University of Southern Queensland, Australia

Laurie Johnson and Dallas J Baker

Shakespeare 400

> On Shakespeare
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> Who invented our lexicon; who put flesh on all the skeleton stories; who lived and died, dressing and cross-dressing, loving dark ladies and men. Who knew how to speak (of) love. We dream our way in and out of him, making up facts, burning the notes. He's one man or six; he's a Marlowe or Essex; he's an anyone but him. Every to be or not to be drives the bridge spike in another millimetre. By the end of the 2020 season, it will be buried to the throat (Jen Webb)

It is a rare writer indeed who is not indebted in some way to William Shakespeare. Teachers of writing are equally indebted, with Shakespeare's poetry and plays being used to teach students of writing everything from poetic structure and narrative arc to dramatic tension and character development. On this, the occasion of the 400th anniversary of the bard's death, this special issue of *TEXT* explores the nexus between two intimately linked yet distinct disciplines: Shakespeare Studies and Creative Writing. The context in which this special issue is released is one in which a global celebration takes place to honour the bard's legacy and in which new directions in the study of Shakespeare are emerging.

'Shakespeare 400' is to the generation that celebrates it what 'The Stratford-upon-Avon Tercentenary Festival of the Birth of Shakespeare' was to the generation of 1864. The differences in naming conventions might seem to speak volumes about what separates the Victorian era from our own, although ultimately the difference is perhaps marked more by modern marketing techniques and cultural meme generation than anything deeper. In 2014, a number of events around the world ran under the banner of 'Shakespeare 450', which seems in hindsight like it was a market research exercise in testing for the viability of promoting the quatercentenary of Shakespeare's death with the label 'Shakespeare 400.' Yet we do not wish to understate the significance of the Shakespeare 400 celebrations: if it seems like the Bard of Avon has been too much in the sun this year, we suggest that the actors, directors, scholars, students, and writers for whom the name of Shakespeare houses a multitude of vocational pathways will have felt these celebrations to be long overdue. More than a once in a lifetime opportunity to celebrate a Shakespeare centenary, the Shakespeare 400 brand also represents first time that one of these centenaries has been able to be celebrated on such a scale as we have witnessed this year.

A brief history of the centenaries of Shakespeare's birth and death will bear this point out. Shakespeare was born in 1564 – we do not know the exact date of his birth, but we know he was baptised on 26 April, so his birthday is conventionally celebrated halfway through the preceding week; thus, 23 April – and died in 1616. As it happens, he died on 23 April, so this date is usually earmarked for commemoration of both his birth and death. In 1664, England was still recovering from the civil wars and the Interregnum period, during which the theatres had been closed. Shakespeare's plays were among the first staged when the theatres opened again, but they were radically adapted for a new generation of audiences by entrepreneurs like William Davenant. By the time of the first centenary of his death, in 1716, Shakespeare had been reinvented by the biographer Nicholas Rowe, whose *Some Account of the Life of Mr William Shakespear* (1709) painted a picture of a writer who had escaped trouble in Stratford to become one of Queen Elizabeth's favourite poets – the fact that his plays needed to be put on the stage was an inconvenience that Rowe, and Shakespeare before him, had to endure. In the eighteenth century, Shakespeare's reputation began to grow as antiquarians sought to add more flesh to the biography, and the great actor David Garrick sought to restore the words of Shakespeare to the plays that bore his name. In 1764, Garrick also championed the idea of a bicentennial celebration in Stratford, but the event took five years to come to fruition, so the festival was held in 1769. For the bicentenary of Shakespeare's death, Stratford was not in a position to repeat the festival, so London's Covent Garden Theatre was used to host a revival of the 1769 celebrations.

By 1816, then, Shakespeare's standing as the national poet of England was accepted, thanks in no small part to the influential Samuel Taylor Coleridge, whose 1811 lectures gave more credence to the idea that Shakespeare's work was best appreciated when read, and not on the stage, yet historians continued to spoil the rise of 'the Bard' by insisting that he spent most of his career in London as an actor. Yet in the wake of the Napoleonic wars, England's desire for national cultural symbols was dampened by the economic strain placed on them by years of conflict (Poole 2015: 57-58). By 1864, the nation was better placed to celebrate the tercentenary of the birth of their national poet, yet there was a distinct lack of organisation, leading to many 'calamities and cock-ups' (Dickson 2015: 13). The year also marks signs of interest in similar celebrations in the United States, but they faced their own internal conflict, with the American Civil War casting a pall over any efforts by the literati to commemorate Shakespeare's life and works. Douglas M. Lanier has shown that America managed to host a number of events to mark the occasion, so there was certainly an intention to generate interest in the milestone, but interest was mixed and some critics noted the public's 'want of zeal' for celebration (2015: 140). By 1916, any interest in the tercentenary of Shakespeare's death, in England or internationally, was overshadowed by a much wider pall of conflict.

In 1964, the United Kingdom hailed 'The Year of Shakespeare' with festivals and major productions in London and Stratford, but there were many festivals and events held throughout Asia, America, Europe, and Australia (Jansohn and Mehl 2015). Yet the 1964 celebrations lacked the global focus of the 2016 quatercentenary. Since 1964, new national associations for Shakespeare Studies formed in America (the Shakespeare Association of America was founded in 1972), Australia and New Zealand (1990), and

elsewhere. Britain came late to the party, in fact, with its own national association formed in 2002, well after the reconstructed Shakespeare's Globe was opened in 1997. Most importantly, the International Shakespeare Association hosted the inaugural World Shakespeare Congress in 1976, and at the 2011 event in Prague agreed to host the 2016 Congress in Stratford and London, giving a long lead time to the organisation of the quatercentenary event as well as a focal event for all other Shakespeare 400 events globally. In 2016, then, for the first time, Shakespeare's works were celebrated globally through a rolling calendar of conferences, festivals, and such like on a major centennial milestone.

The contributors to this special issue have chosen to celebrate or engage with Shakespeare's legacy in both creative and critical ways. Nike Sulway's contribution is a creative excavation of the temporal and textual gaps in Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale.* Her piece playfully interrogates the interstices between Shakespeare's play and Robert Greene's *Pandosto: The Triumph of Time* (1595). The piece subverts and expands on the relationships between the women in the play, particularly between Hermione and Paulina, responding to Theodora Jankowski's question: 'Where was Hermione kept so secretly for sixteen years [was she] living at Paulina's?' (2001: 300). Sulway's piece draws on and contributes to a significant body of work focussed on "queering" Shakespeare.

Kirk Dodd's paper engages with the works of Shakespeare as part of a writing pedagogy. His paper explores rhetorical aspects of Shakespeare's plays, specifically *inventio*, and applies these *inventio* methods in the creation of a blank verse drama entitled *Bennelong*. Dodd's paper is an insightful contribution to the tradition of using Shakespeare as a pedagogical tool, especially in the teaching of composition. Through collage, remixology and editing, Nahrung & Kruse generate relationships between temporal events by articulating a connection between the past and the present, and open this relationship to exploration via interaction. Their piece is non-linear in structure, forcing the reader to choose how to read the work, whimsically declaring 'if you pluck it at any point, the entire web will vibrate'.

Laurie Johnson argues in his paper, 'Borrowed Robes and Garbled Transmissions: Echoes of Shakespeare's Dwarfish Thief', that when Shakespeare's plays are creatively reinterpreted or rewritten, 'Shakespeare' invariably remains locked in as the fixed point of reference: rewritings *of* Shakespeare; reinterpretations *of* Shakespeare, and so on. Since 1753, Shakespeare source studies have been mapping the source materials on which the bard's plays were based, which should have enabled scholars to loosen this fixed point of reference and to begin to picture the much longer history of reinterpretations in which the plays participate. Nigel Krauth's creative contribution emerged from the intense struggle he had with understanding William Shakespeare when he was a young man and developing academic. His piece, *Reading the sentence fully,* is a concise memoir of his early experiences with Shakespeare's work.

Pablo Muslera's piece enters into creative dialogue with Macbeth in order to create a contemporary novel that explores the contemporary relevance of the problems posed within the infamous play. Muslera's creative dialogue is informed by Bakhtin's heteroglossia and focuses on questions of identity through the lens of the Scottish play's

background voices. Kyle Stooshnov's contribution is a fictional account of a play staged at the original Globe based on present-day scholars' detailed reconstruction of the famous playhouse. The piece casts many of the company's players, including Shakespeare himself, in roles for *Julius Caesar*. The piece occupies the nexus between Digital Humanities and Shakespeare Studies in the form of a creative writing experiment with a science fiction spin.

Donna Lee Brien explores the significant body of Shakespearean-themed popular food writing in the context of the so-called 'Shakespeare industry'. Brien's article proposes that such an enquiry, when focused through the lens of creative writing studies and food studies can provide information and analysis of value to both areas of scholarship.

Framed within a broader consideration of the feminist project to revive and reclaim *Hamlet's* Ophelia in the 1990s and beyond, Jess Carniel's article considers how treatment of Ophelia's death has been the significant narrative turning point for adaptations and appropriations. Carniel outlines how this focus on her death has either facilitated or compromised her subjectivity and agency.

In summary, this special issue, 'Shakespeare 400', gives writers and scholars the opportunity to 'write back' to Shakespeare, to consider how that writing back might be undertaken, to explore as yet unplumbed aspects of Shakespeare's work and legacy and to discuss the culture, industry and pedagogy surrounding his works.

Works cited

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Laurie Johnson is Associate Professor (English and Cultural Studies) at the University of Southern Queensland and President elect of the Australian and New Zealand Shakespeare Association. His publications include The Tain of Hamlet *(Cambridge Scholars, 2013),* The Wolf Man's Burden *(Cornell, 2001),* Embodied Cognition and Shakespeare's Theatre: The Early Modern Body-Mind *(co-edited with John Sutton and Evelyn Tribble, Routledge, 2014), and* Rapt in Secret Studies: Emerging Shakespeares *(co-edited with Darryl Chalk, Cambridge Scholars, 2010).*

Dr Dallas J Baker is an academic in the School of Arts and Communication at the University of Southern Queensland. His study and research intersect with a number of

disciplines: creative writing, publishing, media and cultural studies. Dallas is also a writer with creative work published in a number of journals and anthologies. His current research interests are memoir and memory, scriptwriting, publishing and 'self-making' in cultural practices such as creative writing, reading and popular music consumption.