

Marc Norman and Tom Stoppard 1999: *Shakespeare in Love* (the screenplay). London: Faber.

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Elizabethan England has always been popular in the Anglo-American movie industry. In 1998 two new films on the subject were released, namely Shekher Kapur's *Elizabeth* and John Madden's *Shakespeare in Love*. Both of them indulged in certain -otherwise predictable- chauvinistic prejudices. In *Elizabeth*, for instance, the highly positive features of the British are set against the extremely grotesque and exaggerated vices of the French and the Spanish. *Shakespeare in Love*, on the other hand, deals with the exploits and achievements - also with a fair amount of clichés- of Shakespeare and the Golden Age of English drama; Queen Elizabeth has a leading role in this second film too, as she appears as a *deus-ex-machina* who makes it possible for a woman to play a part on the stage. Judi Dench's Academy Award - one of the seven obtained by the film- as the best supporting actress, seems to be quite significant in that context.²

Shakespeare in Love -which was awarded the Oscar for the best original screenplay- was also published as a printed book. As most critics then pointed out, a previous script by novelist Marc Norman was later adapted by Tom Stoppard, who adjusted it to its present form (Duncan-Jones 18). Stoppard was already an experienced writer in the field of Shakespeare

¹ The author wishes to thank Rafael Portillo for his kind help and supervision; also, Janet Dawson for reading and correcting the final version.

² The film drew so much attention that it was also the subject of scholarly discussion. There was a round-table about *Shakespeare in Love* at the Benalmádena Conference on "Shakespeare on Screen" (September 1999).

adaptations, as he had used *Hamlet* for his well-known play *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* (1966), and in later years had produced *Dogg's Hamlet, Cahoot's Macbeth* (1979) in which Shakespeare appears as a character. As for Norman (also an experienced screenwriter), he stated that the entire idea for the script had originated in an informal talk with his own son about Shakespeare's source of inspiration when composing *Romeo and Juliet*.³ However, long before the Academy Award ceremony took place, there had already been a plagiarism row, as some people had noticed strong similarities with the plot of Caryl Brahms and S. J. Simon's novel *No Bed for Bacon* (first published in London, 1941); also, American writer Faye Kellerman had sued the Hollywood studios and the screenwriters, whom she had accused of having plagiarized her 1989 novel *The Quality of Mercy* (Gray 7).⁴

Indeed, the ironic and burlesque tone of *Shakespeare in Love*, already apparent in the film, is even more evident in the script, and that acknowledges Norman and Stoppard's debt to *No Bed for Bacon*. For not only did the screenwriters imitate the general humorous atmosphere of the novel, but they also lifted several other essential elements as well, such as the name of the female protagonist -Viola-, her taste for plays, her infatuation with young William Shakespeare, her male disguise, her connection with *Twelfth Night*, rehearsals and a performance of *Romeo and Juliet*, the rivalry between two theatre companies, the presence of several Elizabethan literary personages, the Bard's suffering from writer's block, and so on. Such specific detail as Shakespeare's hesitation when signing his own name (Norman and Stoppard 5) is also found in the novel (Brahms and Simon 13). A joke about Anne Hathaway's cottage occurs in both works (Norman and Stoppard 11; Brahms and Simon 109).

³ See webpage for the film in www.miramax.com/shakespeareinlov/shakes_picture_03.html.

⁴ However Faye Kellerman's novel has little in common with either the story or characters presented by Norman and Stoppard, as *The Quality of Mercy* focuses mostly on Shakespeare and Rebecca's impossible and tragic love as a result of her being Jewish.

On the other hand, if Shakespeare ever had an extramarital relationship as presented in the screenplay, the only "historical" evidence is a contemporary anecdote recorded by John Manningham; he reports in his *Diary* (13 March 1601) that the Bard had an affair with a lady who had previously agreed to meet Burbage, but found Shakespeare instead. According to Manningham this episode took place just as *Richard III* was being performed at the Globe (Schoenbaum 17). The core of this story is very likely the basis for an early 19th-century French play by Alexandre Duval entitled, coincidentally, *Shakespeare amoureux (Shakespeare in Love)*⁵, first performed in Paris (1804) and later on in Barcelona (in French, 1810); it then gave rise to Ventura de la Vega's free translation *Shakespeare enamorado*, first staged - quite successfully- in Madrid in 1828 (see Par 1: 74-78, and 88-89). This Spanish version became rather popular and was very often revived -and even printed- in Madrid throughout the 19th century.⁶ There is also evidence that the works of A. Duval were soon known in Britain, particularly his play *Charles Edward Stuart, the Pretender*, first performed in Paris in 1802, later translated into English and eventually staged in Exeter (1823). This suggests that Norman and/or Stoppard may have had access to the French source, either in the original version or in an English translation; at least they seem to have borrowed the title. On the other hand, taking into account the strong similarities with *No Bed for Bacon*, the innovative aspect of the screenplay may be brought into question.

There are, however, a fair number of positive aspects in *Shakespeare in Love* that should be pointed out as well. The script in fact pokes fun at some commonplace myths and legends concerning Shakespeare and his age, and does so in a comic manner. In this sense the screenplay's great merit lies in its re-enactment of late 16th-century London life and its precarious but imaginative theatre industry. Thus the rivalry between Marlowe and Shakespeare, Webster's taste for gory

⁵ Alexandre Duval is the pseudonym of Alexandre Vincent Pineu (1767-1842).

⁶ Both the French and the Spanish versions dramatize the love-affair between Shakespeare and a young actress who is rehearsing *Richard III*, while a nurse acts as a go-between.

scenes, the closing down of theatres at the outbreak of the plague, censorship methods, and several other aspects of the theatre profession are all rendered in a rather ironic tone in the script.

The authors exploit to the full well-known Shakespeare quotations, as entire passages from *Romeo and Juliet* and *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* are recited and/or performed, and at the end there is an overt allusion to *Twelfth Night*. At the same time, shorter quotes from *Hamlet*, *The Tempest*, and *The Sonnets* are present throughout the text. For instance, Young Will cites or paraphrases lines from *Hamlet* in his conversation with Henslowe ("Doubt that the stars are fire, doubt that the sun doth move...", 6), at his psychoanalysis-like session with Dr. Moth ("Words, words, words", 9), and in his love quarrel with Viola ("It needed no wife come from Stratford to tell you that", 112).⁷ She receives a love letter that contains Sonnet 18 (61), and then, Will compliments her with an echo of the same sonnet ("You will never age for me, nor fade, nor die", 153);⁸ similarly, Dr. Moth's question "And yet you tell me you lie with women" (9) recalls Sonnet 138⁹; Viola, after having slept with Shakespeare for the first time, says "It is a new world!" (73), thus paraphrasing Miranda's famous line in *The Tempest* 5.1.183-84: "O brave new world/ That has such people in't". Marlowe is quoted too, as his emblematic passage (12. 81-87) "Was this the face that launched a thousand ships..." is recited by all actors at the Rose Theatre audition (31-32). The reader of this script is surprised to find that even some directions tend to paraphrase Shakespeare's texts: "Dawn is breaking. The sun is lacing the severing clouds with envious streaks" (70) is no doubt an ironic rewriting of Romeo's famous speech in 3.5.7-8: "Look, love, what envious streaks/ Do lace the severing clouds in yonder east".

⁷ See *Hamlet* 2.2.115-16 and 2.2.192 for the first two quotes; the third one is a rewriting of 1.5.130-31: "There needs no ghost, my lord, come from the grave/ To tell us this".

⁸ See lines 9-11: "But thy eternal summer shall not fade,/ Nor lose possession of that fair thou ow'st,/ Nor shall death brag thou wand'rest in his shade".

⁹ See lines 13-14: "Therefore I lie with her, and she with me,/ And in our faults by lies we flattered be".

In any case, the entire screenplay is devised, above all, as a tribute to *Romeo and Juliet*, as the love scenes between Will and Viola run parallel to those in the play: Will is first in love with Rosaline (a prostitute in the script), he and Viola meet at a ball, there is a balcony scene, and they make love in her chamber while they recite speeches from the play; in addition, someone is murdered (Marlowe, instead of Mercutio), a nurse plays an important role in the love story, there is a rich suitor, the plot is based on a feud between two different London social groups (theatre professionals versus wealthy families), and so on.

One of the most interesting aspects of the screenplay is no doubt the fact that it sets well-known Shakespeare quotations in a modern context. A particularly outstanding sample is the lovers' dialogue, as they wake up after having spent a night together:

VIOLA. You would not leave me?
 WILL. I must. Look—how pale the window.
 VIOLA. (Pulling him down) Moonlight!
 WILL. No, the morning rooster woke me.
 VIOLA. It was the owl—come to bed— (71)

The screenwriters have here replaced the original birds in *Romeo and Juliet* 3.5 —a nightingale for an owl, and a lark for a rooster— thus trivializing Shakespeare's poetic diction and at the same time hinting at a certain sexual innuendo in "morning rooster". There are several other passages in the script with clear sexual overtones, the most explicit of which is Shakespeare's session with Dr. Moth, as he complains about his "lack of inspiration":

WILL. I have lost my gift (not finding this easy). It's as if my quill is broken. As if the organ of the imagination has dried up. As if the proud tower of my genius has collapsed.
 DR. MOTH. Interesting.
 WILL. Nothing comes. (10)

In order to make the reader/film-viewer fully aware that they are referring to sexual impotence, Dr. Moth adds: "Tell me, are you lately humbled in the act of love?" (11). A sexual pun is intended when Will

complains to Rosaline that he has lost his "gift", and she replies: "You left it in my bed. Come to look for it again" (17).

Some episodes serve as a burlesque of certain Hollywood conventions; for instance, the moment when Viola is crossing the river Thames, and Will orders a boatman: "Follow that boat" (36); on the other hand, the "psychoanalysis" session at Dr. Moth's seems to mock American films, especially Woody Allen's; and Young John Webster is a caricature of contemporary children addicted to gory and violent movies ("I liked it when they cut heads off. And the daughter mutilated with knives", 54).

The text also makes fun of the current Shakespeare cult, since a direction describing Will's own room indicates: "A cluttered shelf containing various objects.... Among those we have time to observe: a skull, a mug that says A PRESENT FROM STRATFORD-UPON AVON" (5). At the same time, it dwells on the controversial theory that the Bard's plays were in fact written by other authors; thus Marlowe outlines the plot and suggests some of the character names for *Romeo and Juliet* while having a chat at a tavern (30), and Shakespeare introduces himself as Christopher Marlowe when speaking to Wessex (44-45). The very trite convention of the "dark lady of the Sonnets" is included too, as Rosaline is described in a direction as "big breasted, dark-eyed, dark-haired, sexual" (14).

One of the great achievements of the screenplay, and therefore of the film, is that it may serve as a useful aid for the study of Elizabethan and Shakespearean drama. In spite of its historical inaccuracies and its burlesque tone, it could be a very attractive tool in the hands of an imaginative English-Literature teacher, as it manages to blend some significant literary and biographical data in an amusing and rather entertaining atmosphere.

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