethronement of centripetal ideologies and polemics with traditional hierarchies. It is evident even in *Saving Hamlet* and *Nothing Happened*. While postmodernist authors questioned the role of a woman in Elizabethan society and contrasted gender roles claiming the canon got it wrong, Molly Booth uses Shakespeare as an ally to prove how close his culture is to ours especially in terms of love relationships and sexuality. Thus, we see that writers continue to exploit Shakespeare's plays in their urge to tell old stories in modern interpretation though shifting the relations between two texts from opposition to complementarity.

Certainly, contemporary texts tend to influence Shakespearean canon because there exist such a great plenty of biographical (pseudobiographical) literary works that the personality of the Bard has considerably changed in our perception. For example, Carolyn Meyer reinvents Shakespeare's young years to create a bitter romance between the boy who will become the world's most famous playwright and a poor farmer's daughter Anne Hathaway who will manage to become his wife (*Loving Will Shakespeare* [6]). The so called Shakespeare's question nowadays triggers a lot of fictional works. They claim to explain doubtful facts from his biography from either stratfordian or antistratfordian points of view. Some of them are intended for teenagers' reading, for example *Shakespeare's Secret* by Elise Broach. The main character of the novel is a teenage girl named after

a Shakespeare's heroine Hero while her sister is Beatrice because their father is a philologist involved in Shakespeare's studies. Like in *Spanking Shakespeare*, a "literary" name spoils the teenager's school life but the problem turns out to be just a matter of attitude. As soon as she solves her psychological issues she finds friends. But the main plot is based on the problem of authorship skillfully introduced by the innocent narrator. Hero's family buys a house from the Duke of Oxford's descendant and she finds a necklace which belonged to Ann Boleyn five centuries ago. Then she investigates the loss of a diamond from the necklace and within a week comes to the conclusion that the real Shakespeare was the Duke of Oxford, an illegitimate son of Queen Elizabeth. Of course she finds the diamond itself, too [7].

The theory of intertextuality provides us with different forms of intertextual connections which are the result of producing a text from two separate texts. These texts exist in a kind of relations which were called "an intertextual dialogue" by Umberto Eco. The recipient text can echo the precedent text in the form of an allusion, a quotation, a parody, or a pastiche and some other which inflates the text with new interpretative meanings. And the tendency we observe nowadays is simplification of the intertextual dialogue and reduction of its forms. Nowadays literary works lack hidden allusions, do not collide ideas with precedent text, do not even hint at some deeper sense. The majority of young adult novels like those just described demonstrate a growing amount of simpler forms of intertextuality: commented allusions, attributed citations, well-known symbols, just references to the famous name of William Shakespeare.

Thus, in *Shakespeare's Landlord*, the first book in Charlaïne Harris's 'Lily Bard' mysterious series, we do not find any ties with either the English playwright's personality or his books. It is a good detective story (and romance) masterfully playing with suspense. The word claiming our attention is the name of a provincial town in Arkansas – Shakespeare – where the main character Lily Bard comes to in order to escape from her dark and violent past. Shakespeare remains the setting, and the only mentioning of its intertextual nature is the following: "I have chosen Shakespeare simply observing the map and choosing where to hide from my past and then I saw the name and as my own name is Bard so I decided to choose this one" [8] Neither the character of Lily nor the details of murders resemble any Shakespeare's heroine or plot though attract the naïve readers' attention (like me I suppose).

The name of Shakespeare is used as a symbol in the novel *Play On* by Samantha Young, too. Shakespeare's books hidden under the bed symbolize hidden desires and suppressed ambitions of a girl who dropped her studies in order to look after her paralyzed father: "Like the stuff hidden in my room. I crouched down and pulled out the old shoebox I'd hidden under my bed and gently lifted it onto my bedspread. I savored opening it, like it was a treasure chest. Calm moved through me at the sight of my stash. I had a bunch of secondhand plays and poetry books in there, books I'd bought online and hidden so my mom wouldn't see what

I'd "wasted" my money on. I didn't think they were a waste. Far from it" [9, p. 3]. The author characterizes her heroine and discovers her real feelings through her attitude to Shakespeare's plays: "I had a thing for Shakespeare. He made even the most ordinary feelings, un-extraordinary thoughts, sound so grandiose. Better yet, he spoke of the most complex, dark emotions in a way that was beautiful and absorbing <...> When I was a kid, I'd been part of an amateur theater group, but had to stop when Dad couldn't take care of himself anymore. That was the extent of my experience on the stage. I'd loved it, though. I loved disappearing into someone else's life, another world, telling stories that held the audience enthralled. And the way they'd clap at the end. Just clap and clap. It was like a giant hug in place of all the hugs my mom had forgotten to give me" [9, p. 4]. The girl leaves her family and homeland for a stranger. She marries him and moves to Ireland. But he is not her destiny, just an instrument to escape. Her Irish life is a long road to her own self where she has to release her guilt, find faith in her strength and make other people believe in her. Performing in front of the children in a hospice symbolizes her guilt and atonement. Because of the past haunting her, she is stuck in her widower's role, a low-paid job and the feeling of inferiority which prevents her from developing healthy relations with her boyfriend. The climax of the story is Nora's apologizing to her mom and getting her pardon. In a year we find Nora studying at Dublin University and having joined an amateur theatre company where she is a Viola's understudy dreaming of acting which suggests her awakening. Acting Viola in a live production symbolizes her new life. The book is full of citations from Shakespeare, which creates a romantic atmosphere: "Conceal me what I am –", "Yes; and shall do, till the pangs of death shake him" etc. The man Nora is in love with appears to be a composer and creates music to their production. Thus Shakespeare turns out to be the plot moving force (being the reason for their reunion), the background of a romantic story and a symbol.

One of the most outstanding books involving Shakespeare is *William Shakespeare's The Phantom of Menace* in the series of *William Shakespeare's Star Wars* by Ian Doescher. Whatever one may expect from a book with such a title it appears to be a fine stylization of Shakespearean individual style with iambic pentameter, dramatic characters and renaissance pathos, the plot following the famous Lucas's film version. This weird attempt to present the world-known sci-fi in the form of an Elizabethan drama brought mind-blowing success to its author because it is based on an unexpected assumption that Shakespeare and Star Wars are absolutely identical from dramatic point of view and thus can be expressed through each other. "Now the curtain rises once again on that star-crossed galaxy far away, this time revealing the tragedy, hubris, and doomed romance that will lead to the fall of the Republic and the rise of an Empire. The saga starts here with this reimagining of Episode I, a prequel tale in which a disguised queen, a young hero, and two fearless knights clash with a hidden, vengeful enemy" [10]. One would find here sword fights, soliloquies, and doomed romance... and enjoy the style:

“O, wherefore art thou but so little pleased?
Because thou read not Phantom of Menace,
Alack! But this be but the fourth of four
So far released in this most grand old lot.

Behold! Mister Binks, he is no one's fool.
'Ere thou too harshly judge his wretched soul,
In this iambic pentameter play,
Binks plays his cards with perfect aptitude.

O, wert thou not but wasting thy short time,
Thou wouldst mayhap hath read yet Anakin's
A-rising out from podraced slavery
To clench his place in the wise Jedi ranks.

And noble Qui Gon, fie! That thou shouldst die
So early, saga-wise. And Gungans fight,
Dear Padme rules, while Palpatine doth plot,
And Maul, well, thou art still a weakling true.

Dost thou sit? Wherefore read thou not the book?
O, but a holy crap! I tire early.
Iambic pentameter: thou art hard” [11, p.14].

What is the use of this stylization? It does not add to the sense of Doescher’s poem but to its dramatic effect, and moreover “The main goal is to improve the Star War series” [10].

A most funny attempt to attach one’s writing to the eternal name of Shakespeare is found in the young adult romance *One Week Girlfriend* by Monica Murphy. It has an epigraph «When I saw you I fell in love and you smiled back because you knew» signed Shakespeare [12, p. 3]. But any reader acquainted with Elizabethan writing feels that this authorship is highly disputable. It is even difficult to guess which Shakespeare’s character could pronounce such a phrase. The real story runs as follows: in 1893 the Italian-language opera “Falstaff” with the music by the influential romantic composer Giuseppe Verdi was first performed. The work was a lyrical comedy in three acts with a libretto by Arrigo Boito that was based on “The Merry Wives of Windsor” by William Shakespeare plus some material from “King Henry IV”. In Act 2, Part 2 of the opera the character Fenton says the following to the character Nannetta:

“Come ti vidi
M’innamorai,
E tu sorridi
Perchè lo sai.”

These Italian words can be translated into English in several different ways. This version is popular today: “When I saw you I fell in love, and you smiled because you knew”. In 1894 an edition of “Falstaff” with the Italian text together

with an English adaptation by Frederic Lyster was published in New York. The line spoken by Fenton in English differed somewhat from the modern instance: “I see that you love me. Ah! you smile because I see it!” In 1977 an English translation of “Falstaff” by William Weaver included the following lines spoken by the character Fenton to the character Anne (originally Nannetta):

“When I saw you
I fell in love,
And you smile
Because you know it” [13].

The confusion of attributing the statement to William Shakespeare instead of Arrigo Boito is understandable because the opera “Falstaff” was derived from Shakespeare’s plays. From that time a few authors have quoted the line as Shakespearian, e. g. Jeane Westin in the romance *Lady Katherine’s Wild Ride* (2006). In 2007 a company called DreamAid produced pillowcases with covers that listed an assortment of sayings, this one included. In 2008 a compilation titled “101 Ways to Say Thank You: Notes of Gratitude for All Occasions” ascribed the quotation to William Shakespeare’s classic tragedy *Romeo and Juliet*.

This example is a brilliant illustration of intertextuality being used for its own sake. It does not matter what is said until we attribute the words to Shakespeare. It can also be called the lowest degree of intertextuality, a point where it dissolves into a simple brand.

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