

**‘All’s Well That Ends Well: Shakespearean Echoes in
Heyer’s Regency Novels’**

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Part 3
Sources

All's Well That Ends Well: Shakespearean echoes in Heyer's Regency novels

Lisa Hopkins

In *Mansfield Park* Henry Crawford declares that 'Shakespeare one gets acquainted with without knowing how. It is a part of an Englishman's constitution'.¹ In Fanny Burney's *Evelina* Sir Clement Willoughby quotes *Twelfth Night* by comparing the heroine to 'patience on a monument'.² Georgette Heyer, influenced by Austen and Burney in so many respects,³ also posits a world in which characters possess an easy familiarity with Shakespeare's work. As Jennifer Kloester declares:

Heyer took pleasure, both conscious and unconscious, in paying homage in her writing to her favorite authors: using Shakespearean quotations as book titles and frequently taking Shakespearean, Austenian and Dickensian characters and plots as the starting point for her own plots and characters.⁴

Laurie Osborne, noting that 'Shakespearean references frequently appear in that most vilified of American genres, the romance novel', observes that:

Shakespeare appears most often in two sub-genres, Regencies and historical romances. Both genres are overtly, even aggressively patriarchal in their double standards and policing of female virtue. Both offer dominant men who are subdued and matched by women who effectively subvert masculine control over their lives and marital choices. Since marriage remains the goal and resolution, however, patriarchy remains intact. Shakespearean allusions become pivotal in this paradoxical combination of female agency and patriarchal dynastic demands.⁵

Allusion to Shakespeare, whose comedies are celebrated equally for the wit and resourcefulness of their heroines and for their unabashed use of multiple marriages, might indeed seem an appropriate means of helping to keep the marriage plot acceptable to readers who might otherwise find it trite or overly conservative. However, it is not only the comedies on which Heyer draws; she also deploys allusions to tragedies and to the Roman play *Antony and Cleopatra* to suggest that it is really better to live life a little less in alt than Shakespeare's suffering heroes do. It is my aim in this chapter to explore what Osborne calls 'Heyer's complex, often unmarked, appropriations of Shakespeare',⁶ and to argue that they play an important part in the creation of her preferred brand of urbane, witty comedy.

Cheltenham tragedies

Heyer is a very theatrically-minded novelist. In *The Unknown Ajax* Hugo directs the rest of the family in what is effectively a play, casting and costuming them to deceive Lieutenant Ottershaw. The most overtly theatrical of her novels is *Venetia*, in which the eponymous heroine discovers that her mother is alive when she spots her in the opposite box during a performance. *Venetia* also uses theatrical terms when thinking about Damerel: 'whether he was the villain or merely a minor character, it was useless to deny that he had infused life into a dull play'.⁷ Most suggestively, Damerel himself asks sardonically

Did you fancy a tragedy to lie behind me? Nothing so romantic, I fear: it was a farce – not one of the ingredients lacking, down to the inevitable heroic meeting at dawn, with both combatants coming off scatheless (91).

Damerel's disavowal of tragedy affords us an important clue to the ways in which Heyer uses theatrical allusions. Of all dramatists, she turns most often to Shakespeare. In *A Civil Contract* Adam's mother advises her son to 'Recollect what the poet says! I'm not sure *which* poet, but very likely it was Shakespeare, because it generally is, though why I can't imagine!';⁸ in *The Toll-Gate* Nell tells her grandfather that Captain Staple is 'Like Hotspur, you know, in that passage which always makes you laugh!';⁹ suggesting a household in which Shakespeare is regularly read aloud. I have discussed elsewhere Heyer's uses of Shakespearean quotation in her detective fiction;¹⁰ here I am going to argue that in her

Regency novels she uses Shakespeare in two principal ways, sometimes to support atmosphere and sometimes to puncture it.

This distinction is slightly nuanced by a clutch of references to *Antony and Cleopatra*. Heyer normally has little time for regrets; her characters know that they ought not to dwell on relationships which can never develop. However *Antony and Cleopatra* is a play which glamorises nostalgia, and when Heyer alludes to it she does allow a more elegiac note to be sounded, even if only briefly. Generally, however, she uses Shakespearean tragedy to mock excessive emotion, while the resilient, cross-dressing heroines of his comedies are models for her own enterprising young women who – like Viola and Rosalind – often ensure not only their own marriages but also those of others.

Heyer's Regency novels range widely across the Shakespearean canon. In *The Spanish Bride* Johnny Kincaid observes when he falls out of love 'Richard was himself again!'¹¹ In *Friday's Child* Hero informs the astonished Ferdy that both her name and his are 'out of Shakespeare' – specifically she is out of *Much Ado About Nothing* and he is 'in *The Tempest*, I think'; she reminds Sherry too that his name, Anthony, is found in *Antony and Cleopatra*.¹² *Friday's Child* also has characters named Isabella and Prosper, the first recalling *Measure for Measure* and the second offering another echo of *The Tempest*. When Sherry warns his uncle, 'if my mother chooses to let you batten upon her, she may do it, but you won't batten on me any longer, by Jupiter you won't!' (17), he uses the same phrase that Hamlet applies to his uncle when he asks his mother why she wants to 'batten on this moor'.¹³ In *Frederica* the hero quotes 'rumour ... is a pipe' from *Henry IV, Part Two*, but forgets everything except the first few words (26); this is ironically appropriate, since the passage in question is all about inaccurate transmission of information.

Another reference occurs in *Sprig Muslin*, with the would-be poet Mr Ross, who believes that there is promising matter for a dramatic tragedy, in blank verse, in the Divorce and Death of Queen Katherine of Aragon. 'Only, did Amanda feel that it would be presumptuous for a lesser poet to tread in the steps of Shakespeare?'¹⁴ This question takes us back to *Henry VIII*, the play from which Henry Crawford reads aloud in *Mansfield Park*, and whatever Amanda may feel, the reader is unlikely to rate Mr Ross's chances of equalling Shakespeare's handling of the theme very highly.¹⁵ In *Arabella* Mr Beaumaris is 'the god of his idolatry' for the dog Ulysses,¹⁶ echoing Ben Jonson's praise of Shakespeare. A less expected presence is *Troilus and Cressida*, but the play's martial

theme meant that it enjoyed something of a revival during the Second World War.¹⁷ We should therefore not be surprised that *The Unknown Ajax* both quotes and takes its title from this work,¹⁸ nor that the heroine of *False Colours* is called Cressida.¹⁹

Shakespearean quotation reaches its peak in *Venetia*. Heyer observed of the book that 'my hero ... is rather given to quotation'²⁰ and actually so is *Venetia*: between them they echo *Julius Caesar* with 'lend me your ears' (7) and 'most unkindest cut of all' (212); *As You Like It* with 'Oh, how full of briars is this working-day world' (28); *Othello* with 'pestilent, complete knave' (30) and 'My reputation, Iago' (31); *Antony and Cleopatra* with 'my salad days' (55) and 'custom had staled her variety' (90); *Much Ado About Nothing* with 'Everything handsome about you' (56); and *Hamlet* with 'We could an if we would' (88), 'Alas, poor Yorick' (129), 'assumed that virtue' (149), 'a consummation devoutly to be wished' (314) and Damerel's persistent characterisation of *Venetia* as 'a green girl' (87). We also hear of Old Capulet and Lear (92), and *Romeo and Juliet* is directly quoted in 'parting is such sweet sorrow' (284). In all two tragedies, two comedies and two Roman plays are quoted from in the novel. The resulting effect is a generic uncertainty, increasing our sense that *Venetia*, which includes both divorce and disability, is a little darker than is usual for Heyer's Regency romances, leaving us perhaps not quite sure where the narrative is likely to go.

Venetia's range of quotations neatly illustrates the different ways in which Shakespearean allusion is deployed in Heyer's Regency novels. Some plays are evoked only in order to be satirised, or to create a bathetic effect. Heyer is particularly fond of echoing *Hamlet*, but she does so usually to create a contrast with tragedy rather than in support of any tragic atmosphere. In *Arabella*, for instance, Lady Bridlington 'vowed there had never been anything to equal Kean's *Hamlet* on the English stage, but derived considerably more enjoyment from the farce which followed this soul-stirring performance'.²¹ Quotations from *Hamlet* are typically misquoted, misunderstood or misapplied, generally to comic effect. In *The Nonesuch* Lindeth comments that Waldo is 'Hoist with his own petard', which Waldo mischievously tells Tiffany is improper.²² Jenny, the heroine of *A Civil Contract*, goes to see the actor Edmund Kean in *Hamlet* and *Othello* (216) and Adam's melodramatic widowed mother enters 'trailing yards of crape, mobled with black lace' (16) – an echo of the First Player's '*But who – ah, woe! had seen the mobbled queen*', which is interrupted by Hamlet with "'The mobbled queen'", to which Polonius adds 'That's good' (2.2.498–500). Later

Adam looks at his mother and ‘view[ed] with dismay the trappings of her woe’ (84), echoing Hamlet’s description of his black clothes as ‘the trappings and the suits of woe’ (1.2.86). The final scene of *Hamlet* might possibly be glanced at in *Regency Buck* when Peregrine cries ‘The wine! What have you put in the wine?’ (290). Again, however, the dominating note is one of bathos: the wine is drugged rather than poisoned and Worth’s intentions are benign. In *False Colours* Kit comments to his mother that problems ‘come not single spies, but in battalions, don’t they?’; her mistrustful response, ‘That sounds to me like a quotation’,²³ is correct, as Claudius in *Hamlet* tells Gertrude that ‘When sorrows come, they come not single spies, / But in battalions’ (4.5.78–9). In Shakespeare’s tragedy the remark refers to multiple deaths, however, thus putting into perspective the rather less serious problems faced by the characters in *False Colours*.

Although Lady Denville is suspicious rather than entirely certain that what Kit offers her is a quotation, Heyer is confident that her readers will be on surer ground. In *Cotillion*, for example, Freddy

conducted himself very creditably at Shakespeare’s grave, saying that at all events he knew who *he* was, and adding a further touch of erudition by telling Kitty an interesting anecdote of having escorted his mother to the theatre once to see Kean in *Hamlet*, and of having dreamt, during this memorable performance, that he walked smash into a fellow he hadn’t set eyes on for years. ‘And, by Jove, that’s just what I did do, the very next day!’ he said.²⁴

Freddy may know who Shakespeare is, but he is wrong about where he is buried: what he has seen in Westminster Abbey is a memorial plaque, *not* Shakespeare’s grave, which is in Holy Trinity Church in Stratford-upon-Avon. There is also a quiet nod to *Hamlet* when Kitty first proposes the sightseeing tour to Freddy. The ‘list of all the historic edifices she wished to see ... made his eyes start from his head with horror’ (133), a comment appearing to glance at the Ghost’s warning that he could make his son’s ‘two eyes like stars start from their spheres’ (1.5.17). The same phrase also occurs in *The Nonesuch* when Tiffany tells Laurie that she is going to London: ‘Mr Calver’s carefully arranged locks were too lavishly pomaded to rise on end, but his eyes showed a tendency to start from their sockets’ (259). Wilfred Steane also refers to Hamlet in *Charity Girl*, noting crisply ‘I am wholly at a loss to understand why anyone should have supposed me to have shuffled off this mortal coil.

In the words of the poet. Shakespeare, I fancy'.²⁵ He is right here, but less successful when he later declares that Desford 'has been like a woodcock, justly slain by its own treachery. Or words to that effect. My memory fails me, but I know a woodcock comes into it' (231). It does – but the lines for which he gropes are those of Laertes, 'Why, as a woodcock to mine own springe, Osric. / I am justly kill'd with mine own treachery' (5.2.312–13), a phrasing slightly more elegant than Steane's version. Both Steane and Freddy possess a little learning, but Heyer clearly depends on her reader possessing rather more, and so being able to enjoy the misrepresentation and misapplication of Shakespeare in general and of *Hamlet* in particular.

Heyer noted of her detective novel *Penhallow* that her friend Carola Oman 'calls it my "Lear"'.²⁶ *King Lear* is also used in her Regency novels, again primarily to create bathos. In *Bath Tangle* Rotherham has a cousin Cordelia and Mrs Floore's maid calls Emily 'a serpent's tooth' (254) – an epithet also recalled in *The Grand Sophy*, when Sir Horace asks his sister 'I suppose you didn't play Ombersley false, did you?' (8). She denies it, but concedes that Ombersley called Charles 'a serpent's tooth' (9), King Lear's term for a thankless child. Letty's aunt in *The Masqueraders* is also called Cordelia, and sees the difficulties inherent in Letty's situation rather than any possible solution. In *Lady of Quality* Ninian Elmore too has a sister called Cordelia and another called Lavinia, a name that appears in *Titus Andronicus*; he laments that Cordelia in particular speaks to him 'as though she had been acting in some tragedy or another' (215).

Macbeth and *Othello* are rarer presences in Heyer's work, but they do appear. In *The Reluctant Widow* Francis Cheviot echoes Macbeth by terming sleep 'Great nature's second course' (233) and John Carlyon by referring to Louis De Castres' 'taking-off' (193), while in *Sprig Muslin* Sir Gareth tells Lady Hester that her brother and the general are 'all sound and fury' (259). In *Frederica* Charles knew that if he was to persuade Charis and Endymion not to marry by special licence he had to 'keep them to the sticking point' (372) and *Othello* too is evoked when Charis, like Desdemona, 'turned as white as her shift' (337). In *Regency Buck* Peregrine is nearly sure that the play he has seen was '*Othello*, or some such thing' (41); there is also a touch of *Othello* in *The Reluctant Widow* when John observes of Eustace, 'There are some men, ma'am, who have such twisted natures that they cannot see virtue in another without hating it' (51). In all these cases, the note of tragedy is sounded only to be disavowed, and is connected only to characters who are peripheral to the narrative or soon disappear from it.

From *Romeo and Juliet* to *Antony and Cleopatra*

Above all, *Romeo and Juliet* is typically evoked only in order to trivialise the sufferings of overly emotional lovers. The play is inappropriate to Heyer's world because her heroes and heroines typically 'marry in', meaning that their partners are not only of their own class but acceptable to those whose opinion they value (one reason why Lydia's good opinion of Jenny is emphasised in *The Convenient Marriage*) and remaining in the class into which they were. Romeo and Juliet marry to disoblige their families and are thus for Heyer an example to be avoided. In *The Nonesuch* we hear of 'the extraordinary revulsion of feeling experienced by young Mr Montague when he first clapped eyes on Miss Capulet!' (137), while Laurence shows his own folly in describing Waldo and Miss Trent as 'star-crossed lovers' (244). The narrator ironically calls Charis and Endymion 'star-crossed lovers' in *Frederica* (334); later the hero Alverstoke refers to the pair as 'this very boring Romeo and Juliet' (375). In *Bath Tangle* 'Lady Serena sat down at the head of the table, commanding the star-crossed lovers to come and take their places, as though she were presiding over a nursery meal' (276) and Rotherham complains that 'What I *thought* to find here was Emily playing Juliet to Gerard's Romeo!' (299). Reference to the play is also made in *The Corinthian*; when Pen tells Richard about the romance of Piers and Lydia, he drily observes 'For myself, I find the theme of Montague and Capulet hopelessly outmoded'.²⁷ In *Sprig Muslin* the schemes of Mr Ross and Amanda are presented in ironic terms: 'Perched on the stable-ladder, a modern Romeo and his Juliet discussed ways and means' (161). Some of these couples marry and others do not. None is ever allowed to contract a secret marriage in the way that Romeo and Juliet do, however, because – as Charles explains to Charis and Endymion in *Frederica* – that would be not only reprehensible, but also very silly.

The obvious exception to this use of tragedy to puncture atmosphere rather than to support it is *Cousin Kate*, the nearest Heyer comes to melodrama or the Gothic. Torquil echoes Gertrude by saying 'There is a willow grows aslant a brook' and Hamlet by worrying about bad dreams;²⁸ he subsequently goes mad, kills his mother in her bedroom as Gertrude thinks Hamlet might do to her and drowns himself as Ophelia does. Kate expects him to encounter 'more attractive metal' (135) than herself, echoing Hamlet's description of Ophelia as 'metal more attractive' (3.2.108), even as Lady Broome compliments her on having 'even been managing all the household affairs, *to the manner*

born, Delabole tells me!' (260), quoting Hamlet's observation that he is 'native here / And to the manner born' (1.4.14–15). Lady Broome also tells Kate 'You're not a green girl!' (266), Polonius's term for Ophelia, before saying 'I am ... going to ask you to look at two pictures' (271), just as Hamlet shows Gertrude miniatures of his father and uncle; Kate also twice uses 'batten' (95 and 109), the word Hamlet applies to the way Gertrude looks at those pictures. Later Philip says, 'This, I fancy, is where we kick the beam' (279), loosely echoing Laertes' promise to Ophelia that 'thy madness shall be paid with weight / Till our scale turn the beam' (4.5.156–7). After Torquil has died, Philip concentrates his efforts on ensuring that he can be buried in the churchyard (318), the issue that also exercises Laertes when Ophelia dies.

There are also hints of more serious uses of *Hamlet* in *The Quiet Gentleman*, where Gervase says to Martin 'choose a foil, and see what you can achieve with it! All these wild and whirling words don't impress me, you know' (61) – an echo of Horatio's reference to 'wild and whirling words' (1.5.139). Francis Cheviot in *The Reluctant Widow* similarly speaks of 'the funeral baked-meats'.²⁹ In both novels one family member really does kill, or intend to kill, another, and the recurring allusions to *Hamlet* contribute to the atmosphere of unease and violence. Generally, however, the purpose of such allusions is, as Heyer herself would have said, to depress pretension – specifically the type of pretension that consists of wanting conduct and putting on airs to be interesting.

There is also an ambivalence in the way in which *Antony and Cleopatra* is used. I have already observed that in *Friday's Child* Hero tells Sherry that he is out of *Antony and Cleopatra* (68), and the play is featured in other novels too. Gilly, the hero of *The Foundling*, says to Gideon 'I would I had thy inches' (69), directly quoting a remark made by Cleopatra to Antony.³⁰ The phrase 'my salad days', another direct quotation from Cleopatra (1.5.76), appears in *Frederica* (75–6 and 224), *The Corinthian* (41) and *Cousin Kate* (78). A reworking of *Antony and Cleopatra* – Dryden's *All for Love* – is evoked in *Black Sheep*, where Miles Calverleigh dismisses his attempt to elope with Celia Morville as 'All for Love, or the World Well Lost'.³¹ Most significantly, *Antony and Cleopatra* provides a structuring presence in *An Infamous Army*. Judith too refers to 'my salad days';³² Barbara says to Charles 'Oh! You! Infamous! I did not bargain for a man of your inches!' (77); Lady Vidal is named Augusta, the feminine version of Augustus, and disapproves of Barbara's love for Charles Audley, just as Augustus frowns on the relationship between Antony and Cleopatra, while Harriet Taverner plays

Octavia to Barbara's Cleopatra over Peregrine's affections. Barbara, a widow like Cleopatra, borrows Harry's clothes and goes out in public (239–40), just as Cleopatra 'put my tires and mantles' on Antony and herself 'wore his sword Philippan' (2.5.21–2). More obliquely, Judith acknowledges that Barbara may have had some excuse for her bad behaviour because 'It is as though your engagement to Charles was acted upon a stage, in all the glare of footlights, for the amusement of your acquaintances' (270); Cleopatra fears to be 'shown / In Rome' (5.2.207–8) and worries that

The quick comedians

Extemporally will stage us and present
Our Alexandrian revels; Antony
Shall be brought drunken forth; and I shall see
Some squeaking Cleopatra boy my greatness
I' th' posture of a whore.

(5.2.215–220)

There is a similar, unusually serious recognition in *An Infamous Army* of the potential psychological cost of living one's life in public view, especially in time of war. Above all, however, *Antony and Cleopatra* is a play about what might have been. This is why I think it may be glanced at in *A Civil Contract*, where the sight of her bedroom in the newly refurbished Lynton House makes Jenny exclaim 'Good gracious, does Papa think I'm Cleopatra?'.³³ Jenny has nothing of Cleopatra's glamour, but she does have something of the quality of falling short which Cleopatra fears will beset future attempts to tell her story. There is also something of the same sense of deficit as at the end of *An Infamous Army*, where Charles Audley has been physically reduced by his injuries in battle and is no longer quite the husband Barbara had expected. *Antony and Cleopatra*, a play that glamorises romance, in Heyer comes to stand for the gap between romance and reality. In stories where characters have really suffered, as opposed to putting on airs to be interesting, it is permissible for once to feel some regret, and *Antony and Cleopatra* is used to support that.

Present mirth hath present laughter

It is, however, comedy that Heyer really likes. In *Arabella* the heroine herself is hailed by an admirer as 'the New Titania' (5), a source of

much mirth to her brothers. In *Bath Tangle* Serena admits she can be 'shrewish' (112); this, together with the emphasis on her copper-coloured hair, may be a possible hint of Alastair ancestry, since the idea of taming is evoked in connection with both Mary, to whom Vidal says 'I'll tame you' (88), and Barbara, who complains that 'It was said that I had met my match, that I was tamed at last' (270). More definitely, however, it is a nod to *The Taming of the Shrew*.

As You Like It is a particular favourite of Heyer's. In *The Masqueraders*, where the old gentleman says 'My father was much addicted to the works of Shakespeare', Robin advises Sir Anthony to 'Thank God fasting',³⁴ echoing the disguised Rosalind's advice to Phoebe. In *The Black Moth* one of the signs that Belmanoir is redeemable is that he tells Diana 'There was no thought of pleasing you when I was christened',³⁵ echoing a comment of Orlando's to Jacques about Rosalind. In *The Toll-Gate* "Just as high as my heart," quoted Captain Sta[p]le' (119), again recalling a remark made by Orlando about Rosalind.

Heyer is also fond of *Much Ado about Nothing*. In *The Masqueraders* Sir Anthony's sister, who helps the lovers, is called Beatrice. In *Sylvester Tom's* father describes the supposed elopement as 'much ado about nothing' (150), while in *Charity Girl* Henrietta says 'I fear I am like Beatrice, and was born to speak all mirth and no matter!' (101). *The Reluctant Widow* also contains an echo of *Much Ado* when Elinor demands 'My lord, did you *indeed* marry me to that man?', to which he replies, 'Certainly not: I am not in orders. You were married by the vicar of the parish' (63). This echoes a pun made at the ill-omened first wedding of Hero and Claudio. Elinor's paradoxical status as both maid and widow also has a touch of *Measure for Measure* about it, and Sir Matthew Kendall's view of Eustace's death is 'that all was well that had ended well' (192). This is an allusion of which Heyer is particularly fond. She employs the same phrase when Edward grandly renounces Venetia, declaring that 'all's well that ends well' (301); Cecilia in *The Grand Sophy* similarly says 'All's well that ends well!' (315); Charles Trevor, having averted the marriage of Charis and Endymion, tells Frederica that 'all's well' (367); after the duel in *Friday's Child* Isabella remarks 'It is a case of all's well that ends well, in fact' (185); and in *The Talisman Ring* Sarah Thane acknowledges 'All's well that ends well, however' (261). The play is also a submerged presence in *Black Sheep*, since Miles Calverleigh is quoting from it when he says 'That I should love a bright particular star!' (157). For Heyer, the idea that all's well that ends well is a better rounding-off of a story than the 'consummation

devoutly to be wished' which her characters sometimes threaten to borrow from *Hamlet*. An example occurs in *The Corinthian*, where the hero is brooding on the fact that he has never been in love and supposes he never will be: "Which, I suppose," remarked Sir Richard to one of the new gas-lamps, "is a – is a consummation devoutly to be wished, since I am about to offer for Melissa Brandon" (25). The consummation for which Hamlet wishes is suicide – but in *The Corinthian* this can be considered only in comic terms, with the idea that Sir Richard might have killed himself rather than marry Melissa being merrily seized on by Melissa's brother as a hilarious indictment of his sister's lack of appeal.

More than any Shakespearean play, however, Heyer echoes *Twelfth Night*. It is the source of one of her favourite words, 'fadge'.³⁶ The play is a clear influence on her fondness for twin plots, a device central to *Sylvester* and *False Colours* and one that also lurks in the background of *The Masqueraders*, where Prudence and her brother Robin both cross-dress, and where Prudence has a duel forced upon her and a tale is spread that she is a fine swordsman (128), just as Sir Toby puffs Viola by saying she has been fencer to the Sophy (3.4.272 – a line that may also have exerted an influence over the title of *The Grand Sophy*). In *A Civil Contract* Adam's sister Lydia decides to be an actress following an amateur performance in *Twelfth Night* (38). The play is evoked again in *Devil's Cub* when Vidal addresses Mary as 'little Patience' (84), perhaps suggesting Viola's image of patience on a monument. In addition, when the landlord protests about Mary's having fired Vidal's pistol, Vidal's words to his steward, 'Fletcher, take the fool away' (99), echo Olivia's instruction about Feste (1.5.34). When Sir Roland Pommeroy visits Rule in *The Convenient Marriage*, 'From the movement of his lips it might have been supposed that he was silently rehearsing a speech' (257), rather as Viola begs Olivia to hear her out because she has learned the speech by heart. In *Cotillion* Jack Westruther addresses Olivia as 'Most radiant, exquisite, and unmatchable beauty' (210) and later calls her 'sovereign cruelty' (211), both epithets being among those applied to the Olivia of *Twelfth Night*. Meanwhile Freddy sapiently says 'Don't think it'll fadge' (192), a word used by Viola, while Meg, also like Viola, is discomposed at not being able to deliver a speech she had 'conned' (243). *Twelfth Night* is a particularly appropriate text to find in *Cotillion* because Orsino falls in love with Viola without ever noticing, since he believes that she is a boy and that he himself has an unquenchable passion for Olivia. This is also the underlying pattern of *Cotillion*. Its heroine Kitty believes herself to be in love with Jack Westruther while Freddy, the true hero of the novel, hides in plain sight because

he too is in a sense disguised, apparently a mere stopgap while Kitty (and perhaps the reader) waits for a more glamorous character to take centre stage.³⁷

Twelfth Night is a submerged but significant presence in *The Reluctant Widow*. Bereft of her father, Elinor, like Viola, resolves to work for her living. Nicky's artless declaration that 'I'm excessively sorry, but I have killed Eustace Cheviot!' (25) echoes Sebastian's admission to Olivia that he has hurt her cousin, and Carlyon shares something of Viola's philosophy when he says 'we must trust to come about' (30). Moreover, the fact that Nicky is only present at all because of a performing bear recalls the strongly developed bear imagery of *Twelfth Night*.³⁸ Bear metaphors are important elsewhere in Heyer too. As well as the obvious allusions to *Troilus and Cressida*, from which it takes its title and several quotations, *The Unknown Ajax* also has a subliminal bear motif. Anthea comments that Lord Darracott 'has been like a bear at the stake all these months' (9); he now proposes 'to lick [Hugo] into shape' (21). In *Venetia* we find not only three direct quotations from *Twelfth Night* – 'Item, two lips, indifferent red' (31), 'A blank, my lord' (56) and 'build me a willow cabin at your gates' (310) – but also Damere's remark to Venetia that Oswald 'should have taken you in his arms, like *this*, and not as though he were a bear' (130). Venetia herself describes Edward as 'as sulky as a bear' (299). The bear metaphor recurs in *The Toll-Gate*, with Nell's aunt said to have been 'sulky as a bear' (133), a phrase repeated in *A Civil Contract* when Jenny reports that Lydia is 'as sulky as a bear' (314). *Twelfth Night*, Shakespeare's last and greatest comedy, is the play to which Heyer turns when she wants to impart a sense of rightness and happiness to events and to create a sense of social continuity. Such a concept is emphasised most notably in *A Civil Contract*, in which a socially authorised marriage ultimately comes to seem a better idea than the love match that Adam initially thought he wanted.

It is in fact this sense that the partner originally desired may not actually be the best that helps to account for Heyer's interest in Shakespearean comedy. It is a frequent maxim in her books that few people marry their first loves – and may be the poorer for it when they do. In *The Grand Sophy* Cecilia Rivenhall wants to marry Augustus Fawnhope, but she will be much better off with Lord Charlbury, just as her brother Charles will be happier with Sophy than with Miss Wraxton; in *Bath Tangle* Hector Kirkby and Serena Carlow think they are in love with each other, but both are proved wrong. In each of Heyer's preferred Shakespearean comedies there is an insistence that

for the good of the community as a whole at least one character must accept a substitute partner rather than the one they initially desired: Orsino in *Twelfth Night* must marry Viola instead of Olivia; Phoebe in *As You Like It* must accept Silvius rather than Orlando; Bertram in *All's Well That Ends Well* must make do with Helena rather than Diana. In all of these cases individual wishes must give place to social necessity, in the same way that no Heyer couple can ever elope to Gretna Green. Heyer does recognise the pull of desire which cannot be fulfilled, which is why *Antony and Cleopatra* is allowed to lurk in the background in some of her books. However, with the single exception of *Cousin Kate*, full-blown tragedies such as *Hamlet* and *Romeo and Juliet* have no place in her Regency novels except as the weapons with which she pricks the bubbles of isolation and self-obsession.

Notes

- 1 Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 335.
- 2 Burney, *Evelina*, 41.
- 3 In *Bath Tangle* Fanny sees Fanny Burney (now Madame D'Arblay) and recalls that *Evelina* was her favourite book (Heyer, *Bath Tangle*, 69–70). For the influence of Austen, see for instance Hopkins, 'Georgette Heyer', 61–80.
- 4 Kloester, 'Literary Genius', 12–13.
- 5 Osborne, 'Romancing the Bard', 47–64, 47.
- 6 Osborne, 'Romancing the Bard', 48.
- 7 Heyer, *Venetia*, 36.
- 8 Heyer, *A Civil Contract*, 33.
- 9 Heyer, *The Toll-Gate*, 91.
- 10 Hopkins, 'Shakespearean Allusion'.
- 11 Heyer, *The Spanish Bride*, 353. *Richard III* is remembered elsewhere too: in *Royal Escape* Charles II exclaims 'A horse! A horse! My kingdom for a horse!' (Heyer, *Royal Escape*, 110).
- 12 Heyer, *Friday's Child*, 67–8.
- 13 Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, 3.4.66–7.
- 14 Heyer, *Sprig Muslin*, 145.
- 15 I am of course aware that *Henry VIII* was written partly by John Fletcher, but for Austen, Heyer's characters and probably Heyer herself it was a play by Shakespeare.
- 16 Heyer, *Arabella*, 177.
- 17 In Edmund Crispin's *The Case of the Gilded Fly* (1944) Nicholas Barclay says of Donald Fellowes and Yseut Haskell, 'I have a friend who's making a bloody fool of himself over her. "I am as true as truth's simplicity, and simpler than the infancy of truth" – you know' (25), while when Nigel sees Yseut coming out of Robert Warner's room 'Troilus' words came unbidden to his mind' (55) and Rachel West remembers 'my first part in London – a very tarty Helen in a production of *Troilus*' (164) (Crispin, *Gilded Fly*, 2009). Similarly in Ngaio Marsh's 1943 *Colour Scheme* 'Gaunt had begun to talk about the more difficult plays, of *Troilus and Cressida*, of *Henry VI* and finally of *Measure for Measure*' (Marsh, *Colour Scheme*, 2011, 152).
- 18 For example 'the elephant Ajax' (76), 'unknown Ajax' (232) and finally 'noble Ajax' (340), as well as 'vaulting ambition' (127, a reference to *Macbeth*) and 'most unkindest cut of all' (338, a reference to *Julius Caesar*). Heyer, *The Unknown Ajax*.
- 19 In *The Foundling* there may conceivably be an echo of *Titus Andronicus* when Mr Mamble says 'They say black will take no other hue, and black I'll remain to the end of my days'

(Heyer, *Foundling*, 314). In *The Grand Sophy*, the scene with the Jewish moneylender has a ring of *The Merchant of Venice* (Heyer, *The Grand Sophy*, 192). In *April Lady* there seems to be an echo of *The Winter's Tale* when Dysart finds a cockroach in his cup and races it against a spider. He is also said to have 'swallowed a spider' (Heyer, *April Lady*, 167), and though it is clear in context that this refers to financial difficulties, it does potentially recall Leontes' image of jealousy as seeing a spider in a drink: this would be apt because Cardross is indeed jealous of Dysart. *Regency Buck* also evokes *The Winter's Tale* when the Regent is referred to as 'the Prince Florizel who had captivated the world thirty-odd years before' (Heyer, *Regency Buck*, 264), though this is not of course Heyer's invention. It is also *The Winter's Tale* that is being quoted in *The Grand Sophy* when 'Mr Fawnhope having become rapt in contemplation of a clump of daffodils, which caused him to throw out a hand, murmuring: "Daffodils that come before the swallow dares!"' (178); William Shakespeare, *The Winter's Tale*, 4.4.117–19).

- 20 Hodge, *The Private World*, 127.
 21 Heyer, *Arabella*, 70.
 22 Heyer, *The Nonesuch*, 136.
 23 Heyer, *False Colours*, 100.
 24 Heyer, *Cotillion*, 135.
 25 Heyer, *Charity Girl*, 177.
 26 Kloester, *Georgette Heyer: Biography of a bestseller*, 241.
 27 Heyer, *The Corinthian*, 158.
 28 Heyer, *Cousin Kate*, 49 and 120.
 29 Heyer, *The Reluctant Widow*, 193.
 30 Shakespeare, *Antony and Cleopatra*, 1.3.41.
 31 Heyer, *Black Sheep*, 50.
 32 Heyer, *An Infamous Army*, 101.
 33 Heyer, *A Civil Contract*, 112.
 34 Heyer, *The Masqueraders*, 264 and 219.
 35 Heyer, *The Black Moth*, 268.
 36 Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night*, 2.2.32.
 37 In addition names from *Twelfth Night* are sprinkled throughout Heyer's books. In *Venetia* Aunt Hendred laments, 'I thought I should have died of despair when Mama – your grandmama, my dear – and Francis made me give up poor Sebastian! I cried for three days without ceasing, but in the end, you know, I was married to your uncle, and I am sure nothing could have been more comfortable!' (265). In *False Colours* Evelyn falls for a Patience, also the name of the girl Lord Lindeth marries in *The Nonesuch*, echoing Viola's description of her imagined sister as 'like Patience on a monument, smiling at grief'. In *Bath Tangle* Rotherham tells Serena that 'To spar with me will save you from falling into a green melancholy' (12), and this is also found in *Black Sheep* where Miles Calverleigh speaks of 'a green and yellow melancholy' (52).
 38 Sir Andrew wishes that 'he had bestowed that time in the tongues that I have in fencing, dancing and bear-baiting' (1.3.90–1) and Fabian says of Malvolio 'You know he brought me out of favour with my lady about a bear-baiting here' (2.4.6–7), to which Sir Toby replies 'To anger him we'll have the bear again, and we will fool him black and blue, shall we not, Sir Andrew?' (2.4.8–9). In the quarrel scene Fabian says Cesario 'pant and looks pale as if a bear were at his heels' (3.4.287–8): Stephen Dickey's formulation is that 'Toby and Fabian, adept baiters both, ... goad Cesario and Andrew into attacking each other' (Dickey, 'Shakespeare's Mastiff Comedy', 255–75, 272).

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