Proceedings

of the

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on

Earlier British Literature

Edited by

Jay Ruud

Northern State University

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Preface

The ten essays included in this volume were presented at the First Dakotas Conference on Earlier British Literature, held in Aberdeen, South Dakota on October 16-17, 1992. The conference was the first attempt to establish a network of scholars with similar interests in the northern plains area, and those attending were enthusiastic about continuing the process, endorsing a plan to hold a second conference in the spring of 1994.

The papers here included are arranged chronologically, and represent the variety of papers presented at the conference. They concern a range of British literature from *Beowulf to the eighteenth century*, with comparative studies branching into American and modern Scandinavian literature. Also representative of the conference is the fact that authors of the papers range from graduate students to full professors, and come from eight different institutions in four states.

The conference was funded by a grant from the South Dakota Humanities Council and by Northern State University. Funding made it possible to bring in Shirley Garner of the University of Minnesota to deliver a keynote address on Shakespeare, and Susanna Fein of Kent State University and David Raybin of Eastern Illinois University to perform with me a dramatic reading of Chaucer's "Miller's Tale" in Middle English. Both activities were well received by conference participants.

These funds also made possible the printing of this volume.

JAY RUUD

Aberdeen, S.D.

Murnan or *Wrecan*: The Idea of Vengeance in *Beowulf*

Thomas J. Gasque
University of South Dakota

Day two in Denmark. Grendel is dead. Beowulf, the savior from abroad, is everyone's hero, being compared to Sigemund, the great dragon slayer of Germanic myth (ll. 875-897), and contrasted to Heremod, whose long periods of self-pity had caused *snotor ceorl monig*[1] "many wise men" (l.908) to mourn (*bemearn*—l. 907). Beowulf alone has been able to destroy the monster that has made life for the Danes unbearable for the last twelve years, and that night there is a celebration in Heorot to honor the hero for what he has done. Everyone is happy, though the poet ominously forecasts a future feud between Hrothgar and his nephew Hrothulf (l. 1019). Hrothgar orders wergild to be paid to the Geats for the death of the one man among them who did not survive Grendel's sudden onslaught, signalling his—Hrothgar's—taking on himself the responsibility for ending the feud.

Then, to continue the festivities, Hrothgar's scop sings a long tale about the unexplained attack of Finn's Frisians on the visiting Half-Danes led by Hnæf, brother of Finn's wife Hildeburh. Many are killed on both sides, including Hnæf. His sister has cause to mourn (*bemearn*—l. 1077) the loss of her kin and her honor. A truce is drawn with the new leader, Hengest, and the Half-Danes become reluctant

thanes to Finn. Over the winter, Hengest's thoughts turn to *gyrn-wræce* "vengeance," and

> Swā hē ne forwyrnde worold-rædenne,
> þonne him Hūnlāfing hilde-lēoman,
> billa sēlest, on bearm dyde; (ll. 1142-44)

> So he did not disdain the "obligation that the world imposes" (Chickering 328) when Hunlaf's son laid the sword in his lap, good battle-flame, finest of blades.

The result: the king was slain and all his men, and the queen was taken back to Denmark. At this point in the poem Wealhtheow, wife of Hrothgar and present queen of the Scyldings, tempers the praise bestowed on Beowulf by reminding her husband that he has an obligation to his own sons and that he should not be carried away by this visitor and promise him more than he should, such as taking him on as his son (ll. 1175-76a). Her diplomacy is palpable and peace is not threatened. She lives up to her woman's role as a keeper of the peace.

But all women are not keepers of the peace. As soon as Wealhtheow finishes her speech, the poet begins to foreshadow that night's chaos, although the men go to sleep satisfied that the threat of Grendel was over. But

> Þaet gesȳne wearþ,
> wīd-cūþ werum, þætte wrecend þā gȳt
> lifde æfter lāþum, lange þrāge,
> æfter gūð-ceare. Grendles mōdor,
> ides, āglæc-wīf yrmðe gemunde
> sē þe wæter-egesan wunian scolde, . . . (ll. 1255b-60)

> Men came to know—it was soon plain enough—his avenger still lived after that battle, for a long time, in hate, war-sorrow, Grendel's mother, a monster woman, kept war-grief deep in her mind, dwelt in terrible waters.

The awful she-creature breaks in on the sleeping men, grabs one of Hrothgar's most beloved warriors, and races back to her lair. Hrothgar grieves and sends for Beowulf, who had spent that night in another building. He hears the news and Hrothgar's challenge to seek out Grendel's mother in a place so horrible that a stag will even give up his life on the bank rather than seek refuge in the waters of the pond. Beowulf's response is

> "Ne sorga, snotor guma! Sēlre bið æghwæm
> þæt hē his frēond wrece, þonne hē fela murne.
> Ūre æghwylc sceal ende gebīdan
> woroldes līfes; wyrce sē þe mōte
> dōmes ǣr dēaþe; þæt bið driht-guman
> unlifigendum æfter sēlest. . . ." (ll. 1384-89)

> "Grieve not, wise king! Better it is for every man to avenge his friend than mourn overmuch. Each of us must come to the end of his life: let him who may win fame before death. That is the best memorial for a man after he is gone. . . ."

Murnan or *Wrecan*—Mourn or Avenge—this is my theme, and I think it is one of the main ideas being developed in this fine epic from the Old English period. Yet, it is an idea which has not been widely discussed in the criticism of the poem. In some ways the topic is self-evident. Most of the action of the poem, as I will demonstrate shortly, is precipitated by the desire for revenge, and most of the critics who have discussed the poem at length have dealt with the topic. Edward B. Irving's book, *A Reading of* Beowulf, devotes a number of pages to the many feuds that take place in the poem, moving from the story of Finn and Hengest, which I have described above, through Beowulf's projection of what will happen to the old feud between the Danes and the

Heathobards after Hrothgar attempts to settle it by giving his daughter in marriage to Ingeld, and finally to the long-standing feud between the Geats, Beowulf's people, and the Swedes, projected by the messenger to resume after the death of Beowulf and to bring about the final destruction of the Geatish nation (Irving 169-91). For Irving, these feuds are "negative images" which stand in contrast to the hero of the poem, who, from what the poet shows us, is never involved in this sort of thing. "Beowulf's energies are directed outward and away from the world of human violence and warfare, . . . with the purpose of preserving human community by fending off threats from the outside" (190).

Another book-length study of the poem is John D. Niles' 1983 Beowulf: *The Poem and Its Tradition*. In a chapter entitled "Reciprocity," Niles places the tradition of revenge in the context of *wergild*, the price "paid in just compensation for a slaying," and in the even broader context of the exchange of gifts and material things for both positive and negative actions, but he says very little about vengeance as a main idea. The most complete discussion of the topic that I have found is an article by Martin Camargo, which appeared in *Studies in Philology* in 1981. Camargo, who reaches many of the same conclusions that I do, even implies that revenge is "the central theme of *Beowulf*" (121). He argues that the Finn episode, often seen as an interesting but irrelevant digression to the main focus of *Beowulf*, is in fact central to the development of the poem. Its importance is in the way that it first sounds "the dark chord of tragic revenge" which builds to an "ominous crescendo" in the second part of the poem (123). More recent articles by Stephen C.B. Atkinson and John M. Hill also touch on the topic. For Atkinson, the actions of Grendel and his mother are dark shadows of the behavior expected of a thane, including the obligation to avenge one's lord, but the monsters have none of the positive qualities associated with thaneship. Hill's article is a psychological analysis that reaches conclusions similar to Irving's, that Beowulf is the only figure in the poem to go beyond simple revenge to attain what Hill calls "superego mastery."

These discussions touch on but do not, I think, finally resolve the questions raised by revenge in *Beowulf*. Irving's is an attractive argument, but it may be too sympathetic to the hero of the poem, who after all, in a poem clearly by a Christian poet, is as much a champion of vengeance as any of the less attractive characters, who it may be noted are often immobilized by excessive mourning. Although I cannot be sure about the attitude and ethical position of the poet, I believe it can be shown that he (or she) finally, by showing the utter futility of the old system of revenge, rejects not only the system but the values of Beowulf himself.

Time does not permit an exhaustive analysis of all of the passages in *Beowulf* that relate to this theme. What follows is a reading of the poem based on a few selections.

The idea of retribution, an approximate synonym for revenge, appears very early. When Scyld Scefing floats mysteriously into the leaderless Danish kingdom, he is a helpless child, but *hē þæs frōfre gebād* (l. 7) "he experienced consolation for that" by becoming a powerful king. His power is revealed in his ability to take away mead benches, exact tribute, and terrify enemy warriors (ll. 5, 6, 11), and his greatness is summed up in a formula which seems to me more negative, as seen from a Christian perspective, than positive: *Þæt wæs gōd cyning!* (l. 11) "That was a good king!" Much later in the poem, the very same formula is used of Beowulf when he becomes king (l. 2390).

Scyld Scefing's great grandson is King Hrothgar, who built the great hall Heorot, whose greatness is qualified by the ominous announcement that Hrothgar's own son-in-law will rise against him in *ecg-hete* "sword hate" and burn the hall (ll. 82, 84). This episode, which does not occur in the time frame of the poem, is projected in more detail when Beowulf returns to his own kingdom and speculates what will happen as a result of Hrothgar's daughter's marriage to Ingeld of the Heathobards as a pledge of peace. Beowulf, in a rare moment of political and psychological insight, suggests,

Oft seldan hwǣr
æfter lēod-hryre lȳtle hwīle
bon-gār būgeð, þēah sēo brȳd duge! (ll. 2029b-2031)

But seldom anywhere, after a slaying, will the death-spear
rest, even for a while, though the bride be good!

He then imagines a scenario in which at the wedding an old man of the Heathobards, past the age of fighting, will point out to a young warrior a sword hanging from the belt of a Dane and ask if he remembers that it was the sword of his father, slain by Danes. One thing will lead to another, and slaughter will resume and Ingeld's *wīf-lufan . . . cōlran weorðað* (ll, 2065-66) "wife-love will grow cool." There is no way, Beowulf implies, to stop the cycle of revenge.

Returning to the early part of the poem, just after the foreshadowing of the events just described comes the first mention of Grendel. His *rēoc ond rēþe* (l. 122) "savage and reckless" attacks on the men of Heorot are without motivation, it seems. He is not moved by vengeance, but the poet credits his evil nature to his lineage; he is a descendant of Cain, whose motive for killing his brother Abel stems more from jealousy than vengeance. Yet the poet reminds us that for Cain's deed God took vengeance: *Scyppend . . . þone cwealm gewræc* (ll. 106-07). This, while acknowledging the world's law of retribution, perhaps interjects the Christian doctrine that vengeance belongs only to God, but such vengeance does not root out evil. Germanic society had evolved a wergild system as a means of bridling revenge, but the limitations of that system can be seen in the dealings with Grendel, who for many years has waged a one-creature war against Hrothgar's kingdom. *Sibbe ne wolde* "He wanted no peace," the poet says,

wið manna hwone mægenes Deniga,
feorh-bealo feorran, fēa þingian;
nē þǣr nǣnig witena wēnan þorfte

beorhtre bōte tō banan folmum. (ll. 154b-58)

with any of the men in the Danish host, to put off his killing,
settle it by payment; none of the counselors had any great
need to look for bright gifts from the hands of the slayer.

From the Christian point of view any solutions that the Danes try are doomed to failure. Least effective are their sacrifices to the pagan gods, which the Christian poet has transmuted into devils (ll. 175-88). Only a great force can deal with Grendel, and it is at this point that Beowulf enters the story.

When Beowulf arrives in Denmark, Hrothgar remembers that Ecgtheow, Beowulf's father, had found refuge with the Danes after his involvement with a feud, which Hrothgar had settled with a payment. He thinks that this is the reason that Beowulf has come to his aid (ll. 457-72), but Beowulf seems not to be aware of this story.

On the night of Day One in Denmark Beowulf and his men take charge of Heorot, and Grendel arrives as expected. What happens next is one of the most troubling episodes in Beowulf's career. He watches calmly as the monster grabs and eats Hondscio (the name appears only in line 2076), one of his close companions. It is possible that this act of sacrifice stems from the revenge motive, in that Beowulf could not justify his own attack on Grendel without a reason, since it is not his nation that has suffered from the monster.

I have already discussed at some length the events that follow the death of Grendel. It should be clear from the pattern that the poet has established that Grendel's mother acted from a sense of revenge when she attacked the hall on the next night, that she had not only the right to avenge her slain son but the obligation to do it. Unlike women in more polite society, she has the option to wreak revenge and not to mourn. In turn, Beowulf, on behalf of Hrothgar, must continue the cycle. The poet, with fearful economy, has shown us the only logical outcome of

vengeance, the total destruction of a nation or a family, though we must admit it is with little regret that we witness the end of the Grendels.

The patterns of vengeance that run through Part 2 of *Beowulf* are extensive and complex. Many of the feuds that appear earlier in the poem reappear with greater intensity, including the long-running and confusing conflict between the Geats and the Swedes. When the messenger announces that the death of Beowulf will cause the Swedes to renew the old feud, because his strength was the only deterrent, we get the feeling that the Geatish nation is doomed to extinction (ll. 2999-3006). But the futility of the whole process is pointed up early in Part 2, when the notion of revenge is reduced to absurdity, for even the dragon displays the emotion. When part of his treasure, a cup, is taken, probably to be used to settle a feud, the dragon reacts in human terms: he seeks revenge by burning down the local houses:

Hord-weard onbād
earfoðlīce   oððæt ǣfen cwōm;
wæs ðā gebolgen   beorges hyrde
wolde se lāða   līge forgyldan
drinc-fæt dȳre. (ll. 2302b-05a)

The hoard-keeper waited, miserable, impatient, till evening came. By then the barrow-serpent was swollen with rage, wanted revenge for that precious cup, a payment by fire.

The whole Anglo-Saxon notion of justice is reduced to a bestial reaction to the loss of a "precious" one with material value only.

The poet has Beowulf narrate from his own background the most touching instance of the futility of revenge. In his youth he was taken in by King Hrethel of the Geats, father of Hygelac and of two others, Herebeald and Haethcyn. One day Haethcyn accidently shot and killed Herebeald with an arrow. For the death of a son, a man feels he must

receive some compensation, but he can neither gain wergild from nor take revenge on his own family.

Þæt wæs feoh-lēas gefeoht,   fyrenum gesyngad,
hreðre hyge-mēðe;   sceolde hwæðre swā þēah
æðeling unwrecen   ealdres linnan. (ll. 2441-43)

There was no way to pay for a death so wrong, blinding the heart, yet still the prince had lost his life, lay unavenged.

Hrethel's dilemma is compared to that of an old man whose son is hanged from the gallows; he is powerless to *him helpe . . . ænige gefremman* (ll. 2448-49) "help him at all." In his helpless grief and mourning, Hrethel falls into despair. He can not hate his son, but he can not love him either, and he dies of a broken heart.

Beowulf is a complex character in a complex poem. We find him throughout an admirable character whose motives are never petty and his actions always heroic. I suspect that the Christian poet admired him as much as we do, and he regretted that he could not make of him a Christian, but he (the poet) had too keen a sense of history for that. Beowulf was *mægenes strengest // on þǣm dæge / þysses līfes* (ll. 196-97; 789-90) "the strongest man in those days of this life," but the poet finally did not believe that he met the standards of a Christian either in behavior or understanding. Because he could not have known the Christian message that salvation not satisfaction is the ultimate end of man, he was doomed to a limited life, his highest aspiration to win fame before death. "That is the best memorial for a man after he is gone," Beowulf says (ll. 1388-89), an attitude that is echoed in the last, slightly discordant, lines of the poem:

cwædon þæt hē wǣre   wyruld-cyninga,
mannum mildust   ond mon ðwærust,
lēodum līðost   ond lof-geornost. (ll. 3180-82)

They said that he was of world kings the kindest to his men,
the most courteous man, the best to his people, and the most
eager for fame.

Note

[1] All quotations from *Beowulf* are from the dual-language edition edited by Chickering. Translations are also by Chickering, with some modifications.

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A World Ransomed: Shakespeare on Video

John Howard Wilson
Dakota Wesleyan University

I teach an upper-level class in Shakespeare; I have taught it twice to classes of about twenty students, a few more times as directed studies for one or two students. I do not claim to be the most experienced teacher of Shakespeare, and I do not pretend to have all the answers. I wish only to report my experience, hoping to provoke discussion of how we teach Shakespeare and what we want to accomplish.

I taught Shakespeare for the first time in my first year as an assistant professor, two and a half years ago. I relied almost entirely on myself, hoping to dazzle students with brilliant lectures, extracting the last bit of meaning from every scene of the twelve plays we were reading. I used videotape only once, playing a few scenes from *Richard II*. I did not seriously consider any more extensive use of video, dismissing it as a crutch for teachers less dedicated than I was. Despite my devoted preparation and painstaking analyses, students did not show much curiosity or enthusiasm. A few followed my lectures and took extensive notes, doing what I expected of "good" students, the type who would not have complained if I had done nothing but give dramatic readings. The others were much less involved. Confronted with only printed texts and my wayward explications, they seemed uncertain, confused, bored, listless, even morose. They became more and more passive throughout the semester, responding only to the most obvious questions, with only the simplest replies. I noticed these developments and lamented them, but the extent of my preparation led me to blame the students, who seemed not to be working hard enough, i.e., not as hard as I was. Still, the experience bothered me, and I began to consider ways of altering my approach.

Opportunity came the following year, when my chairman went on sabbatical, and the rest of the department had to decide how to spend the money allotted us. I was able to acquire five tapes: *Romeo and Juliet*, *Julius Caesar*, *Hamlet*, *King Lear*, and *Macbeth*. Students' performance in class, on papers, and on exams had led me to believe that most were unable to understand Shakespeare's language, unable to imagine a scene based on simple stage directions and dialogue. I still didn't know how I wanted to use the tapes in class, but I hoped that films of the plays might give students a clearer idea of characters, scenes, and meaning. I also began to relinquish the preconception that the plays are primarily texts to be explicated, puzzles to be solved. Now they seem to me written almost exclusively for performance, and any performance is likely to be more interesting than my analysis of imagery, irony, parallel, or early modern English.

The question was how to use the tapes. When I was a teaching assistant at the University of Michigan, I worked with a course called Composition and Shakespeare. Students could take it as an alternative to Introductory Composition, writing about plays instead of what they did on their summer vacation. Tapes of the plays were shown at night in one of the libraries, so that we could discuss productions without spending any time in class viewing them. Discussions rarely involved more than a few students, since only a few were able to see the tapes before any given class, and since only a few went to see the tapes anyway. The night-time method is attractive, since it keeps class time free, but the students I work with are involved in sports, part-time jobs, extra-

curricular activities, and so forth, too busy to be bothered with additional assignments.

I decided to use the tapes in class, abandoning another preconception, that the professor's job is to talk. Several options still remained. I could run the whole film through two or three class meetings, then ask students to discuss it and its relation to the play. I have never tried this approach, since it seems likely to be ineffective. Though students seem to prefer tapes to teachers, they also seem mesmerized by too much television. They have a hard time remembering what they have seen the day before, let alone the week before. I wanted to be able to make some points about the film and the play as the production unfolded and I decided to show each tape scene by scene, ten, fifteen, or twenty minutes at a time. This method worked very well. Students could follow the plot from beginning to end, strengthening their sense of what happens and why. I could raise questions about actors' interpretation of characters, directors' conception of scenes, and decisions to delete scenes or lines, encouraging students to analyze video presentations they tend uncritically to accept. Stopping the tape and turning on the lights discourage dozing. Students seemed to grow more confident, more willing to comment on the play or at least the production of it, and some called attention to features of the films I hadn't noticed. Trying to do *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The First Part of Henry IV* without tapes confirmed my suspicion that students were getting little if anything out of the texts, as they refused to participate in discussion and, when questioned more closely, admitted that they just didn't get it. I also did *The Tempest* without a tape, at the end of the semester, and these sessions went a bit better, students trying to imagine how they would film the play. I don't think this exercise helped them to understand the language of the play, but it did help them to understand the actions and characters, their imaginations stimulated by fifteen weeks' study of plays in production. The whole experience was much more enjoyable than the first time I taught the course, and I would recommend using more tape to anyone having trouble teaching Shakespeare.

Positive as my experience was, I recognize the limitations of this approach. Taking time to watch two-hour or two-and-a-half-hour films in class means extending discussion of a single play for two weeks, so that it is possible to study only seven or eight plays in a fifteen-week semester. Reacting to film tends to focus discussion on scenes and characters, not on language. Students have a hard time with Shakespeare's diction and imagery, and more attention to them might better prepare students for reading plays other than those studied in class. By viewing each film scene by scene, I spent too much time on unimportant transitions, time that could have been spent talking about longer, more complicated scenes. It will take more preparation, but getting a precise count for each scene should make it possible to skip some parts without wasting time rewinding and fast-forwarding. Skipping may detract from students' understanding of the play, and it may prove difficult to eliminate scenes, since the director, writers, and editors will already have eliminated whatever they consider superfluous. The laser disc makes it much easier to skip a scene, but these devices have yet to appear on my campus, and I wonder if someone will soon get around to putting the plays on disc.

While I wait, I have been trying to imagine other ways of using tapes in class. I have been able to acquire a few more—*A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Henry V*, a second version of *Hamlet*, a second version of *Macbeth*. My class watched the 1948 and 1990 versions of *Hamlet*, though I think we might have used our time more productively, especially since the students panned Laurence Olivier's production. If you have access to two versions, you might try comparing certain scenes. The graveyard scenes in the two *Hamlets* are, for instance, both interesting and brief, among the best scenes in the films, and I would like to compare them for you now.

The most obvious difference is the black-and-white of 1948 and the color of 1990. Olivier's film seems preoccupied with the heads of the actors, evident in the first glimpse of the Gravedigger and in the way the shadow of Olivier's head falls directly on a skull Hamlet does not yet

know to be Yorick's. Such an effect is uncommon in a color film, and calling attention to it can help to reduce students' resistance to black-and-white, an anachronism in the age of Turner.

Learning about cinematic style is fine, but it is hardly enough reason to teach Shakespeare through video. The productions should also show students something about the characters, the scenes, and the play as a whole. On the simplest level, these scenes help students to visualize what many would otherwise find unintelligible, an important and symbolic moment, when Hamlet goes to the grave to confront first Yorick's death, then Ophelia's, then his own. The actors convey the script's humor and aggressiveness, qualities most students have difficulty recognizing in printed dialogue. The interpretation of character is probably the most interesting aspect of these two scenes. The Gravedigger is irresistible in both versions, cheerful, witty, grotesque, played admirably by Stanley Holloway in 1948 and Trevor Peacock in 1990. Hamlet speaks almost the same lines each time, but Olivier and Mel Gibson manage the role in very different ways. Olivier's Hamlet is cerebral, almost out of this world, picking up the skull before he knows whose it is, then, on finding out, establishing intimacy with Yorick, whispering to the skull, holding it next to his own, almost kissing it. Sticking with Shakespeare, Olivier has Hamlet say that the skull is abhorred in his imagination, but it seems not to be, as he laughs when the dirt, or desiccated brain, falls out on his lap. Fond as he is of the skull, Olivier's Hamlet is also curiously detached, simply tossing it into the grave when the funeral procession appears.

Gibson's Hamlet is more visceral, more amused by the Gravedigger, more moved upon learning the fate of his old friend, more clearly appalled by the skull. Gibson and the director, Franco Zeffirelli, seem to have shot the scene with Olivier in mind, trying to do theirs differently. Someone decided to place the skull on a mound, leaving Gibson free to act in a posture more confrontational than Olivier's. The skull appears beside the face not of Hamlet, but of the Gravedigger, who simultaneously shoves it into the foreground and reveals its identity. The skull on the mound is a bit awkward, in that Gibson has to point to Yorick's lips, which would seem not to hang but to be covered by grass and dirt. Still, the next shot is effective, skull in the foreground, a close-up of Gibson's face forming the background, the character appropriately sympathetic, nostalgic, and philosophical. Gibson's departure from Olivier is even more striking when the two films are viewed in their entirety, and the different interpretations contribute to the creation of quite different moods. Their differences can be described as strengths or weaknesses, as results of different experiences in acting, or as attempts to play to different audiences, and these judgments can lead students to a greater appreciation of acting and directing. In teaching Shakespeare, it is more important to use different performances to show how complicated Shakespeare's characters are and how variously they can be interpreted.

It would be interesting to compare other scenes from the two versions of *Hamlet*—the encounter with the Ghost, the interview with Ophelia, the soliloquy, the play within the play, the argument in the Queen's chamber, and the sword fight. Actors' handling of other roles could also be compared: Felix Aylmer's Polonius is a doddering old fool in 1948, but Ian Holm gives him a sinister side in 1990. Peter Cushing gives us a conventional Osric in 1948, effeminate and amusing, but John McEnery's in 1990 is much more subdued. Jean Simmons's Ophelia in 1948 is obviously innocent, almost childlike, unprepared for the trauma that awaits her, but Helena Bonham-Carter's in 1990 is sensual, distraught from the beginning, torn apart by the violence of her own impulses as well as the dislocations in her world. These contrasts could be extended almost endlessly, but they depend on having two versions of the same play. I want to shift now to selection of tapes, in case anyone is building a collection, as I have been for the last year and a half.

The BBC has produced all the plays, but I have not been able to identify a distributor in the United States. Productions most widely available here seem to be those that were released from studios, though there are a few from British television. Of the two *Hamlet*s, the 1990

version is much more appealing to students, partly because it's in color, partly because it features actors they recognize. It is a fine film with many impressive performances, though Olivier's production is equally fine. Zeffirelli has also directed *The Taming of the Shrew*, with Richard Burton and Elizabeth Taylor, and *Romeo and Juliet*. The former sacrifices a lot of dialogue in favor of action and scenery, but the latter is a faithful production of the play, indulgent in early scenes, a bit rushed toward the end. Thames Television taped a live presentation of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in 1963, the late Benny Hill as Bottom, the production surprisingly good. Kenneth Branagh won praise for his recent *Henry V*, worthy of comparison with Olivier's 1944 film. There have been at least two films of *Julius Caesar*. The 1953 version features James Mason, John Gielgud, and Marlon Brando. Excellent in places, it skims later scenes. The other was finished in 1970, but I have not seen it. Granada Television did *King Lear* in the early 1980s, Olivier in the leading role, in a competent if not brilliant production. *Macbeth* seems to have attracted the most filmmakers, perhaps because it is bloody and short. Roman Polanski could hardly resist such material, in 1971 releasing a film I have yet to see. I acquired Orson Welles's 1948 *Macbeth*, hoping for the best, since he did it only seven years after *Citizen Kane*. I was disappointed by unnecessary stunts, bogus Scottish accents, and liberal rearrangement of text. I have since acquired a more faithful version from Thames Television, Michael Jayston as Macbeth, but I can still use a few scenes from Welles for comparison. I have ordered a film of *The Tempest* Richard Burton did in 1963, but it hasn't arrived yet. Next time I teach Shakespeare I intend to concentrate on these eight plays: *Romeo and Juliet*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Henry V*, *Julius Caesar*, *Hamlet*, *King Lear*, *Macbeth*, and *The Tempest*. Anyone could argue for other plays, but it happens that these are available in videotaped versions students find accessible. Five of the eight are tragedies, producers' favorite type, comedies a distant second, histories almost untouched. Students might get a distorted sense of

Shakespeare's repertoire from such a course, but I would contend that they get more from video than from reading and lecture.

I am not advocating the replacement of printed texts with videotapes, only greater use of tape to illuminate text. I have never seen an ideal adaptation of a Shakespeare play, and even productions I admire delete scenes, distort action and motivation, and exaggerate the importance of a few lines. The script often differs from what appears on the screen, and the discrepancy can show students something about the difficult art of the film and the variety of problems Shakespeare creates for players and producers. To appreciate the discrepancy, students need some sort of text, and Signet Classics are an appropriate choice for courses using a lot of video. Sylvan Barnet, the general editor, describes each play's production for stage and screen, assessing most of the films I have mentioned. Barnet's judgments are sometimes questionable, and students seem to enjoy disagreeing with an authority. They also enjoy spending little on books, and eight Signets can be had for $25. Videotapes are also inexpensive, about $20 apiece, though prices vary widely, and one does well to shop around. A good collection can be built for $250.

Mentioning money brings me back to my title. The First Gentleman in *The Winter's Tale* reports that Leontes seems to have "heard of a world ransomed, or one destroyed," appropriate metaphors for Shakespeare with video, and Shakespeare without. The productions are inherently flawed but often beautiful visions, obtained at the price of having one's imagination conditioned by actors and directors, whose interpretations affect all subsequent reactions to the play. *To ransom* can mean "to save" as well as "to pay," and I really believe videos save some students from abandoning Shakespeare out of frustration. Reading little and understanding less, these students tend to give up, and for them the plays amount to a world destroyed. The camera captures something they have trouble seeing in their mind's eye, as the actors transform abstruse printed matter into powerful emotion and enchanting poetry. From there, a few may even go back to the text of the play, trying to

ind the inspiration for such strange characters and actions. Videotaped ersions of Shakespeare are far from perfect, and I have no idea how nany worlds they ransom, but they do at least help us to present the nost influential plays in the English language to students unable or nwilling to appreciate them in any other form.

Works Cited

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