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"There is a community of mind in it": Quoting Shakespeare in the Eighteenth Century

John Mullan

- 1 The post-Covid arrival of online exams has set many literary academics rethinking the significance of literary quotation. For it has meant the end of quotation as a sign of a student's expertise. Of course, the apt and telling use of quotation in critical writing is still some kind of skill, but no student in recent years has any longer had to have any quotations by heart. What was once essential to a literary education has become (at least for now) unnecessary. Some teachers of literature will feel a loss. For there is no more direct or insistent way than quotation in which literature of the past makes itself present – alive – again. I would like to suggest that the very invention of English Literature in the eighteenth century manifested itself in a new habit of literary quotation – especially the quotation of Shakespeare.

- 2 By the early nineteenth century, Shakespeare's presence in the ordinary language of educated men and women could be taken for granted. In Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park*, written between 1811 and 1813, the heroine, Fanny, listens to Edmund Bertram discussing Shakespeare with the rakish but cultivated Henry Crawford, who has been reading aloud, rather well ("his reading was capital"), from Shakespeare's *Henry VIII*:

"No doubt one is familiar with Shakespeare in a degree," said Edmund, "from one's earliest years. His celebrated passages are quoted by everybody; they are in half the books we open, and we all talk Shakespeare, use his similes, and describe with his descriptions; but this is totally distinct from giving his sense as you gave it. To know him in bits and scraps is common enough; to know him pretty thoroughly is, perhaps, not uncommon; but to read him well aloud is no everyday talent." (Austen III.iii, 279)

We can presume that Fanny too, who relishes hearing Shakespeare read aloud, and who herself reads Shakespeare to her indolent aunt, would have plenty of Shakespeare quotes in her head.

- 3 A decade later, Byron, writing Canto VI of *Don Juan*, could flippantly presume that all his imagined reader (and perhaps most of his actual readers) would have their memories well-stocked with Shakespeare quotations.

I

"There is a tide in the affairs of men
Which,—taken at the flood,"—you know the rest,
And most of us have found it now and then;
At least we think so, though but few have guess'd
The moment, till too late to come again.
But no doubt every thing is for the best—
Of which the surest sign is in the end:
When things are at the worst they sometimes mend.

II

There is a tide in the affairs of women
Which, taken at the flood, leads—God knows where (Byron 299)

"You know the rest," says Byron, in the first-person speaking voice that he perfected in *Don Juan*. It is colloquial, but it is not casual. He means that "the rest" ("leads on to fortune") would be known, because this part of this speech by Brutus from *Julius Caesar* had become a famous quote, with a life of its own. Indeed, it seems from Byron's own use of it that these two lines were so well used that they had escaped their original context. Brutus is asserting that now is the propitious moment, at Philippi, to engage in battle with Octavius's forces. He is wrong.

- 4 However, quoting Shakespeare, indeed quoting great literature in the vernacular at all, is not such a time-honoured habit. In 1781, when Samuel Johnson, according to Boswell in his *Life of Johnson*, commended the habit of quoting from the work of great writers, he had in mind only the writers of antiquity, in the classical languages: Greek and Latin.

The subject of quotation being introduced, Mr. Wilkes censured it as pedantry.

JOHNSON. "No, Sir, it is a good thing; there is a community of mind in it. Classical quotation is the *parole* of literary men all over the world." (*Life of Johnson* 1143)

Literary quotation is the universal currency of educated men (and probably not women), whatever their nationality. It is instructive to see what Wilkes is supposed to have said in reply:

WILKES. "Upon the continent they all quote the vulgate Bible. Shakespeare is chiefly quoted here; and we quote also Pope, Prior, Butler, Waller, and sometimes Cowley."

By "here", of course, Wilkes means in Britain. It sounds as if quoting English Language authors is a rather new cultural habit, and as if only select authors (all, except Shakespeare, poets) are chosen. It is apparently worth remarking upon the fact that Shakespeare is what is now "chiefly" quoted by the British. Is it possible that, in the 1780s, this is a relatively new phenomenon?

- 5 If we go back to the early eighteenth century, we can certainly find prominent examples of the culture of classical quotation to which Johnson was appealing. Those exemplars of polite literature, the essays of the *Tatler* and the *Spectator*, made quotation from a Latin author an expected habit. From Number 41 of the *Tatler* (July 14, 1709) onwards, most numbers of this periodical had an untranslated Latin quotation at its head. At first quotations were rarely attributed, but as time went on, authors' names were usually given. Some quotations were used more than once. A particular quotation from Juvenal's First Satire – *Quicquid agunt Homines nostri Farrago Libelli* ("All the doings of mankind shall form the motley subject of my page") – was used many times, as if it were the motto for the paper. The *Spectator* confirmed the habit, always opening with a

fragment of Horace or Juvenal, Ovid or Virgil. On the first page, the Latin quotation sat just below the day's date: timeless eloquence alongside the currency of the moment. This use of literary quotation was continued by essayists who followed, notably Samuel Johnson himself in the essays of the *Rambler* and the *Idler*.

- 6 The early decades of the eighteenth century saw a procession of new editions of Shakespeare's plays, confirming his dramatic works as the very heart of a vernacular literary canon: English Literature. Yet Shakespeare quotation is rather rare in the work of major authors of the first four decades of the eighteenth century. Alexander Pope may have edited Shakespeare, but he hardly ever quotes him in his own poetry. His is a poetry of allusion and parody (of English poets like Milton and Dryden, as well as of Horace or Virgil), but not of vernacular quotation. If we suspect that such quotation might have been absent because it was thought vulgar, we can trawl through the novels of Daniel Defoe (certainly thought too low to be literature by contemporaries), and find plenty of Biblical quotation, a very small amount of English verse, but no Shakespeare.
- 7 Something changed in the mid-eighteenth century. The publication of Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* in 1740 heralded the triumph of the Novel as a morally serious literary form, as well as a commercial product. It also, tentatively, featured some Shakespeare quotation. Richardson's heroine is a fifteen-year-old servant girl who has developed her literacy through the indulgence of her now dead mistress. She instinctually reaches for *Hamlet* when her son, now her master, Mr. B, assaults her:

he offered to take me on his knee, with some Force. O how I was terrify'd! I said, like as I had read in a Book a Night or two before, Angels, and Saints, and all the Host of Heaven, defend me! And may I never survive one Moment, that fatal one in which I shall forfeit my Innocence! Pretty Fool! said he, how will you forfeit your Innocence, if you are oblig'd to yield to a Force you cannot withstand? (*Pamela* Letter XV, 31)

Pamela's grammatically incorrect "like as I read in a Book" indicates her unliterariness, yet somehow she has the natural good taste to be reading *Hamlet* after a hard day of domestic labour. Of course, she does not get the quotation quite right:

HORATIO. Look, my lord, it comes.

HAMLET. Angels and ministers of grace, defend us!

The line that Pamela misquotes is Hamlet's exclamation on first seeing the ghost of his father. Like a good Christian, he appeals to Heavenly powers to protect him from what might be a diabolical apparition. Pamela's near-quotation is therefore entirely appropriate (she more than once refers to Mr B. as a "devil", turning her ordeal into a spiritual test). It is telling that Richardson – who himself disapproved of theatre-going – should choose Hamlet as proper reading for his pious, self-improving heroine. She writes idiomatically and not quite correctly, but with some bracing awareness that Shakespeare provides the words for all occasions.

- 8 Hamlet's eloquent terror at the appearance of his father's ghost had already been celebrated by Addison in the *Spectator*, in an essay which discusses "the several Artifices which are put in Practice by the poets to fill the Minds of an Audience with Terror":

The Appearance of the Ghost in *Hamlet* is a Master-piece in its kind, and wrought up with all the Circumstances that can create either Attention or Horrour. The Mind of the Reader is wonderfully prepared for his Reception by the Discourses that precede it: His dumb Behaviour at his first Entrance, strikes the Imagination very strongly; but every Time he enters, he is still more terrifying. Who can read the Speech with which young Hamlet accosts him, without trembling?

HOR. Look, my Lord, it comes.

HAM. Angels and Ministers of Grace defend us... (*Spectator* No. 44, 20 April, 1711, 186)

Hamlet's exclamation would return in Richardson's third and last novel, *Sir Charles Grandison*, where Dr Bartlett writes to Harriet Byron from Italy, copying out Grandison's account of his encounter with the distracted Clementina, a high-born young Italian lady:

Good God! said she.—Then in English breaking out into that line of Hamlet, which she had taken great notice of, when we read that play together—

Angels, and ministers of grace, defend us!

She left her mother, and stept gently towards me, looking earnestly with her face held out, as if she were doubtful whether it were I, or not. (*Sir Charles Grandison* Vol. III, Letter VIII, 698)

Clementina quotes "that line of *Hamlet*, which she had taken great notice of, when we read that play together". Implicitly, Grandison has been reading Hamlet aloud with Clementina in order not only to improve her English, but also to inculcate her into Englishness. Just two years after the 1753 publication of the first four volumes of *Sir Charles Grandison*, the line appears once more in Johnson's *Dictionary*, under GOBLIN. Johnson quotes not just Hamlet's instinctive exclamation, but also the following two lines:

Angels and ministers of grace, defend us!

Be thou a spirit of health, or *goblin* damn'd,

Bring with thee airs from heav'n, or blasts from hell?

Johnson gives the attribution as simply "*Shak.*" Hamlet's exclamation was now becoming almost idiomatic. As we will see, the first instalment of Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* (1759) will also feature the line, quoted without attribution or explanation.

- 9 After *Pamela*, quotation became more important to Richardson. For all the success of his first novel, there had been a descant of criticism and even mockery of the novel's lowness or vulgarity. When he composed *Clarissa*, he was highly conscious of the need to lard his characters' letters with appropriate literary fragments, thereby elevating their prose and dignifying his own literary undertaking. In order to manage this, he reached for the standby volume of the age: Edward Bysshe's *The Art of English Poetry*, which presented "A Collection of the most Natural, Agreeable, and Noble *Thoughts*, viz Allusions, Similes, Descriptions, and Characters, of Persons and Things; that are to be found in the best *English Poets*". The passages (1,452 quotations from 48 different authors) are given under topics, which are arranged in alphabetical order (Culler 858-862). If you want some good poetic quotes (many from verse drama) about anger, beauty, jealousy or love, there they are. Dryden is quoted far more often than any other writer. Bysshe explained in his 1702 Preface that he had not quoted "the Good Shakespeare" as often as he deserved because his diction sounded antiquated to modern ears (Bysshe, Preface). First published in 1702, it went through seven further editions by 1737. Richardson used the fourth edition of 1710.
- 10 Richardson particularly wanted his well-born and inventive villain, Robert Lovelace, to quote with apparent ease from English poets. Lovelace's very first letter in *Clarissa* includes verse quotations from Sir Robert Howard, Thomas Otway, Dryden (twice), Cowley – and Shakespeare (*Clarissa* 142-148). All the quotations that he here uses are to be found in Bysshe. Lovelace takes a line from *Othello* to tell his friend John Belford how he adores Clarissa: "Perdition catch my soul, but I do love her." There it is in Bysshe, filed under "Protestations of Love". Clarissa too is supposed to have a store of

Shakespeare quotations in her head. After she has been raped, she writes a letter in which verse fragments from English authors are deliriously combined (*Clarissa* 893). They include two appropriate passages from *Hamlet*. Lovelace, she writes, has done an act that "takes off the rose / From the fair forehead of an innocent love / And sets a blister there". Scrawled in the margin at an angle to this she adds lines spoken by the Ghost to Hamlet: "I could a tale unfold whose lightest word / Would harrow up thy soul". Both quotations are to be found in Bysshe: the first under "Jealousy", the second under "Astonishment".

- 11 Lovelace's high estimate of Shakespeare leads him to compliment Clarissa's supposedly matching knowledge of the greatest English writer. Wishing to shrug off "the earnestness she expresses for death", he knows that her "innate piety" will not allow her to contemplate suicide, and persuades himself that she in fact nurses some unadmitted fear of death:

The lady is well read in Shakespeare, our English pride and glory; and must sometimes reason with herself in his words, so greatly expressed, that the subject, affecting as it is, cannot produce anything more so.
Ay, but to die, and go we know not where;
To lie in cold obstruction, and to rot [...] (*Clarissa* 1148)

He goes on to quote the whole of Claudio's speech from *Measure for Measure*, an overwhelming expression of the character's unwillingness to resign himself to the death sentence that his virtuous sister, Isabella, has told him that he must accept. The whole speech is, of course, given under *death* in Bysshe.

- 12 Richardson is so reliant on Bysshe that he unsuspectingly follows his errors. After a particularly impassioned exchange with Clarissa, Lovelace reflects on his decision to leave "the lady to cool" (*Clarissa* 800). "Shakespeare advises well," he tells Belford, as he quotes lines beginning "Oppose not rage, while rage is in its force; / But give it way awhile, and let it waste". The lines are, in fact, nowhere in Shakespeare, but are duly ascribed to him in Bysshe, under *rage*. They come not from Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida*, as Bysshe would have it, but from Dryden's thoroughly rewritten 1679 version of the play. There is no evidence that any contemporary spotted Richardson's reliance on this anthology of thematically organized quotations. However, use of Bysshe's *Art of English Poetry* was so common elsewhere by the mid-eighteenth century that it did come to be mocked. In his introductory chapter to Book XIV of *Tom Jones*, entitled "An essay to prove that an author will write the better for having some knowledge of the subject on which he writes", Henry Fielding sardonically observes how men in certain occupations may prosper without the labour of erudition:

very little reading is, I conceive, necessary to the poet, less to the critic, and the least of all to the politician. For the first, perhaps, Bysshe's *Art of Poetry*, and a few of our modern poets, may suffice; for the second, a moderate heap of plays; and, for the last, an indifferent collection of political journals. (Fielding 648)

The Art of Poetry also contained a rhyming dictionary, which Fielding perhaps also has in mind. Later in the century, in Fanny Burney's (unstaged) play, *The Witlings* (1779), Bysshe it is a prop for the hopeless poet, Dabler, exactly because his inability to find a rhyme without it.

- 13 *Tom Jones* is itself richly furnished with quotations, but mostly these are in Latin. They are invariably translated into English, but only occasionally attributed. Referring mockingly to the pioneer of the pantomime in England, John Rich, manager of the Covent Garden Theatre, he says,

A great genius among us will illustrate this matter fully. I cannot, indeed, range him under any general head of common artists, as he hath a title to be placed among those

Inventas qui vitam excoluere per artes.

Who by invented arts have life improved.

I mean here the inventor of that most exquisite entertainment, called the English Pantomime. (Fielding 183)

The quotation is from the *Aeneid* (VI.663), but it is not necessary to say so. Fielding's narrator speaks in what Johnson called "the *parole* of literary men". In the opening chapter of Book XII of *Tom Jones*, "Showing what is to be deemed plagiarism in a modern author, and what is to be considered as lawful prize", Fielding ironically justifies his itch for classical quotation. "The antients may be considered as a rich common, where every person who hath the smallest tenement in Parnassus hath a free right to fatten his muse" (Fielding XII.I). Quotation, he says, is a sign of the inferiority of the modern author. Moderns such as himself are like the propertyless mob, who, given the chance, "plunder and pillage their rich neighbours without any reluctance".

- 14 Quoting Shakespeare is different. When Fielding quotes Shakespeare, he tells the reader that he is doing so, though he sometimes gives the reader enough credit to know the play and the context. At the opening of Book VII, "A comparison of the world and the stage", he reflects on how many writers "have considered human life as a great drama", and discusses the reasons for this:

The brevity of life hath likewise given occasion to this comparison. So the immortal Shakespear—

—Life's a poor player,

That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,

And then is heard no more.

For which hackneyed quotation I will make the reader amends by a very noble one, which few, I believe, have read. (Fielding 284)

Fielding goes on to quote at length from Samuel Boyse's little known 1740 poem "Deity". He is, of course, joking about the lines by Boyse being more "noble" than those from *Macbeth*, but the joke would not work if "hackneyed" did not have a point. *Macbeth*'s final soliloquy, beginning "Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow", is, in 1749, already famous and, in some part or another, often repeated.

- 15 There were several places to find Shakespeare quotations conveniently selected and organized. Bysshe's handbook formed the basis of other collections, such as the *Thesaurus dramaticus* (1724). Charles Gildon created a section of "Shakespeareana" in his *Complete Art of Poetry* (1718) by adding 154 Shakespeare quotations to a selection of three-fifths of *The Art of English Poetry*. Alexander Pope compiled an index to his edition of Shakespeare, which, as Brean Hammond says, "provides the reader with a Shakespeare quotation for every occasion". Just before Johnson's *Dictionary*, came a less celebrated work that would strongly influence the habit of quoting Shakespeare: William Dodd's *Beauties of Shakespear* (1752). This was the first such author-specific collection of "beauties". Dodd's collection takes the reader through most of Shakespeare's comedies and some of his tragedies (histories were omitted), play by play, quoting the highlights under thematic headings, with footnotes pointing to analogous passages in other Shakespeare plays and in works by poets admired by Dodd. Further footnotes comment appreciatively on the merits of what is quoted, sometimes with the support of contemporary critics. At places Dodd compares Shakespeare to Homer and Virgil (he is emphatically an equal of the greatest of the ancients), but also

represents him as the originator of poetic effects that later poets would imitate. The effect of the collection is not just to provide the "best" passages of Shakespeare for the genteel reader, but also to make the dramatist seem an active influence on other admirable English writers, especially poets.

- 16 The work that definitively established the importance of Shakespeare quotations was Johnson's *Dictionary*, first published in 1755. Johnson, "whose memory was wonderfully retentive" (says Boswell), was in the habit of quoting Shakespeare from memory (*Life of Johnson* 30). Travelling from Elgin to Forres, Johnson behaved as though he and Boswell were truly revisiting the location ("the very heath") of the famous scene in *Macbeth*, when Macbeth and Banquo encounter the witches:

In the afternoon, we drove over the very heath where Macbeth met the witches, according to tradition. Dr. Johnson again solemnly repeated —
"How far is't called to Fores? What are these,
So wither'd, and so wild in their attire?
That look not like the inhabitants o' the earth,
And yet are on't?"
He repeated a good deal more of *Macbeth*. His recitation was grand and affecting, and, as Sir Joshua Reynolds has observed to me, had no more tone than it should have: it was the better for it. (Boswell, *Journal* 232)

Johnson knew, it seems, how to speak in character, and had large passages of Shakespeare ready to recite. Many would appear in his *Dictionary*. Over 500 different writers are quoted in the *Dictionary*, which gathers some 114,000 different quotations. Johnson used about 19,000 quotations from Shakespeare: about 17 per cent of the total (Read 37). (The next most frequently quoted authors are Dryden, Milton, Addison, Bacon and Pope – as well as the King James Bible.) The density of Shakespeare quotation is remarkable: every page – every column of every page – contains some Shakespeare. Johnson sometimes identifies the play from which the given quotation is taken, but more often does not. He never gives act or scene numbers, and never indicates the speaker of any quoted lines. It is sometimes as if the reader is expected to know who is speaking the lines and why. The effect is the more striking because Johnson rarely uses any dramatic texts except Shakespeare's.

- 17 The *Dictionary* teaches Shakespeare's verbal variety and the relish of his lines. This is sometimes clear in the extent as well as frequency of the quotations. When Johnson wishes to illustrate the word *afloat*, for instance, he gives seven lines spoken by Brutus in *Julius Caesar* (the very speech that Byron could cut short because "you know the rest"). "There is a tide in the affairs of men ...", pursues the metaphor to declare "On such a full sea are we now *afloat*". Johnson might have used only that last line, but he chooses to give most of the speech. The definition of *KING* as "Monarch; supreme governour", for example, is illustrated by five verse passages, the first four of which are from *Richard III*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *Richard III* again, and *Macbeth* (the final passage is from Pope's *Essay on Man*). Any one of these passages might have sufficed on its own. The invitation to the dictionary user seems to be to revel in the Shakespearean variations on a theme. Indeed, the richness of quotation suggests that it is worth the reader's time to browse words whose meanings he or she perfectly understands.
- 18 Such intensity of quotation is characteristic of the *Dictionary*. Less obvious are the ways in which certain passages from Shakespeare, lodged in Johnson's memory, become the elemental material of the language that he is anatomising. *Macbeth*, as Boswell's

recollection implies, much occupied him. Here is an extreme example, the lines of the First Murderer as he and his accomplice await Banquo and his son, in *Macbeth* III.iii:

The west yet glimmers with some streaks of day:
Now spurs the lated traveller apace
To gain the timely inn

It is one of those apparently superfluous passages in the play that work to establish the impending powers of night. These two-and-a-half lines evidently lodged in Johnson's mind, for they supply the *Dictionary* with no fewer than eight illustrations: for the words WEST, GLIMMER, STREAK, DAY, LATED, GAIN, TIMELY and INN. Back come the murderer's lines, again and again.

- 19 A little word chasing in the *Dictionary*, and one can catch at some of the speeches that clearly fascinated Johnson. Take Macbeth's soliloquy at the opening of the last scene of Act I of *Macbeth*:

If it were done when 'tis done, then 'twere well
It were done quickly. If the assassination
Could trammel up the consequence, and catch
With his surcease success; that but this blow
Might be the be-all and the end-all here,
But here, upon this bank and shoal of time,
We'd jump the life to come.

This speech supplies the *Dictionary* with quotations separately to illustrate eight particular words: ASSASSINATION, TRAMMEL, END, JUMP, EVEN-HANDED, FACULTIES, TRUMPET-TONGUED, and VAULTING. The same speech, in which Macbeth grapples with his own terror at the murder that he plans, is laid before the reader, as if it will always reward more attention.

- 20 Perhaps it is impossible to assess how the effect of recollection in the mind of this great reader of Shakespeare shaped the dictionary user's sense that Shakespeare's plays were essential to the English language. Johnson sometimes takes Shakespeare as a maker of language that others might imitate. Under the heading for PARTIALIZE, which he defines as "To make partial", he says, "A word perhaps peculiar to *Shakespeare*, and not unworthy of general use," offering the following quotation from the opening scene of *Richard II*, spoken by the King himself:

Such neighbour-nearness to our sacred blood
Should nothing privilege him, nor *partialize*
Th' unstooping firmness of my upright soul.

Johnson's judgements against some of the words he defines and illustrates – "A barbarous word", "A bad word", "Scarce English" – have become notorious. Yet, as shown by the quotations he uses, the "best authors" (especially Shakespeare) confute such judgments. Under NOWADAYS, he observes that the word "is perhaps barbarous", but turns to a memorable example of its use in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, where Bottom, speaking to Titania, observes (with more wisdom than he knows), "to say the truth, reason and love keep little company together nowadays (III.i). Under PREJUDICE, Johnson comments on the "impropriety" of using this word to mean "Mischief, detriment, hurt, injury", before giving two examples of such usage from Shakespeare's *Henry VIII*.

- 21 Johnson's *Dictionary* demonstrated the quotability of Shakespeare, above all other authors. One avid reader of the *Dictionary* was Laurence Sterne, whose *Tristram Shandy* confirmed the need to lace your prose with Shakespeare. Naming one of its main

characters after Yorick, the dead jester in *Hamlet*, it made famous as never before what remains one of the most famous short quotations from Shakespeare. In Chapter XII of the first volume of the novel, Tristram recalls Eugenius's recollection of Parson Yorick's last moments of life, and the "faint picture" of "those flashes of spirit, which (as *Shakespear* said of his ancestor) were wont to set the table in a roar" (Sterne 29). This quotes Hamlet's lines to Horatio about Yorick, the court jester, as he holds Yorick's skull and remembers "your flashes of merriment, that were wont to set the table on a roar" (*Hamlet* V.I.190-191). This leads Tristram to Parson Yorick's "epitaph, and elegy". There on the page, surrounded by a border, as if we were actually looking at the "plain marble slab" under which he is buried, is the famous quotation: "Alas, poor YORICK!" (Sterne 30). But this is no mere inscription. "Ten times in a day," we are told, passers-by on the footpath crossing the churchyard, will stop and look and say aloud (the quotation is now repeated on the page), "Alas, poor YORICK!" Presumably, as well as sighing for the vicar they might have known, they know that they are quoting Shakespeare – with a peculiar poignancy.

- 22 Sterne was so confident about the currency of Shakespeare quotations that Tristram does not need quotation marks, nor indeed any declaration that he is quoting, when he is quoting Shakespeare. In the opening chapter of Volume IV of the novel, which was first published in 1761, Tristram imagines a man quietly and feelingly telling a woman a story, and having to look into her eyes as he does so. This may be "dangerous", but the alternative are more so,

For to look up to the ceiling, in that case the two chins unavoidably meet—and to look down into each other's laps, the foreheads come into immediate contact, which at once puts an end to the conference—I mean to the sentimental part of it. —What is left, madam, is not worth stooping for. (Sterne 246)

This will trigger in the literary memory of the well-read reader (or perhaps the dedicated theatregoer) the relevant passage from *Twelfth Night*, where Malvolio disdainfully tosses Olivia's ring at the feet of Viola (disguised as Cesario):

MALVOLIO. Come, sir, you peevishly threw it to her, and her will is it should be so returned. [He throws down the ring.] If it be worth stooping for, there it lies in your eye; if not, be it his that finds it. *He exits.* (*Twelfth Night* II.ii)

Tristram is not just being knowing; the allusion means something. Sterne's narrator pretends that the non-sentimental (we might say, carnal) aspect of any intimacy is beneath our regard. Yet to do so in the foolishly lofty phrase of the foolishly lofty Malvolio is to make clear that he is not in earnest. The irony seems all the more mischievous when we register that Tristram has himself stooped, as it were, to pick up a nice phrase from the greatest of writers.

- 23 For Sterne, the currency of Shakespeare quotation is self-evident. Readers do not need to be told where Tristram is finding his resonant phrases. In *Tristram Shandy*, Shakespearean quotations are usually unmarked. Here are three passages from the last chapter of the second volume of the novel, in its very first instalment, where Walter Shandy, Uncle Toby and Dr. Slop are discussing the influence upon a child's character of the manner in which they are born. All three refer to the "singularity" of Walter Shandy's opinions:

In truth, there was not a stage in the life of man, from the very first act of his begetting,—down to the lean and slippered pantaloon in his second childishness, but he had some favourite notion to himself, springing out of it [...]

He would often lament that it was for want of considering this properly, and of applying it skilfully to civil matters, as well as to speculative truths, that so many things in this world were out of joint [...]

Whence is it, dear Sir, that we are corrupted?—Because we are needy;—our poverty, and not our wills, consent.—And wherefore, he would add, are we needy? —From the neglect, he would answer, of our pence and our halfpence:—Our bank notes, Sir, our guineas,—nay, our shillings take care of themselves. (Sterne 129-130)

Most would now recognize the fragment of Jacques's soliloquy on the Seven Ages of Man from *As You Like It* in the first of these, and Hamlet's declaration that "The time is out of joint" in the second. Fewer, probably, would catch in the third passage, Walter's lament at the importance of small errors, a line from Act V of *Romeo and Juliet*, where the Apothecary himself laments that he is compelled to accept Romeo's payment for "A dram of poison": "My poverty, but not my will, consents". The buried (and slightly adapted) quotation is there for the Shakespeare aficionado to recognize.

- 24 In love with Shakespeare (and the Shakespeare performances of Sterne's friend, David Garrick), finding a fellow spirit in Yorick, and therefore peculiarly drawn to *Hamlet*, jestingly preoccupied with death – it is not surprising that *Tristram Shandy* also uses that exclamation by Hamlet with which Pamela fumbles. In that same chapter of Sterne's novel that contains the three Shakespeare quotations above, Walter Shandy is contemplating, with the help of "all kinds of books", the forces supposedly acting upon a baby's skull during childbirth:

But how great was his apprehension, when he farther understood, that this force acting upon the very vertex of the head, not only injured the brain itself, or cerebrum,—but that it necessarily squeezed and propelled the cerebrum towards the cerebellum, which was the immediate seat of the understanding!—Angels and ministers of grace defend us! cried my father,—can any soul withstand this shock? — (Sterne 134)

The exclamation is at once appropriate for such a bookish character – and comically incongruous. Hamlet's exclamation returns in Volume III of *Tristram Shandy* (in the novel's second instalment), in "The Author's Preface", which Tristram belatedly provides. Tristram is justifying the proportions of "wit" and "judgment" (incompatible qualities in Locke's philosophy) in his book. He muses on "the arctic and antarctic circles", where, he imagines, "the passions of a man" become so "frigid" that his judgment is minimal and his wit non-existent. "Angels and ministers of grace defend us!" he exclaims, in mock horror (Sterne 176). How "dismal" it would be to attempt anything significant in a place "with so plentiful a lack of wit and judgment". The latter is, in part, another quote from *Hamlet*, where the protagonist tells Polonius that old men, like him, "have a plentiful lack of wit, together with most weak hams" (*Hamlet* II. 2).

- 25 With *Tristram Shandy*, we have an author who is intimate with Shakespeare – and who presumes that his reader is almost equally so. Quoting Shakespeare was now natural, the sign of a shared ownership of a national literature. Authors could presume, as Austen's Edmund Bertram presumes, that their readers knew their Shakespeare. By 1775, Sheridan in his play *The Rivals* could give Mrs Malaprop a comic hodge-podge of misquotation from *Hamlet* with the confidence that most of his audience would catch her errors. She is telling her niece Lydia of the merits of young Captain Absolute:

I protest, when I saw him, I thought of what Hamlet says in the play: "Hesperian curls! The front of Job himself! An eye, like March, to threaten at command! A station, like Harry Mercury, new—" Something about kissing on a hill. However, the similitude struck me directly. (Sheridan IV.ii.13-17)

She half-recalls and inventively bodes lines in which Hamlet presents his mother with a picture of his dead father:

See what a grace was seated on this brow,
Hyperion's curls, the front of Jove himself,
An eyelike Mars' to threaten and command,
A station like the herald Mercury
New-lighted on a heaven-kissing hill (*Hamlet* III.iv.56-60)

Mrs Malaprop's confusions are, characteristically, oddly creative, not least the substitution of Job for Jove. Perhaps she has been reading one of those anthologies of "beauties" rather than the plays themselves. Or perhaps she goes to the theatre a great deal and dimly recalls what she has heard but not understood. The hilarious jumble of her Shakespeare fragments mocks the genteel affectation of Shakespeare quotation, yet presumes an audience well enough versed in Shakespeare to understand the mockery. The laughter that Sheridan expected confirmed that quoting Shakespeare was what cultured men and women did, and what they expected others to do. We still do it.

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