

Johannes Molz

A Close and Distant Reading of Shakespearean Intertextuality.  
Towards a Mixed Methods Approach for Literary Studies

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## English Summary

Shakespeare is everywhere. His spirit and his words are such an integral ingredient of British language and culture that it is hard to find any piece of fiction that does not in some way contain references to the immortal Bard, be it verbatim or distorted, knowingly or devoid of intent. The question is *how* Shakespeare's words are used.

To answer this question, I have examined a total of 170 texts (mostly novels), taken from the complete works of fiction of eleven contemporary authors affiliated to several different styles, movements, or subgenres. Close and repeated reading of their texts as well as Shakespeare's complete works yielded a list of over 2,400 references to Shakespeare containing more than 7,900 referencing words that were collected in an Excel file.<sup>1</sup> These results are categorised and interpreted regarding what the later writers quote, how they quote it, and to what end they do it. This leads to generalisable patterns or *quotation strategies* that describe how Shakespeare is used by the authors. It is even possible to state a tendency for the respective literary movements they belong to.

While this is a sizable number of books for a literary study, these 170 texts hardly scratch the surface of the phenomenon of Shakespearean Intertextuality. The question of *representativeness* arises not only in the face of the corpus but also concerning the completeness of the references: despite frequent close readings of all texts, it is impossible to tell what percentage of the references I found and consequently the quotation strategies stated above might not represent the complete set of references contained in the works of these contemporary authors.

To tackle these problems the qualitative first part is followed by a quantitative study in which methods from the fields of *text reuse* and *text mining* are used to scan a digitised sample of the texts for references, repeating a process in a few weeks that took a decade to complete manually. The results, advantages and desiderata of both the qualitative and the quantitative approach are discussed and evaluated. This combination of *close* and *distant reading* both serves to validate the quotation strategies stated in the first part and to explore ways of scaling up the corpus of the search for instances of Shakespearean Intertextuality.

The qualitative part of this thesis is concerned with the quotation strategies used by the respective writers. Magical Realism has been a highly political genre from its beginnings in South America up to the present. The examined writers pertaining to this

<sup>1</sup> This Excel file contains further authors, references and metadata and accompanies this thesis as an appendix. It can be accessed at <https://doi.org/10.5282/ubm/data.177>.

genre — Angela Carter, Salman Rushdie, Arundhati Roy and Zadie Smith — often, but not exclusively, use their references to Shakespeare to point out struggles and tensions in postcolonial contexts (Rushdie, Roy, Smith) or in the context of power structures in a patriarchal society (Carter). In doing so they deeply engage with Shakespeare, sometimes to a point where the texts are unreadable without familiarity with Shakespeare's plays (as for example in Rushdie's short story 'Yorick', which can only be made sense of in connection with *Hamlet*).

The Oxbridge Connection is a group of writers who read literature in Oxford or Cambridge in the 1970s. Their approach to Shakespeare is vastly different to that of the Magical Realists. Whereas the latter quote Shakespeare, discuss him, distort him, question him, three writers in this group — Douglas Adams, Julian Barnes and Hugh Laurie — use far fewer references and rarely go beyond casually mentioning the Bard's name. The fourth writer in this group, Stephen Fry, differs from the other three in that he engages with the original texts heavily, questions Shakespeare's choice of vocabulary and scansion, the interpretation, the prevalence and the performance of the plays.

The third and final group of writers consists of Jasper Fforde, Neil Gaiman and Terry Pratchett, which I subsumed under the category Contemporary Fantasists. Each author in this trio uses more references than the highest scoring author of the other groups. While Gaiman mostly quotes Shakespeare verbatim, Pratchett and Fforde alter the original text, at times to a point where the references blend in until they almost disappear in the stream of the contemporary texts. All three writers introduce Shakespeare as a character in their texts, be it as a parody (Pratchett), a pseudo-biographical depiction (Gaiman) or as an army of clones (Fforde).

The quantitative part of the thesis replicates the qualitative, manual part of the thesis with computational methods in order to facilitate the search for references. Rstudio and an algorithm initially designed to compare sequences of DNA are used to find groups of matching words between Shakespeare's texts and the contemporary texts. The results are manually interpreted; the abundance of false positive results consisting almost exclusively of semantically void combinations of stop-words like "me, as to the" makes this part highly time-consuming. As was to be expected, the algorithm was very fast and more accurate than the manual search when it came to verbatim quotations. The manual search excelled in finding altered references. A combination of both yields better results faster.

This thesis mixes methods in different ways than could be rightfully expected when the term "mixed methods" is invoked. The quantitative search is in itself a combination of qualitative preparation, quantitative examination and a qualitative interpretation of the results. The qualitative part looks at some of its results from a quantitative perspective, as the corpora involved are large enough that such a distant perspective becomes necessary to shed light on the strategies and patterns involved in Shakespearean Intertextuality.

The field is practically limitless and ever-growing. Any attempt at studying Shakespearean references on a larger scale than a handful of texts demands a new combination of qualitative and quantitative methods. This thesis may serve as a first step towards a map of Shakespearean Intertextuality.