

BARTLETT'S EVOLVING SHAKESPEARE

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Long before digital media, long before the movies, television, and radio—let alone e-books and Madison Avenue—quotation books “appropriated” Shakespeare. At least since John Heywood’s 1546 collection of proverbs, compendiums of famous and worthy sayings, played a significant role both in shaping and reflecting the popular cultures of English-speaking peoples. Shakespeare, whose plays demonstrate how well tuned his own ear was to the shapely phrases turned by others, ultimately became the core of the leading American book of sayings, *Bartlett’s Familiar Quotations*. In the sixteenth edition of *Bartlett’s*, released in the fall of 1992, there are over 1,900 quotations from Shakespeare. The Bible comes in second at 1,591 entries. Around the Shakespeare/Bible core, the complete *Bartlett’s* itself has grown from a slim 258 page volume printed privately by bookseller John Bartlett in 1855 to the 1,405 page “best-seller” that American parents often buy high-school graduates (along with a dictionary—or the equivalent software) as they pack them off to college. That very equation of *Bartlett’s*, a quintessentially nonacademic text, with a research tool itself speaks volumes of the ways mass marketing blurs rather than crosses the boundaries and barricades so often placed between the artist and the academy, the academy and “the people.”

Over the near century and a half since Bartlett began his project, the collection has grown from source book to resource book, from a place where one could find out “who said that” to “what do I say under these circumstances.” While that evolution initially accentuates a binary opposition which insists, as Richard Burt puts it in the introduction to the present book, that “popular culture is made by the people” while mass culture is “imposed on the people” (4), the *Bartlett’s* project ultimately illustrates the

impossibility of sustaining such a distinction. John Bartlett actually began his lifelong undertaking with the mixed motives of both a populist and an elitist, though not especially those of a capitalist. His first self-published volumes reflected both an American fan's devotion to European letters and, as in early modern books of "noble sentences," a humanist's desire to improve his reader's moral fiber. But once Bartlett's collection became a viable commercial venture for Little, Brown and Company, who purchased Bartlett's copyright in the 1860s, editors and editorial boards took over all responsibility for determining what it was we should be able to "look up." The Shakespeare section has kept growing and growing and growing. Indeed, so much so that when we review the evolution of Bartlett's Shakespeare, we learn much about the criteria that implicitly guided and continues to guide selections in less stable sections of the volume. Academic readers willing to cross the borders between art and "mass media" may see in that evolution how Shakespeare has been introduced to, and processed for, the masses.

In the preface to his first edition, John Bartlett set forth his mission: "The object of this book is to show, to some extent, the obligations our language owes to various authors for numerous phrases and familiar quotations that have become 'Household words.'" But by the time of his preface to the fourth edition in 1863 (the first printed by Boston publishers Little, Brown, though with John Bartlett still as editor), Bartlett demonstrates prescient awareness of how difficult it is to determine criteria for the popular: "The Compiler of this Collection of Familiar Quotations thinks it desirable to say, in introducing the work to the favor of the public, that it is not easy to determine in all cases the degree of familiarity that may belong to phrases and sentences which present themselves for admission; for what is familiar to one class of readers may be quite new to another."

Although Bartlett goes on to insist that he has attempted to be guided in his selection by familiarity to the "general reader" rather than by "merit alone," we can readily see his personal identification with Shakespeare played out not simply in the breadth and length of his Shakespearean quotations but in the very shaping of the Shakespeare unit. Following the custom of nineteenth-century American editors of Shakespeare, Bartlett chose to cite *The Tempest* as his first play, and placed as his first quotation Prospero's lines: "I, thus neglecting worldly ends, all dedicated / To closeness, and the bettering of my mind." Here, however, Bartlett made a decision that would certainly interest psychoanalysts: he cropped Prospero's speech, thereby absolving the Duke of responsibility in the usurpation of his kingdom much as Prospero himself does. In fact, all eighteen entries from *The Tempest* retain this idealized view of Prospero. My own favorite cropped passage takes on similar biographical dimensions when we learn that John Bartlett's second lifetime project was a very thorough concordance to Shake-

speare: "My library / Was dukedom large enough." Is it, moreover, a "lack of familiarity" or psychological resistance that prevents editor John Bartlett from citing Prospero's acceptance of Caliban as his own or of referring to any of the Mage's farewell epilogue? Clearly, Bartlett saw *The Tempest* as a portal opening rather than closing on his project.

Indeed, though quotations from history plays and tragedies outweigh other citations in all editions of *Bartlett's*, tracing the fate of *The Tempest* provides a useful lens on the project as it passes from editor to editor, age to age. John Bartlett maintained control of his book through nine editions, assuming his life's work would end with his life. But in 1914, nine years after Bartlett's death at the age of eighty-five, Little, Brown brought out a tenth edition under the editorship of Nathaniel Haskel Dole. Dole notes, "In this new edition the main body of John Bartlett's compilation, up to the beginning of the 19th century, has been practically unchanged." Dole adds primarily American authors such as Poe, Whittier, Longfellow, and Lowell. He leaves Shakespeare untouched—except to add a few citations here and there. But in placing new, indeed more "familiar" lines before Bartlett's opening citations from *The Tempest* (e.g., "I would fain die a dry death"), Dole obscures Bartlett's very purpose in beginning with *The Tempest*. In so doing, however, Dole also makes clear the power an editor has to preserve or reject, to obscure or to popularize.

In 1936, Christopher Morley took over the eleventh edition. His edition pushes to the foreground an editor's (and a publisher's) power to *make* something popular. Whereas there is a kind of humility in John Bartlett's acknowledgment that he might be at fault in missing the needs of different "classes" of readers, no one ever has nor will accuse Christopher Morley of humility. In his preface he bows toward his assistant, associate editor Louella D. Everett, while assuring us that "one collaborator . . . knows acutely what readers want; and the other believes himself to know what they ought to want." We are left no doubt as to which of the two's work would be "caviar to the general." Morley considerably expands all Bartlett's entries, making "literary power the criterion rather than width and vulgarity of fame." In appointing a Rhodes Scholar who never recovered from his Anglophilia, Little, Brown cut John Bartlett's original link to the populace and marketed the new volume directly to an American public self-consciously eager to learn what they "ought to want."

Though he follows Bartlett's ordering, the more "scholarly" Morley does standardize the Shakespeare entries for the first time, citing W. J. Craig's recent Oxford edition; he also expands considerably the already lengthy citations from Shakespeare's history plays and tragedies. And Morley adds his own favorite little attitudinal lines from the comedies, such as these (from *Two Gentlemen of Verona*): "Since maids, in modesty, say 'no' to that / Which

they would have the proferer construe 'Ay.'" He also expands entries from *The Tempest*, bringing the number of entries for that play from twenty-six in Dole's edition to thirty-seven in his own. Morley retains Prospero's cropped lines on "neglecting worldly ends," but increases many of the play's chastisements, such as "Lest too light winning / Make the prize light"; "Keep a good tongue in your head"; "Do not give dalliance too much rein."

Morley's preference for these admonishments seems consistent with the determinedly hierarchic views that guide many of his additions to the eleventh edition, but even given cultural values in 1936, we might well question either the moral *or* literary merits of lines like "With foreheads villainous low." In a world sunk in depression, Morley does find space for one line from the epilogue: "And my ending is despair." When he edits the 1948 twelfth edition, he is forced by the circumstances of a darkening world to look beyond literary merit and cite references that range from Hitler and Einstein to the UN Charter—as well as to Winston Churchill, who admitted to growing up reading *Bartlett's*.

The thirteenth centennial edition (1955) was prepared by "the editorial staff" of Little, Brown who invoke the father of their project in a manner that seems to effect a compromise between Morley's elitism and Bartlett's dedication to tracking down "household phrases." The editors write: "We have borne in mind the original basis of selection which John Bartlett, a partner at Little, Brown, determined as 'familiar or worthy of being familiar.'" That last phrase—"worthy of being familiar"—underscores how much, by mid-twentieth century, *Bartlett's* had become a repository not just of literary, but also of cultural values. At the same time, the volume had acquired new scholarly credentials, as once again reflected in the Shakespeare section. The editors abandon John Bartlett's romanticized arrangement of the plays in favor of "the dates and order, about which there is much conjecture [set by] Sir Edmund Chambers." But the editors also continued to avoid academicians, preferring instead those who, like Morley, are trained by, but are not of, the academy.

By 1968, *The Tempest* was enjoying a stage revival, which may explain why the editor of the fourteenth edition, Emily Morrison Beck, increased her *Tempest* entries from thirty-seven to forty-three. Here, the blurring of lines between academic and popular subcultures as well as kinds of Shakespearean appropriations becomes almost complete. But most interestingly, during an age that called leaders into accountability, Beck cut completely Prospero's misleading reference to "neglecting worldly ends." She does include, for the first time, Caliban's potent lines:

You taught me language; and my profit on it
Is, I know how to curse: the red plague rid you,
For learning me your language!

When Beck edited the fifteenth edition in 1980, she again added selections to the ever-growing Shakespeare entries, but she left *The Tempest* "set," leaving to the most recent editor, Justin Kaplan, the decision finally to add Prospero's crucial admission that "This thing of darkness I Acknowledge mine."

Kaplan proved to be the perfect editor for the turbulent '90s. In his preface to the sixteenth, 1992, edition, Kaplan writes that he considers "A quotation book . . . both intellectual history and cultural montage." He is the first editor who also forthrightly admits that "Some quotations, of course, become 'familiar' simply because they appear in a 'book of familiar quotations.'" It is perhaps this late twentieth-century self-consciousness that led Kaplan to set forth more explicitly than any other editor (even Morley) his criteria for inclusion. Quotations have been chosen "as well for their literary power, intellectual and historical significance, originality, and timeliness." The last criteria may explain why the Shakespeare entries have undergone something of a subtle but radical transformation. Kaplan also chose to collapse rather than blur the boundaries between editorial staff and academic specialists, turning often to those in the academy for recommendations. As one of the Shakespearians Kaplan consulted for suggestions on "what to cut, what to add," I can testify both to Kaplan's postmodern deference to "specialists" as well as his acute awareness that academicians often carry their own axes and often swing those axes at the very notion of Shakespeare as both "popular" and "popularist."

In many ways, Justin Kaplan sustains the Little, Brown affinity for editors with a scholarly air but without academic credentials. Kaplan dropped out of the Harvard doctoral program but won a Pulitzer for his biography of Mark Twain. Unlike Morley, however, Kaplan supports numerous liberal (one might even say leftist) causes and an outright appreciation for the masses, though the unwashed are unlikely to be found at his dinner table. Ultimately, Kaplan's decision to invite many experts to his table so that they might talk in quotation marks meant that he had to evaluate the evaluators. Consultants quickly saw—or heard—what wasn't there in the Shakespeare section. Lines like, "Macduff was from his mother's womb/Untimely ripped" and "Now, gods, stand up for bastards." Such omissions from earlier volumes seem to reflect the squeamishness (if not prudery) and righteousness of earlier editors. Their addition to the current volume points to Kaplan's corrective measures, each of which reflects his and his chosen academicians' biases: female characters are given greater voice, and the canon is somewhat deromanticized.

The *Wall Street Journal's* editorial board considered such "timeliness" a matter of political correctitude rather than one of political righteousness and perhaps the difference lies only in the eye of the beholder. The *Journal*, in reviewing the sixteenth edition *in toto*, lamented that Kaplan did not find

Ronald Reagan particularly quotable yet included lines Jimmy Carter delivered to the Women's Agenda Conference. But in fact, Kaplan, like all the editors before him, also reflects even as he shapes popular opinion, a phenomenon that itself shifts in time. By 1992, Reagan's teflon had largely worn off while a resurrected Carter was showing up at peace talks with an extended hand. In numerous photo layouts, that hand just as often held a Habitat hammer as an olive branch. It seems that any source book like *Bartlett's*, if it is to succeed in the mass market, must in fact capture the popular sentiment of its own era even while hoping to influence what must inevitably see print in the next edition.

Kaplan's recalibration of the Shakespeare section to reflect a 1990s sensibility is evident throughout, but especially in the *Antony and Cleopatra* entries. He adds seven significant quotations, almost all of which return to the Queen of Egypt her complexity and her prominence in the play. New entries range from Cleopatra's advice to Antony that he "play one scene / Of excellent dissembling, and let it look / Like perfect honor" to her exclamation "My man of men" to her crucial speech to her maids as she contemplates suicide:

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' the' posture of a whore.

Such additions, however, did not come without a price. In order to make space for these and other inclusions, Kaplan had to decide what lines might best die a quiet death. At my suggestion, he removed Morley's entry from *Two Gentlemen of Verona*. Yet in arguing that only an attorney defending against date-rape would miss such lines, was I not also trying to influence Kaplan's influence as he mediated Shakespeare's influence? As *Bartlett's* evolves, so too does the collaborative nature of John Bartlett's once singular project. Even dragging less provocative, quite obscure lines off-stage highlighted the temporal limitations of "universal genius." Will popular readers miss—or miss being edified—by lines such as, "Sir, he made a chimney in my father's house, and the bricks are alive to prove it" (from *Henry VI, Part Two*) or even, "Thus far into the bowels of the land / Have we marched on without impediment" (from *Richard III*)? The Shakespearean who winces at even these cuts points to a different kind of limitation; we would cite the entire text of every play.

Of course, to cite the entire text is to reproduce *The New Oxford Shakespeare*. To assure that the flavor of context be at least preserved in a quota-

tion book is more difficult though perhaps even more important when presenting the equivalent of forensic evidence to the general reader. Generations of *Bartlett's* editors, for example, seem to have been committed to suppressing evidence in order to preserve an image of kings above fault (unless they were outright tyrants like Richard III or Macbeth). Bartlett initiated this process with his manipulation of Prospero's image. So too did careful editing change the nature of King Lear's epiphany on the moor. Until 1992, his speech ran thus:

Poor naked wretches, wheresoe'er you are
 That bide the pelting of this pitiless storm
 How shall your houseless heads and unfed sides
 Your loop'd and window'd raggedness, defend you
 From seasons such as these?

"Blind" seems too kind a word to attribute to earlier editors who so cropped this passage; "unconscionable" seems more apt. Then again, ours has been a culture slow to assume responsibility for homelessness. Is the 1992 version truly more "popular" or does the present entry attempt to use its medium to make accountability itself more popular? Now the busy speech-maker who turns not to Shakespeare but to Bartlett for an apt passage on the poor will read:

O I have taken
 Too little care of this! Take physic, pomp
 Expose thyself to feel what wretches feel,
 That thou mayst shake the superflux to them,
 And show the heavens more just.

What forces kept earlier editors from including such eminently quotable, such utterly poetic, and so morally sound lines? What responsibility should the masters of modern media—comic book author, movie producer, web master or source-book editor—assume when appropriating Shakespeare? Should we appropriate Shakespeare? How can we not? Would a "true Shakespeare" reflect his or our views on race, gender, social order, or divine justice? Surely the answer must always be, as it should always be in critical studies, "Both. Neither." Try reviewing the sonnets and plays in order to advise what should be added and what left out of the upcoming millennial edition of *Bartlett's Book of Familiar Quotations*. That activity should make clear the sheer burden of any interpretive task. The weight of choosing for others what might best represent Shakespeare thus led me to advise citing Prospero's epilogue more fully than did John Bartlett himself. Now the reader of

Bartlett's may at least learn that the editor, critic, director, reader's end need not be despair if it is

relieved by prayer,
Which pierces so that it assaults
Mercy itself and frees all faults.

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