**Unspeakable
ShaXXXspeares**

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Unspeakable ShaXXXspeares

Queer Theory and American Kiddie Culture

Richard Burt

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UNSPEAKABLE SHAXXXSPEARES

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*In memory of my brother,
David Maclay Burt*

What are the noises of the waking morning that we draw into our dreams? The “ugliness,” the “out-of-date,” are only dissembled voices which speak from our childhood.

—Walter Benjamin, *Passagen-Werk*, V, 1214.

Anyone who presumes to speak about stupidity today runs the risk of coming to grief in a number of ways. It may be interpreted as insolence on his part; it may even be interpreted as disturbing the progress of our time. . . . And so a question gradually arises that refuses to be put off: Just what is stupidity? . . . when confronted with stupidity I would rather confess my Achilles' heel right away: I don't know what it is. I have not discovered any theory of stupidity with whose aid I could presume to save the world. . . .

—Robert Musil, “On Stupidity”

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P R E F A C E T O T H E P A P E R B A C K E D I T I O N

ShaXXXploitation 2000

All the World's a Globe!

The explosion of Shakespeare on film and television in the 1990s reached its apotheosis shortly after *Unspeakable ShaXXXspeares* first appeared in print: *Shakespeare in Love* (dir. John Madden, 1998) was released to wide acclaim, winning an astounding thirteen Academy Awards, including Best Picture, Best Actress, and Best Original Screenplay, with Awards presenter Whoopi Goldberg initially appearing at the ceremonies as a Dame Judi Dench-like Queen Elizabeth.¹ A flood of more films adapting or citing Shakespeare followed, including the operatic, rural Italian William Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (dir. Michael Hoffmann, 1999); the noirish *Hamlet* spin-off *Let the Devil Wear Black* (dir. Stacy Title, 1999) set in contemporary Los Angeles (the film's tagline is "Something is rotten in the City of Angels"); *Tea with Mussolini* (dir. Franco Zeffirelli, 1999); two futuristic porn spin-offs of *Romeo and Juliet* and *Macbeth* entitled *Exile* (dir. Brad Armstrong, 1998) and *In the Flesh* (dir. Stuart Canterbury and Antonio Passolini, 1998), respectively; a hardcore video about a bawdy production of *Romeo and Juliet* entitled *Shocking Shakespeare: Romeo and Juliet Get Juicy*, in the *Private Video* series *Amanda's Diary* number 5 (dir. John Millerman, 1999); a compilation of heterosexual anal porn scenes entitled *Shakespeare in Lust* (Metro Pictures, 1999); and *Free Enterprise* (dir. Robert Meyer Burnett, 1999), a romantic comedy starring William Shatner as himself, performing a rap/musical *Julius Caesar* in which he plays all the parts.²

A number of films constituting a subgenre I call Shakesploitation flicks were also released.³ These films either cite Shakespeare (*High School High* [dir. Hart Bochner, 1997], *Whatever* [dir. Susan Skoog, 1997], *Can't Hardly Wait* [dir. Deborah Kaplan and Harry Elfront, 1998], *Jawbreaker* [dir. Darren Stein, 1999], *The Rage: Carrie 2* [dir. Robert Mandel and Katt Shea, 1999], *Cruel Intentions* [dir. Roger Kumble, 1999], *200 Cigarettes* [dir. Risa Bramon Garcia, 1999]) or adapt his plays: *10 Things I Hate About You* (dir. Gil Junger, 1999) is based on *The Taming of the Shrew* and *Never Been Kissed* (dir. Raja Gosnell, 1999) on *As You Like It*. Shakespeare showed up on television as well in the spin-off *The Tempest* (dir. Jack Bender, 1998) set in the Civil War South with Peter Fonda as Prospero and Harold Perrineau as Ariel, and in an episode of MTV *Celebrity Death Match* that featured William Shakespeare duking it out with rapper Busta Rhymes.

As this preface goes to press, *Verona Beach* (dir. Donald McAlpine), the prequel to *William Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet* (dir. Baz Luhrmann, 1966) and starring many of the same actors, has been green-lighted by Fox and is scheduled for release on Thanksgiving, 2000. Two more Shakesploi flicks are forthcoming: *O* (dir. Tim Blake Nelson, 1999), based on *Othello*, and *Near in Blood* (dir. David Dobkin, 2000), based on *Macbeth*. Kenneth Branagh will do three more Shakespeare films: *Love's Labor's Lost* is now in post-production and films of *Macbeth* and *As You like It* will follow. Two contemporary New York adaptations are also set for release: *Hamlet* (dir. Michael Almereyda) with Ethan Hawke as Hamlet and Julia Stiles as Ophelia, Kyle MacLachlan as Claudius, and Bill Murray as Polonius, and *Macbeth in Manhattan* (dir. Greg Lombardo). Julie Taymor's flashy, gender-bending *Titus*, starring Anthony Hopkins as Titus and Jessica Lange as Tamora, is also forthcoming, and in *Romeo Must Die* (dir. Andrzej Bartkowiak), kung fu star Jet Li will play Romeo to hip-hop singer Aaliyah Haughton's Juliet.

Why, we may ask, has Shakespeare exploded with such massive force in mass culture in the 1990s and beyond the millennium? In this preface, I will limit my comments on this vast new output to those aspects that bear on some central concerns of *Unspeakable ShaXXXspeares*: the increasingly porous boundaries of national film production, and hence increasing uncertainty over whether a given film is or

is not American, I will suggest, can be understood as a symptom of Shakespeare's new position in mass culture after the end of the Cold War, a symptom which is thematized in Branagh's *Hamlet* (1996) and *Shakespeare in Love*. I will also suggest that the Hoffman *Dream* and two of the Shakesploi flicks foreground the phenomenon of a dumbed-down Shakespeare in mass culture; the latter two films also focus on the gender of "the loser," raising the question of whether the loser is really a guy thing or not.

Though the nineties proliferation of mass media Shakespeare is wildly overdetermined, it is no accident that it coincides with the end of the Cold War, beginning with Branagh's *Henry V* in 1989, the same year the Berlin Wall fell.⁴ Since that film, made with an all-British cast, Shakespeare film production has become increasingly multi-national, as many recent examples continue to make clear. *In the Flesh*, for example, was filmed in Budapest by an American and an Italian director with Hungarian and American actors, and Hoffman's *William Shakespeare's A Midsummer Night's Dream* with its Italian setting and American and English cast imitates Branagh's earlier *Much Ado About Nothing* (1993) in both respects. Similarly, Hoffman's *Dream* used Australian birds in the Tuscan woods, and the character Patrick Verona in *Ten Things* is from Australia. *Shakespeare in Love* is particularly striking in this regard: its production was both American and British.⁵ It began as an American film and ended up being made in England, was written by an American and an Englishman, and starred two major American actors, Gwyneth Paltrow and Ben Affleck in an otherwise British cast. Moreover, the film received crucial recognition in Los Angeles at the seventy-first Annual Academy Awards Ceremony. The ambiguity of *Shakespeare in Love*'s production is registered in the film, notably at the end when Shakespeare's love interest, Lady Viola de Lesseps (Gwyneth Paltrow), appears alone on a beach of the New World of the Virginia colonies, recalling *Twelfth Night* and *The Tempest*, the former of which the lovers have discussed and Shakespeare has begun to write.⁶ The unhappy conclusion opens up rather than settles Shakespeare's status as foundational author. Though Shakespeare speaks in a voice over, it is Viola, following Queen Elizabeth's lead, who gives Shakespeare the plot of *Twelfth Night*. Just who is appropriating whom here, we may ask?⁷ Branagh's *Hamlet* is perhaps more

overtly a post-Cold War film, with its Czarist setting, storming of the palace by Laertes, and the parallel between Old Hamlet's statue being toppled and the toppling of statues of Soviet figures such as Lenin in 1989. Branagh's use of an older cast, including two actors who had played Hamlet earlier in their careers, John Gielgud and Derek Jacobi, suggests that his film records as well the toppling of an earlier Anglo-American Shakespeare empire.

The explosion of mass media Shakespeares in the nineties may be read partly as unconscious efforts at reterritorializing Shakespeare as relations between world powers are reconfigured in the post-Cold War globe. Shakespeare in the United States constitutes a new form of cultural imperialism in which Shakespeare is regarded as a native export, as if the United States could claim anything as its own. In the United Kingdom, a Shakespeare mediated by the American-led, Disney-like new Globe Theater and Hollywood helps shore up unity that is increasingly fragmented (witness the pull away from union by the Welsh and the Scots and the breakup of England itself into northern and southern regions) even as the United Kingdom is being incorporated into a NATO-led European community. And Japan provides yet another form of cultural imperialism, one based on importing rather than exporting Shakespeare. Japan has replicas of the Globe and Fortune Theaters in Tokyo as well as a Shakespeare Country Park in a Tokyo suburb.⁸ Composed of reproductions of New Place, Shakespeare's birthplace, and Mary Arden's home, all the products of a collaboration with the English architect Julian Bicknell, the Shakespeare Country Park, which opened in 1997, translates Shakespeare and Stratford-Upon-Avon into a specifically Japanese framework. The Shakespeare Country Park mixes attempts at historical authenticity with contemporary theme park additions: guides wear period dress, and one can hear Elizabethan music played on recorders by Japanese employees. Other touches have a Disneylike feel: one of the Shakespeare mannequins talks, so well, in fact, that one feels a real personality behind it, and the garden is quite free-wheeling, containing a section, for example, called "The Forest of the Imagination." Similarly, the Tsubouchi Memorial Theater Museum, at Waseda University, Tokyo, based on the Fortune Theater, imports Shakespeare into a Japanese context: the museum displays all of theater history, Japanese as well as Shakespearean.

In addition to the way nineties Shakespeares are difficult to pin down in terms of national boundaries, the nineties dumbing down of Shakespeare in mass media continues to gallop apace. In 1999, Shakespeare made it into volumes of two popular do-it-yourself book series: *Shakespeare For Dummies* (with a foreword by Dame Judi Dench!) and *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Shakespeare*.⁹ And it seems fitting that Alicia Silverstone, who played a Shakespeare-citing heroine in the teen comedy *Clueless* (dir. Amy Heckerling, 1995) was originally cast as Rosaline in Branagh's *Love's Labors Lost*. I would like to comment in some detail on the continued dumbing down of Shakespeare in mass media by turning now to William Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *10 Things I Hate About You*, and *Never Been Kissed*.

If the post-Cold War globe has seen new First World alliances around Shakespeare, it has also seen a correlative set of alliances in international pop and opera music, marked notably by the use of "Nessun dorma" from Giacomo Puccini's *Turandot* in the 1990 BBC broadcast of the World Cup finals and the "Three Tenors" phenomenon, with its own forms of dumbing down and commercialization.¹⁰ Hoffman's *Dream* may be appreciated in this context. Though the film clearly understands itself as a middle-brow, mainstream film, adopting a classical music score replete with a number of arias from Italian operas, it in many ways bears the imprint of the same youth culture as does Luhrmann's *William Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet*, most notably in putting "William Shakespeare's" in the title. Perhaps the most obvious concession to the younger, potentially bored teen audience is the titillating use of nudity and suggestions of sexual intercourse without there being any offense to pardon, effectively making Puck's epilogue unnecessary and freeing schoolteacher escorts of anxiety about being sued for sexual harassment.¹¹ Even Bottom (Keven Kline) and Titania (Michelle Pfeiffer) have a sentimental farewell during the epilogue, while he examines the crown he wore when he was with her, now shrunken to the size of a (wedding?) ring, as if to suggest that there was nothing really bestial about their relationship at all.

In contrast, the classical music score is meant, one assumes, to appeal mainly to the adult audience who really want to see and enjoy an art film. The score is often used in a thematic way. For example, Bottom is portrayed as a lady's man, and when his unhappy marriage is revealed

in his home, we hear “Una furtiva lagrima” from Gaetano Donizetti’s *The Elixir of Love*, suggesting that Titania will fulfill Bottom’s own romantic longings. Similarly, Bottom later plays for Titania a recording of the famous aria “Casta diva” from Vincenzo Bellini’s *Norma*, which is Norma’s hymn to the Goddess of the Moon and hence of chastity. Just as Norma’s prayer is ironically undercut by the fact that she has already borne two children by her unfaithful Roman lover, so Bottom’s idealizing view of Titania is undercut by her own sexual desire for an ass. Though these arias may contribute to the significance of the film’s action, their claim to doing so is notably undercut by their overfamiliarity. The film uses only the most famous, recognizable arias, that is, and their excessive familiarity is largely due to their constant citation in mass culture, particularly advertising. The film’s programmatic quality—using Felix Mendelssohn’s “Wedding March” from his *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* (not again!) when the married couples enter the theater to see *Pyramus and Thisbe*, the joyous “Brindisi” from Giuseppe Verdi’s *La Traviata* for piazza and party scenes, the plaintive intermezzo from Pietro Mascagni’s *Cavalleria Rusticana* when the exhausted lovers sleep, at Bottom and Titania’s last farewell, and so on—suggests a “Greatest Hits of Nineteenth-Century Italian Opera” approach, a kind of Calista Flockhart sitcom, fast foodish *Ally M(a)cSummer Night’s Dream*, the canned equivalent of MTV’s heavy rotation music videos rather than a high culture alternative to it.¹²

Some critics might conclude that the choice of familiar arias and other equally familiar instrumental music was part of a marketing strategy designed to make a middle-brow audience feel comfortable less because they could congratulate themselves on their actual knowledge of opera (since spectators who are literate about opera are the ones most likely to dismiss the film) than from their familiarity with famous arias in a mass culture context. The film’s “easy opera listening” strategy is essentially a marketing strategy, this account would have it, one that encourages the audience to have a “feel good” experience while watching the film, analogous to the way audiences are encouraged by similar opera citations in television ads to enjoy (and consume) pasta, cars, and coffee. Moreover, the classical music selections may have been chosen less for their thematic role in the film than for their marketability as numbers on the soundtrack CD.

While I find this account compelling, I would argue that Hoffman's *Dream* does imagine an alternative to mass culture, albeit an entirely negative one: significantly, the fairies do not know how to play the opera records Bottom has brought with him to play on his hand cranked record player, and they quickly tire of the music.¹³ The fairies suggest a mode of artistic production, in my view, outside of any recording apparatus or electronic medium, an unwired counterboredom to a hardwired youth audience bored by high culture.

In contrast to the Hoffman *Dream*, late nineties Shakesploi films overtly thematize the "dumbing down" of Shakespeare witnessed in earlier high school movies. Yet these Shakesploi flicks also resist the celebration of dumbness and stupidity so marked as a guy thing in the earlier films: Shakesploi flicks articulate a fantasy about the nerdy girl who is unpopular because she is smarter than her classmates. In *10 Things*, the popular and pretty Bianca (Larisa Oleynik) twice calls unpopular and pretty sister Kat (Julia Stiles), a character based on Shakespeare's Katherina Baptista, a loser, and Josie Geller (Drew Barrymore), the heroine of *Never Been Kissed*, accidentally prints the word "loser" on her forehead. Yet the teen girl leads in these romantic comedies are not, in the end, losers, and their knowledge of Shakespeare is precisely what redeems them from loserdom. What is crucial to understand about the new Shakesploi flicks is that they radically oppose Shakespeare literacy and girl loserdom: teen girl characters are not permitted to identify with the loser figure except insofar as they can hope to reject it.

We may pursue the implications of this move to oppose culturally literate girls and losers by contrasting *10 Things* and *Never Been Kissed*. Though both films link the heroines' literacy and knowledge of Shakespeare to their achievement of romantic success, they differ markedly in the way they thematize the process of adapting Shakespeare. *10 Things* uses the cover song and the register of sound to create a series of cynical puns which invite us to read the film as a cover of Shakespeare's *Taming*. By contrast, *Never Been Kissed* thematizes adaptation as going undercover, using the visual register of disguise as a means by which the writer's voice can be read rather than heard. The conception of adaptation as aural or visual has significant consequences for the ways these two films both revise gender issues in

Shakespeare's plays and revise the teensploi films with which they compete: *10 Things* reads itself as a cheap trick, a prostitution of Shakespeare; by contrast, *Never Been Kissed* reads itself as saving itself for Shakespeare, the heroine refusing to prostitute herself for the sake of getting a newspaper story.

10 Things uses Shakespeare's cultural authority to produce a conservative feminism where the price of avoiding domestic abuse is sexual repression of women, and the price of teen interest in Shakespeare is the radical dumbing down of his writings. Yet the film also produces an account of its own process of adapting Shakespeare in terms of the cover.

10 Things does not simply allude to Shakespeare through the use of a sound clip but thematizes its status as a teen adaptation of a literary classic both by gendering rock music and by using the cover song to reflect as well on its relation to similar teen films. The film begins by representing Kat's relation to her female peers in terms of a war between pop songs. Kat is differentiated from other girls from the start by her interest in (bad) girl rock and roll. What starts as the movie's unlocated soundtrack music—Semisonic's "FNT," heard as the credits roll while the camera pans right from a shot of the space needle and skyline to kids arriving at school—is then located in a car radio with four girls in the car listening happily to the music by a guy band. This song is soon drowned out, however, by Kat's car radio, playing Joan Jett's "Bad Reputation," itself a cover, as she pulls her car up beside theirs, and this song in turn becomes the unlocated soundtrack as the credits continue to roll. Music is similarly used to contrast scenes in which Kate and Bianca come back from a big party with their dates. Angry music plays as Kat leaves her date's car and walks into the house while happy music plays as Bianca leaves her date's car.

In thematizing a teen adaptation of Shakespeare in terms of music reception, *10 Things* also foregrounds teen music itself as a form of adaptation by using a number of cover songs. For example, Kat's love interest, Patrick, covers Frankie Valli's "Can't Take My Eyes Off of You," and another cover plays on Kat's car radio as Patrick drives Kat home from a wild party. At the prom, a red-haired woman singer sings a cover of "Shout," and the girl-led band Letters to Cleo then covers Nick Lowe's pop song "Cruel to Be Kind," with the lead singer coming

onto the floor to address both Patrick and Kat. The film ends as we hear a cover of Cheap Trick's "I Want You to Want Me," also by Letters to Cleo. These covers explore cross-gender possibilities for performance and also suggest a model for understanding what kind of reception teen audiences may give Shakespeare. All of the songs covered by women were originally sung and written by men. Only Patrick covers a song written by a person of the same gender.

Though it might appear that cross-gendering allows women who cover male songs more freedom, I think the opposite is the case. The covers by the women are nearly identical to the originals. The band arrangements by Letters of Cleo do not depart musically from the original in any significant way. In fact, the covers are almost identical to the originals except for the gender of the voices. By contrast, Patrick's cover of Valli is quite different, performed at the high school stadium, sung first without accompaniment and then, when he gets to the refrain, with the high school marching band.

Rather than simply close down feminist possibilities, however, the film invites a critique of its own Shakesploi version of teen romance. The title of the last cover song—"I Want You to Want Me"—and the name of the band performing it—Cheap Trick—activate a series of puns that bear on the cover song as model for teen adaptations of Shakespeare. The cover of this band in particular invites one to read the film's resolution and the film itself as a "cheap trick" in which one kind of desire is converted into another: the film *10 Things I Hate About You* is exchanged for the similar sounding play *The Taming of the Shrew*, and the novelization of the film is similarly exchanged for the play as literature. The cover of Cheap Trick's "I Want You to Want Me" comes on just after Kat and Patrick make up and invites a critique of the film's own cheap tricks, particularly with regard to the ostensibly happy ending. When Kat accidentally learns that Bianca's love interest (and the guy with whom Kat had once had a one night stand), Joey, paid Patrick to take her out, Patrick heals the hurt he has caused Kat by using the bribe money to take her out on a date to buy her a Fender Stratocaster guitar (that he had seen her play in a music store). The lovers kiss but Kat protests, "You can't just buy me a guitar every time you mess up, you know." He replies: "I know. But there's always drums, the bass, and maybe even someday a tambourine." When she starts to

protest again, he silences her with a kiss. The cover of Cheap Trick then comes on.

The film's "cheap trick" gleefully undermines, if not entirely cancels, the conservative feminism and reformation of heterosexual male desire the film wants to shore up by licensing the institution of a new economy in romantic relationships: in moving the wager at the end of the play to the beginning of the film, *10 Things* effectively turns Patrick into a gigolo. In this the new romantic economy, the guy can still "mess up" and then clean up by paying the girlfriend off. Whatever Patrick has done that may have harmed Kat, in the logic of this economy, will come back to her in the form of something she wants. This economy licenses male transgressions against romantic love, although in this soft-pedaled teen fantasy there are no real transgressions (such as cheating) to speak of: Patrick is not interested in Bianca, nor is he interested in any other woman. *10 Things* regards Kat and its audience as tricks to be cheaply turned.

To be sure, the film may hold out some hope to feminists by suggesting a link between the singer of *Letters to Cleo* and Kat, the singer anticipating what Kat plans to become. The end furthermore heightens the connection between Kat and the singer by echoing the Induction to the *Taming of the Shrew* (like the way the Induction calls attention to the fact that we will see a play-within-a-play, the film credits call attention to the fact that we have just seen a film: the credits are interrupted by a series of outtakes, thereby showing us how the film was made, what was cut, what didn't work); the cross-dressing ambiguities raised by the page dressed as Christopher Sly's wife in the Induction are played out in the film in terms of the cover as a vocal transvestism. Yet, as we have seen, the cover song here covers over, as it were, the (rebellious) female voice, limits it to being the copy-Kat, as it were, of the male voice, which is conceived of as much freer and originary.

In contrast to *10 Things*'s thematization of teensploi adaptations of literary classics in terms of the cover song, *Never Been Kissed* goes undercover and thematizes Shakespeare in terms of the visual register of disguise. While more high-minded, *Never Been Kissed* is, in my view, actually the cheaper film. It undoes the feminist and homoerotic potential of *As You Like It*, turning the theme of disguise in the play into a means by which heterosexual love can discover itself. The film

rehearses the standard teensploi plot about a nerdy girl, Josie Geller (Drew Barrymore), who finds true love with a hunky guy in a pastoral comedy in which an adult can go back to high school to undo her traumatic experiences there. When Josie walks into her English class, her teacher, Sam Caulson (Michael Vartan) says "Welcome to Shakespeare's *As You Like It*." A series of citations from and commentary on *As You Like It* register Josie's transition from "shit" girl loser to "it" girl celebrity. Like Rosalind, Josie is able to find a romantic partner by temporarily taking on a disguise, thereby transforming as well her high school status as loser and moving herself up from copy editor to undercover reporter for her newspaper. The play's theme of cross-dressing is translated into control over the way one is read. Significantly, Josie's success is signaled in visual terms: as she takes on a disguise, like Shakespeare's Rosalind, she also moves from being an undercover newspaper human interest story writer to being a reporter who wears a hidden camera to being the subject of a story televised by other reporters. Josie's move from undercover reporter to television reporter/celebrity suggests that by controlling the ways in which she is read, the Cinderella girl can occupy both sides of any given teen girl fantasy or behavior. Girls, you can have it both ways, the film implies, when it comes to popularity, taking drugs, and having sex. Josie gets stupid stoned on ganja cake and wows the audience of a band when she dances on stage, but she takes the drug accidentally, without knowing that the cake is spiked. She's a virgin, but she's rumored by her brother to be sexually active and a femme fatale who has dumped really hot boys in popular rock bands. Similarly, she becomes popular and is crowned prom queen, but she then throws it all away because she is morally above being superficially concerned about proms and popularity.

Yet the film's focus on the visual register of disguise has significant implications for Josie's voice and hence for any feminism one might want to claim for the film. The (very humanist) plot is centrally about Josie finding her voice, and it might seem, at first glance, that the film moves out of the visual register of disguise and deception into the vocal register of (naked) truth. Josie reads aloud from the play in class, which recalls her earlier moment of reading a poem aloud in class, and then she reads her paper on *As You Like It* aloud in class as well. Later in the film, she reads her newspaper story in a voice over, and she

speaks to the assembled crowd and television cameras with a microphone as she waits for Sam to show up to kiss her. Yet *Never Been Kissed* actually folds the aural register into the visual, reducing the former to silence. Moreover, she turns the hidden camera off in order to talk with Sam privately about her feelings for him. To this extent, it might be thought that she controls how she is seen and by whom. Yet the medium of the newspaper poses a problem in readability: although it is published, Josie's story may be missed or discarded as trash by its readers, as when Sam doesn't see it while he packs up to leave town. The film supplies Josie's story to the audience through a voice over, and her use of a microphone at the baseball field suggests a further need for a prosthetic supplement to her voice. (It's never clear why Sam comes after all, whether he has read Josie's story or heard about it.) Furthermore, the displacement of her newspaper story by a televised live event means that she is seen but not heard. When Sam, like Orlando, shows up late for his romantic rendezvous, after Josie has given up and, significantly, dropped her microphone (hence lost her voice), Josie does not rebuke him. Indeed, she says nothing, simply grateful he has come to kiss her.¹⁴ In strikingly sexist terms, the film equates female romantic success for a woman with losing her voice, at best allowing her to gain it only in order to lose it.

Never Been Kissed's conservative feminism can also be seen in the way it yokes Shakespeare and mass media, especially television journalism, to a very straight-laced notion of female sexuality. Like the other Shakesploi flicks under discussion, *Never Been Kissed* turns on a division between the girl characters, and in this case models that division on a corresponding division between high literary culture and low mass culture. Knowledge of Shakespeare's *As You Like It* is the means by which Josie's superiority over her female rivals gets confirmed. The three popular girls, Gibby, Kirsten, and Kristen, are shown up as embarrassingly stupid and ignorant when they can't figure out which historical couple Josie and her high school date Guy have come to the prom dressed up as Rosalind and Orlando:

Kirsten. Who are you guys?

Gibby. Please don't tell me you're Medieval Barbie.

Josie. Rosalind and Orlando.

When Kirsten and Gibby look blank, Josie adds, "From *As You Like It*?" When they still don't get it, she adds, "Shakespeare?" But they still draw a blank. In contrast to Josie, the three girls have come to the prom dressed as different versions of Barbie: proto-Stepford wife clones, Gibby gets angry with Kristen, claiming that Kristen has stolen the idea from her. Barbie, we are to infer, is a bad role model for girls from a feminist point of view. Shakespeare, by contrast, is where it's at.

Yet Josie also gets the better of these girls by virtue of the fact that she is a reporter, her final triumph being her performance in front of cameras. The film articulates a preteen girl's fantasy of romance which, it has to be said, is quite timid: after all, the film is called *Never Been Kissed*, not *Never Been Fucked*. Despite the baseball field setting where Josie waits to be kissed, it is clear that while Josie may be ready to play, she is not ready to ball. The film's erotic focus is a kiss, not sex, a kiss that perhaps takes a Monica Lewinsky, exhibitionistic direction, as the fantasy of being the star of the romance, fit for media consumption, is fulfilled here. But the fantasy, of course, falls far short of Josie winning her teacherly knee-pads. (Even when asked for a date by Guy in her teen bedroom at a party with no parents around and with both of them sitting on her bed, neither one attempts to kiss the other).

The two Shakesploi flicks I have examined reveal a dialectical contradiction between dumbing down Shakespeare and making him a genius (and, by extension, making those who appreciate him intelligent and morally superior). Materialist feminist critics might be tempted to deplore Shakesploi flicks for using Shakespeare to legitimate a conservative brand of feminism. Rather than radically departing from conservative feminism, however, this materialist feminist analysis of Shakesploi flicks actually mirrors its conservative opposite insofar as it defines success for teen girls and young women in terms of a radical divide between intelligence and stupidity, between winners and losers.

A fuller engagement with stupidity and the loser in mass culture might profoundly transform materialist feminist criticism and its account of the bad girl, conflicts between women driven by rivalry over men, female sexuality, mass culture, cultural literacy for teen girls, and so on. Such an engagement might also open up a new perspective on the datedness of materialist feminism as presently practiced, and materialist feminism might thereby be able to consider

itself as a variation of loser criticism. The issue would no longer be men in feminism but couples (and coupling) in feminism. This would involve an analysis of heterosexual romance not only from the viewpoint of loser feminism but as loser romance, what could be called “dumb love.”¹⁵ But this would be another project, one that would entail reading the way that another story, *Lolita*, has rivaled and perhaps already displaced *Romeo and Juliet* as the foundational plot for American romance in the nineties and beyond.¹⁶

Though many cultural critics, especially materialist feminists, will no doubt continue to oppose their own brand of intelligent critique to what they consider to be “stupid” brands of criticism such as conservative feminism, the willfully dumbed down loser remains, in my view, a more interesting, if paradoxically (un)productive, way to manage the various kinds of boredom that now pervade the global political culture and the international music and Shakespeare scenes.

Notes

I would like to thank John Archer, Christopher and Stephen Benfey, Mark Thornton Burnett, Wes Folkerth, Judith Haber, Amy Kaplan, Judy Kennedy, Jeffrey Wallen, and Stanley Wells for conversations about various parts of this preface.

1. Goldberg later appeared dressed as actor Geoffrey Rush's character in the film, Philip Henslowe, as well. I discuss *Shakespeare in Love* in two forthcoming essays, “Mass Culture in Love, with Shakespeare: Literary Authorship, Academic (Feminist) Criticism, and the End of the Shakespearean,” in eds. Mark Thornton Burnett and Ramona Wray, *Shakespeare, Film, Fin de Siècle* (Macmillan) and “No Holes Bard: Homonormativity and the Gay and Lesbian Romance with *Romeo and Juliet*,” in eds. Don Hedrick and Bryan Reynolds, *Shakespeare Without Class* (St. Martin's Press).
2. Two strip club owners in Arizona and Florida used performances of Shakespeare to avoid violating new laws limiting nudity in public. The owner of the Castlebury, Florida Club Bwana Cocktail Lounge, Mike Pinter, put on a parodic sketch of *Macbeth*. *The Charlotte Observer* reported on June 6, 1999 that he and three dancers had been arrested for performing it.
3. I discuss these films and others at much greater length in my essay “(T)e(n) Things I Hate About Girlene Shakesploitation Flicks in the Late

1990s, or, Not So Fast Times at Shakespeare High,” different versions of which are forthcoming in an issue of *Colby Quarterly*, edited by Laurie Osborne, and in *Screening the Bard*, edited by Lisa Starks and Courtney Lehmann.

4. The parallel between Soviet statues and Old Hamlet's statue has been noted by Mark Thornton Burnett in his fine essay “The ‘Very Cunning of the Scene’: Kenneth Branagh's *Hamlet*,” *Literature / Film Quarterly* 25, no. 2 (1997): 82.
5. On this point and British film in general, see Andrew Pulver, “British Film Industry: Bard to Worse at the Multiplex,” *The Guardian*, Friday February 5, 1999: 19.
6. Though *Twelfth Night* alone is mentioned by name in the film, the Virginia colonies reference call up *The Tempest*, as does Viola's remark: “At sea, then—a voyage to a new world?” The screenplay more pointedly refers to the “brave new world” to which Viola is going. See Marc Norman and Tom Stoppard, *Shakespeare in Love: A Screenplay* (New York: Hyperion Miramax Books, 1999), 155.
7. In a review of *Unspeakable ShaXXXspear*s, Stanley Wells writes that this film is an exception to the rule I note in Shakespeare pornography, namely, that Shakespeare as a character never gets laid. Yet Shakespeare is not represented here as he usually is, bald, middle-aged, and with a paunch. We will have to wait for a porn spin-off I expect will be entitled *Shakespeare in Lust* for a real exception. (The 1999 compilation of anal scenes by that title unfortunately has nothing to do with Shakespeare.)
8. For websites for the Globe theater, built in 1888 and taken over by Panasonic in 1990, and the Shakespeare Country park, see <http://www.panasonic.co.jp/ccd/globe1-e.htm> and http://www.awa.or.jp/home/ogata/town/sc_park/shakspal.htm.
9. See John Doyle and Ray Lischner, *Shakespeare for Dummies* (New York: IDG Books, 1999) and Laurie Rozakis, *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Shakespeare* (New York: Alpha Books, 1999).
10. On the World Cup finals, see Paul Smith, *Millennial Dreams: Contemporary Culture and Capital in the North* (London: Verso Books, 1997), 141-144. It is worth noting that the 1999 MTV video awards were held for the first time in the New York Metropolitan Opera House, with various rock stars posing as opera characters: Chris Rock as Rigoletto, David Bowie as Mephistopheles, and Janet Jackson as Cleopatra. See Robin Pogrebin, “A Night at the Opera (with Music by MTV),” *New York Times*, Thursday, September 2, 1999, B1, B5.
11. On the flap over the 1999 RSC production of the play, see Rory Carroll, “Over-sexed Shakespeare Has Shocked Pupils Voting with Feet,” *The Guardian* Friday April 16, 1999.
12. Opera clips further the process of fragmentation Theodor Adorno sees in the Wagnerian leitmotif, a radical process of integration that is “no more than a cover for the underlying fragmentation.” See Theodor

Adorno, *In Search of Wagner*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (London; Verso 1981), 104.

13. The film resists the idea put forward by feminist architects that electricity and fairies were linked as a form of feminization. See Sarah Boxer, "So That's Why Walls Conceal Heating Vents," *New York Times*, Saturday June 5, 1999: A17; A19. It is also worth comparing Hoffman's film with Francis Ford Coppola's *Bram Stoker's Dracula*, in which Shakespeare is placed outside new recording apparatuses, particularly the kinoscopes with their peep shows. A placard for a theatrical performance of *Hamlet* precedes Count Dracula and Mina's entrance into the kinoscope gallery.
14. To be sure, one can easily understand why she is silent here, especially since she is the one who is apologizing.
15. This is the title of a book on twentieth-century American loser culture I am co-writing with my wife, Elizabeth Burt (née Power).
16. The two works come together in the film *Beautiful Girls* (dir. Ted Demme, 1998).

P R E F A C E

My Own Private ShaXXXspear

Generation XXX Criticism

This book is necessarily addressed not only to readers interested in Shakespeare but also to readers interested in American popular culture; film, video, and queer theory; psychoanalysis; and cultural criticism. It offers both a series of queer readings of Shakespeare films and a reading of Shakespeare as queer symptom of America's national unconscious, a symptom registered in popular culture, primarily film, video, and television of the 1980s and 1990s. Shakespeare is cited again and again across a variety of popular American film and television genres including comedy, science fiction, action, gangster melodrama, situation comedy, cartoon series, and so on, only to be cancelled out in ways that range from simply not marking the adaptation of Shakespeare as such, as in Gus Van Sant's *My Own Private Idaho*; to drowning him out, as in Baz Luhrmann's *William Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet*; to his wholesale destruction in films such as *The Naked Gun* and *Skyscraper*. Until recently, Shakespeare's citation has been read in terms of his status as an author of classical texts: his plays have been regarded as adaptable to successive generations and cultures because of his poetic genius, complexity, and transhistorical, transcultural wisdom.¹ By contrast, I maintain that Shakespeare's citation in American popular culture registers the way his "classic" texts resonate with deep, unconscious elements of the United States's cultural self-legitimation. To explore this idea, I will take up the following wide-ranging questions: Why is Shakespeare both invoked and disappeared in America? What does Shakespeare enable American

popular culture to do and say that it couldn't otherwise do and say without him? When can Shakespeare *not* be cited in American popular culture? Can American popular culture function without Shakespeare? What happens to academic representations of Shakespeare when they are positioned in a popular context? How do extra-academic representations of Shakespeare and their reception conflict with the widespread academic desire to control and regulate how Shakespeare is received both inside and outside of academia?

In addressing these broad questions, among others, *Unspeakable ShaXXXspeares* focuses on some of the implications of Shakespeare's mediatization over the past two decades: films are now widely accessible on video, and CD-ROMs and the internet have expanded archival possibilities. While Shakespeare's mediatization has made a new database available, it has also had the unintended effect of making it clear just how much Shakespeare has not been archived, indeed, how much cannot be archived because of its pervasiveness and impermanence. Any attempt to assess Shakespeare's significance as a cultural icon in American culture has to address this paradoxical phenomenon: as Shakespeare is dispersed, he allows certain ideas to be spoken, but he also remains unspeakable in a number of ways, as he gets drowned out, displaced, even, as we shall see, "terminated." Though many of the films and television episodes I discuss have not been archived, the category of the unspeakable is by no means confined to the unarchived, the unconscious, or the closeted, but traverses every point at which Shakespeare is being articulated and mediatized. Similarly, while the unspeakable refers to the relative tastelessness and absence of formal complexity of many of the films and television replays I discuss, the unspeakable traverses all productions from avant-garde to the most cheaply made pornographic adaptations.

The point of attending to unspeakable ShaXXXspeares isn't, then, to move some adaptations or citations from the cultural margin to the center, from the national unconscious to the national conscious, and thereby make possible liberatory, queer resignifications of heterosexist norms, as if the margin or the unconscious constituted the "truth" rather than a site of contradiction and ambivalence. Instead, I wish to analyze the paradoxical ways Shakespeare remains unspeakable even as he is made to speak various national fantasies. To this end, I analyze

unspeakable ShaXXXspeares in relation to figures such as the porn star, the transvestite, the virtuoso, and particularly the loser, all of whom occupy versions of the castrated subject-position of what I call "kiddie culture." Shakespeare's mediatization, I suggest, calls into question whether Shakespeare can still signify what Jacques Lacan (1966) calls "the phallus" or "*objet petit a*," the cause of desire, and thus can no longer serve either as a signifier of a national, paternal identity in American popular culture or as some remainder outside the symbolic in terms of which American national fantasy is organized.² This book is thus partly about mourning the displacement of not only Shakespeare but, more generally, the literary by the cultural, as the United States moves into a multicultural, postpatriarchal social formation. I should add that focusing on Shakespeare's citation and resignification in American kiddie culture necessarily involves a transnational critical approach since the plays, as they are represented in popular terms now more in movies than onstage, migrate between the United States (particularly Hollywood) and other countries, primarily England, of course, but Italy and Germany as well.³ My primary focus is on films made in the United States, but I also take up transnationally produced films and videos made in England, Italy, and Japan but widely marketed in the United States.⁴

In addition to enlarging the Shakespeare archive, I provide a way of making unspeakable ShaXXXspeares, hitherto archived or not, an object of criticism. Much of what might be considered by many to be "unspeakable" has remained undiscussed because it has seemed inane or just plain stupid. Rather than try to reclaim such replays and citations by showing that they are actually intelligent (that is, politically subversive, as present cultural criticism typically understands popular culture), I have attempted to think through their production and consumption in the context of a youth culture that paradoxically defines intelligence as dumbing down, and for which matters of speed, the new, the cool, the trivial, the inane, the belated, and the obsolete are crucial. My aim in focusing on unspeakable ShaXXXspeares is partly, then, to rethink the terms by which Shakespeare and cultural studies in general have been debated over the past two decades. Conservatives might deplore "unspeakable" popular resignifications of Shakespeare as symptomatic of a national decline in cultural

literacy, an erosion of standards; by contrast, progressive cultural critics might celebrate unspeakable ShaXXXspeares as expressions of a protopolitical youth culture. Yet both conservative and progressive critics believe that they (and, in the case of cultural critics, popular texts) are intelligent and that the critics they oppose are not; both sides share the same assumption, that is, that intelligence, culture, and criticism are all on the same side.

What demands consideration in the 1990s, however, is the way Shakespeare is being recoded for a kiddie culture in which “cool” losers transvalue stupidity, indeed, in which stupidity and politics are not easily opposed, either in popular culture or in criticism and theory. The present transvaluations of stupidity and loserdom have significant implications both for pedagogy and for the way we think of the academic intellectual: If cultural critics now eschew an older model of the academic intellectual as vanguard reformer of politically incorrect popular culture, what, if any, possibilities remain for a newer model of the intellectual as a student who learns from popular culture, essentially now co-extensive with youth culture, once that culture announces itself as dumb and dumber?⁵

I hope it is clear, then, that *Unspeakable ShaXXXspeares* does not cover the much-traveled territory of Shakespeare films and adaptations. It is in no sense a performance history or filmography.⁶ Instead, I focus on a series of replays of Shakespeare that are often so far from their “originals” they no longer count as interpretations of the plays at all. Thus, I do not generally offer new interpretations of Shakespeare’s plays (on film and video), not because of space constraints but as a consequence of the post-textual parameters of the electronic archive and its modes of access. The focus of this book is on what I call “post-hermeneutic” ShaXXXspeares insofar as Shakespeare’s texts in the brave new world of mediatization are no longer the symbolic source of a history of ongoing interpretations that respond to each other in a meaningful dialectic. (By the same token, I would not claim that Shakespeare’s texts offer us any special access to this world.) “ShaXXXspeare” functions instead as an imaginary icon that inspires a series of decontextualized, disembodied, unmoored, even hallucinatory references and recreations. In a psychoanalytic register, one could say that the imaginary productions of psychosis and perversion have replaced

symbolic chains of obsession and hysteria in the postmodern reception of Shakespeare.

In reading replays of Shakespeare in American popular culture through the lenses of film and queer theory and Lacanian psychoanalysis, I aim not merely to legitimate readings of popular culture by contextualizing them in the usual theoretically reflexive way (that is framing them in relation to recognizable theoretical discourses and debates) but to use Shakespeare to critique the American brand, as it were, of cultural studies—particularly the dominant academic fantasies about fandom, stardom, pedagogy, and the role of the academic intellectual—that he typically articulates. This book is a study of Shakespeare as a symptom of the American national unconscious, but it is also a study of Shakespeare as a symptom of the American academic unconscious.⁷ I am interested in examining what can't be recycled rather than in recycling cultural trash. Thus, I do not follow out the work of Michel de Certeau and Pierre Bourdieu (see Cartnell 1997) and define myself as a critic who, as a fan of popular culture, can speak what is in unspeakably bad taste in a bourgeois sense about the ShaXXXspeare replays I discuss. Instead, I examine the ways in which this strategy inadvertently attempts to get rid of the academic unconscious. It (unknowingly) evades an inquiry into the now-dominant academic fantasies about popular culture, about politics as the license for attention to culture (high and low), about the desire of the critic/fan—the desire to keep desiring to do criticism, the will to will Will. Analysis of popular culture and celebrations of fandom have been enabled through a narrow conception of politics, a conception that comes at the expense of an analysis of the academic unconscious, even when, perhaps especially when, that criticism has drawn explicitly on psychoanalysis.

Parts of this book have already seen print. A much shorter version of chapter 1, "The Love That Dare Not Speak Shakespeare's Name: New Shakesqueer Cinema," appeared in *Shakespeare, the Movie: Popularizing the Plays on Film, TV, and Video*, edited by Lynda E. Boose and Richard Burt. I would like to thank Lynda Boose for encouraging me to write the original article. Parts of the Introduction come from my contributions to an essay in the same collection that I co-authored

with Lynda, entitled “Totally Clueless: Shakespeare Goes Hollywood in the 1990s.”

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wonderful film, *Skyscraper*), Kate Lemons, Ignacio Lopez, Elizabeth MacDuffie, Kristine Ring, Josh Ruddy, Becky Kershman, and Noah Blaustein. Amy Kaplan provided valuable comments on chapter 3, and my colleague Wally Kerrigan did the same for the second chapter. Rebecca Schneider offered challenging readings of much of the book, as did Donald Cheney, Michael Schoenfeldt, and Stuart Culver. I would also like to express my appreciation to John Rogers and Jeffrey Wallen for their many conversations and their sensitive, careful, and often provocative comments on earlier drafts of several chapters. My friend and colleague Don Levine put his enormous knowledge of film at my disposal. It was a pleasure to discuss with him his ideas about “the cinematic ga(y)ze.” Stephen Orgel generously gave me a copy of *Carnival in Venice* and Doug Lanier was kind enough to supply me with a copy of the *Ozzie and Harriet* episode, “An Evening with *Hamlet*.” I am very grateful to Patrick Cassidy of Troma Entertainment for supplying me with a copy of *Tromeo and Juliet* as well as numerous slides and publicity stills, two of which are reproduced in this book. I am especially indebted to Betty Wilda, who was super helpful in obtaining almost all of the stills for this book.

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