"Your shape and making": Christopher Moore's Shakespearean *Fool* Trilogy

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Adaptations and appropriations are common in the Shakespearean world, as well as in numerous other fictional realms. Until recently, there have often been unofficial divides between such works emanating from professional writers and those crafted by enthusiastic amateurs. As Johnathan H. Pope remarks, Shakespeare appears in many adaptive realms, including a wide range of fan fiction constructs:

> Authors rewrite Shakespeare according to the widespread conventions, tropes, and genres of fan fiction: Shakespearean slash, het, hurt/comfort, fluff, crossover, alternate universe, PWP, body swap, genderswap, podfic. . . there are Shakespeare drabbles, flashfic and Yuletide challenges, gift fics, 5+1 things, and Real Person Fics (RPFs).[1]

The boundaries between fan fiction and professional creations are increasingly becoming more permeable, however. Christopher Moore, for example, who frequently writes "cross-over" novels that share characters much in the way that television shows sometimes do, has created a trilogy of Shakespearean-based narratives that utilize features associated with fan fiction.[2] These features include allusions to several contemporary theoretical, literary, and cosplay constructs, including magical realism, picaresque narratives, and variations of what Sara K. Howe and Susan E. Cook identify as "kink" or "fringe sexuality and textuality," such as boisterous

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public masturbation and sexual activity between a wide range of characters, including some—a sea serpent and a fairy/squirrel, for instance,—that lead these texts into regions parallel to the erotic territory associated with "animal roleplay."[3] In their collection of essays, Howe and Cook indicate that "kink denotes a break from the mainstream."[4] Sexual activity of many kinds serves as a refrain throughout these volumes. Moore's prose is not circumscribed within any particular theoretical model, however. Instead, he continually presses against the kinds of boundaries that also appear in Shakespearean drama and borrows motifs from a range of literary styles. He questions, for example, differentiations between species, which appear in the backgrounds of characters such as Caliban. He investigates spaces merging realism with fantasy, which we encounter in *The Winter's Tale* and elsewhere, and he highlights liminal areas unclearly situated between life and death, reminiscent of *Romeo and Juliet, Cymbeline,* and other plays. Moore's narratives extend far beyond Shakespeare's stories, but often remain attuned to them and use similar philosophical configurations.

Moore's *Fool* Trilogy, which includes *Fool* (2009), *The Serpent of Venice* (2014), and *Shakespeare for Squirrels* (2020), seems designed both for students of literature and fan-fiction aficionados, many of whom will recognize and revel in his numerous allusions to Shakespeare, and other writers and who will understand the interlocking theoretical underpinnings of his fiction. As a review in the *Dallas Morning News* remarks about *Fool*, it is: "Often funny, sometimes hilarious, always inventive, this is a book for all, especially uptight English teachers, bardolaters and ministerial students of the kind who come to our doorstep on Saturday mornings."[5] The author of *Lamb: The Gospel of Biff, Christ's Childhood Pal* (2004), Moore has already demonstrated his ability to interact irreverently with iconic characters and themes. He continues in this vein during these three novels, which follow several Shakespearean characters through adventures often diverging broadly from the events portrayed in the early modern dramas they invoke. Central to these works is the Fool, Pocket Dog Snogging, who wends his fictive way from Lear's kingdom to the Venice of *Othello* and *Merchant of Venice,* and finally ends up in what Moore calls "a very mythical fourteenth-century Athens and the forest and mountains around it," for an encounter with

numerous figures from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.[6] Some of Pocket's activities coincide with places and events occurring in Shakespeare's plays, while others veer wildly into an environment resembling the "worlds" of fan fiction.[7]

"Traditional" fan fiction, which is produced by deeply invested amateurs, is distributed outside professional publishing entities and commonly sidesteps the financial structures associated with for-profit creation. As Karen Hellekson and Kristina Busse indicate, there are two overarching categories for fan fiction:

> Affirmative fans tend to collect, view, and play, to discuss, analyze, and critique. Transformative fans, however, take a creative step to make the worlds and characters their own by telling stories, cosplaying the characters, creating artworks, or engaging in any of the many other forms active fan participation can take.[8]

While Moore does not fit within the formal category of unprofessional writer, being published by HarperCollins under their William Morrow imprint, his novels correspond with the creations of transformative fans. He is a prolific, professional novelist, whose oeuvre appears to be designed for a well-educated audience of "nerds," as defined by the Urban Dictionary which claims this term refers to "An individual who: 1. Enjoys learning 2. Does not adhere to social norms." This electronic resource offers a further note about "nerds":

> If you are reading this article to determine whether you are a nerd or not, you are not. Nerds do not need to look up the definition of "nerd": it is a label with no consequence whatsoever, and nerds have better things to do than play along with societal stereotypes. That being said, if you merely want to see what people think of when they think of the word "nerd", because human thought processes, societal constructs, and philosophy are so interesting, consider yourself a nerd."[9]

Nerds not only enjoy learning, they are often quite adept at acquiring and expanding their knowledge. It is likely no coincidence, therefore, that nerds and some of those producing fan fiction in Shakespearean domains exhibit the practices key to "transfer of learning," which are believed to be fundamental to educational success. As Viviene C. Cree and Cathlin Macaulay note:

> Knowledge is not given but is actively acquired and interpreted by the individual. In this context, transfer of learning will be facilitated by creating a suitable climate for learning, acknowledging that the feelings and attitudes of the learner are as important as their cognitive strategies in dealing with the learning task, enhancing their capacity for self-direction, and allowing time for reflection and making connections between prior and present experience Collaborative or andragogic models facilitate this kind of learning.[10]

Fan fiction occupies a wide territory and takes many forms. Shakespearean fan fiction is equally diffuse. Since there are no "rules" governing this genre, reductive definitions should not apply; nevertheless, there are characteristics shared by Moore's creations and other transformative adaptations of Shakespearean drama. The dense, capacious texts attracting fan fiction in the current context appear likely to engender significant learning transfer, which may be an identifying characteristic of "nerds" and which might indicate why Shakespeare would be appealing to this cohort.

Francesca Coppa describes fan fiction in a way that supports the notion that the contingent of amateur authors fashioning and absorbing this brand of fan fiction are engaged in significant transfer of learning:

> A fanfiction-reading fan would come to see how one fanfiction story was reacting to another, how one narrative idea was building on another. They'd know what was *canon* (that is, a fact or piece of information from the original source) and what was *fanon* (a fan-authored idea or interpretation that is so perfect, so convincing, or fun that other fan-authors simply adopt it wholesale) in the story. . . A fan would likely be immersed in a whole universe of fanfiction—not just within the fandom of the story, but across a whole series of fandoms.[11]

As Coppa suggests, fan fiction often emanates from an intellectually rich environment, that takes full advantage of previous texts in order to create new artifacts. In addition, Ann K. McClellan notes that such practices have characterized fan fiction for a long time, creating works which range:

> from Homer's collections of the *Odyssey* and *Iliad* stories to Shakespeare's reimagining of Thomas Kyd's *Spanish Tragedy*

> in *Hamlet,* or more recently, to the late nineteenth-and early twentieth-century Sherlock Holmes pastiches, parodies and comics.[12]

Also, as Sheenagh Pugh reminds us:

> Shakespeare, his contemporaries and successors happily plundered Classical, English and European history for plots and characters. But they don't seem to have regarded the "original" plots and characters of other writers as sacred either.[13]

McClellan further describes the strategies associated with these writing techniques in terms that resonate with both Moore's writing and unprofessional, contemporary instances of fan fiction:

> authors adopt the main characters, geography and major plot elements of an already established fictional world and create new narratives that then exist outside the original text. Fanfic can provide backstory and individual characters, fill in gaps left within original storylines, create new plotlines, extend the world and its characters beyond the boundaries of the original source, place the characters into new situations or worlds, and more.[14]

While McClellan here describes the output of many fan fiction writers, her remarks correlate closely with Moore's interaction with Shakespearean drama. In a recent email exchange, Moore describes his plans for engaging with his audience:

> There are lots of "inside" Shakespeare jokes, but I try to make the stories work in such a way that they're funny even if you don't know Shakespeare. The inside stuff usually comes from allusions to plays other than the one that particular novel is based on. (e.g., There are Hamlet jokes in all my books, yet none of [the books] are based on *Hamlet*).[15]

He further discusses his interest in drawing attention to characters who may get less stage time in Shakespeare's plays:

> I like to develop characters that don't get much script time in Shakespeare, but who are interesting. In *Serpent*, I think Portia's maid Nerissa and Iago's wife Emelia [sic] are the most clever characters in the book, and Jessica is a lot more strident, while Portia is revealed to be a bit of a brat. . . some of the minor characters really don't have anything to do in the

> plays (like the fairies or the servants) but in my books they get their own agendas.[16]

As he explains, Moore draws readers' attention to a range of characters in the plays, just as theatrical practitioners can shift audiences' focus in numerous directions.

In much transformative fan fiction, writers employ a variety of stylistic techniques as they craft alternative versions of favorite texts, including alterations to locations, gender identifications, narrative arcs, and other facets of the textual or audiovisual artifact which serve as the source for the new creation. Some of the stories fashioned remain closely aligned with elements contained within their narrative starting points; others incorporate significantly disruptive details, characters or issues not appearing in the origin texts. McClellan, for example, describes Sherlock's popularity in fan fiction contexts in ways that correspond with the Fool trilogy's interaction with Shakespeare's plays:

> The openendedness of the television show, however, provides fans with ample opportunities to speculate on character and relationship arcs, conflict and cliffhanger resolutions, and broader plot developments while still remaining within the constructs of the original world.[17]

With regard to Shakespearean fan fiction, moreover, Valerie M. Fazel and Louise Geddes note that fans are not always attracted by the drama, since some:

> are incidental tourist, visitors whose interest in something other than Shakespeare—an actor, a new film adaptation, an adjacent discipline, or a culturally eclectic website—drives them circuitously to the [Shakespearean] corpus.[18]

As noted above, Moore's writing is designed for readers who approach the novels from similarly diverse routes. Shakespeare's ambiguity and cultural role support innumerable narrative arcs.

Accordingly, Moore does not always constrain himself within "the constructs" of Shakespeare's "original world." Nevertheless, he uses a number of maneuvers similar to those McClellan describes above as he crafts his novels. Pocket, for instance, is introduced in the first installment of Moore's trilogy as the famous character from *King Lear,* but unlike Shakespeare's Fool, he does not die, as Lear reports in the play: "My poor fool is hanged" (*King Lear*,

5.3.3494). Instead, he engages in a lengthy series of episodic adventures that intersect with additional Shakespearean narratives. At the same time, Moore avoids the obscurity sometimes associated with unpaid fan fiction, such as works described by Coppa:

> a lot of the best works of fanfiction are not comprehensible to a general reader, just as a lot of the best poetry depends on you having a fairly deep knowledge of the traditions and history of poetry, and the better you know Homer's Odyssey, the better you'll understand Joyce's *Ulysses*.[19]

As he acknowledges, however, Moore typically fashions his narratives to appeal to both kinds of readers. Accordingly, while his novels do not depend upon prior knowledge, he often encourages his audience to "find the Shakespeare." After naming some of the sources for *Shakespeare for Squirrels,* for instance, he invites his readers to flaunt their own expertise, saying: "There have been lines and phrases drawn from the other plays as well, but as I forgot to make note of them, you may bask in your own cleverness if you recognized a line."[20] He further rewards more knowledgeable readers with a variety of verbal "Easter eggs."[21] He wryly alludes, for instance, to Nahum Tate's popular *The History of King Lear* (1681), which offers viewers a happy ending to Shakespeare's tragedy whereby Cordelia and Lear both live. Cordelia then marries Edgar.[22] Moore's Cordelia also survives in Fool, but she weds the eponymous jester, rather than Gloucester's exonerated son. This nod to Tate offers another bonus to astute readers, however, since they will know that the character of the Fool does not appear in this seventeenth-century tragicomedy. Moore includes these kinds of allusions often, offering insider status to those who notice them without alienating readers who lack information that might signal a subtext. Thus, he can gesture at the common double casting of the Fool and Cordelia, by intertwining their narratives, but readers without any background in theatrical history will not be confused.

Although fan fiction emanates from diverse sources, responses to Shakespeare's writing align closely with responses to a particular cluster of texts, films, and television programs. This branch of fan fiction emerges from texts that are popular, complicated, and both emotionally and intellectually compelling to their audiences. Notably, many popular culture media attracting the attention of

fan fiction creators feature some of the most prominent actors of modern Shakespearean productions, including (among others), Patrick Stewart (*Star Trek*); Benedict Cumberbatch, Martin Freeman, and Andrew Scott (*Sherlock*); Ian McKellen (*Lord of the Rings*); David Tennant, Christopher Ecclestone and Catherine Tate (*Dr. Who*); Gwendeline Christie (*Game of Thrones*); and Maggie Smith, Kenneth Branagh, Fiona Shaw, Emma Thompson and Ralph Fiennes (*Harry Potter*). Interconnections between these kinds of actors and texts create a fertile environment for novels such as Moore's Shakespearean Trilogy. The audiences likely to be attracted to these works will understand and appreciate the clever interplay between genres and theoretical frameworks that characterize Moore's fiction.

Moore expands the theoretical frameworks of Shakespeare's plays by fashioning storylines that primarily include characters found in Shakespeare's plays but then putting these figures in situations that alternately reflect and diverge from events represented in Shakespeare. There are three regularly recurring characters, Pocket, Drool (an apprentice fool, given to frequent, often public, masturbation), and Pocket's monkey, Jeff. Pocket is the only one of these emanating directly from early modern drama, although Jeff presumably corresponds with the monkey Jessica purportedly acquires in *Merchant of Venice* (3.1.1350). Other figures, many from Shakespeare, appear intermittently, commonly in the novel coinciding with "their" play. Typically, those drawn from Shakespeare offer exaggerated versions of their dramatic forebears. The portrayals of Goneril and Regan in Fool, for instance, correspond with many of the qualities they display in *King Lear,* but they channel the vigorous libido exhibited in Shakespeare into extensive sexual involvement with Pocket, with allusions to "kinky" animal play. When Regan, for instance, resents Goneril's carnal dalliances with the fool, she demands equal measure, which he willingly offers:

> And oh it led to many months of clandestine monkey noises: howling, grunting, screeching, yipping, squishing, slapping, laughing, and no little bit of barking. (But there was no slinging of poo as monkeys are wont to do). Only the most decent, forthright monkey sounds as are made from proper bonking.[23]

Desdemona and Portia, two of the main characters from Shakespeare's Venetian plays, *Othello* and *Merchant of Venice,* transform into siblings in Moore's rendition of their stories, a detail that presumably leads to the author's decision to send Othello, his wife, and his soldiers to Corsica rather than Cyprus, so that they will remain in closer geographical proximity to Venice.[24] Shylock's daughter Jessica's fate also deviates from Shakespeare's storyline. Instead of eloping with Lorenzo as she does in *Merchant of Venice,* her story partially merges with that of *Pericles*' Marina, as Jessica participates in various adventures accompanied by pirates. Pocket also introduces Jessica to Marco Polo, who plays a key role in their escapades, and the tale sometimes converges with Edgar Allan Poe's "Cask of Amontillado.[25] These changes and other variations from Shakespeare's texts facilitate audiences' abilities to encounter fresh narratives, while appreciating the insider knowledge that helps them understand and value these frequently eccentric or raunchy alterations to the source materials.

Moore does not create his novels solely using the techniques associated with fan fiction, however. Instead, as noted above, his narrative frequently alludes to diffuse literary, critical, and cultural perspectives. Drawing in part from the picaresque literary tradition, for instance, Moore's trilogy offers a first-person account, told by an idiosyncratic protagonist who gets entangled in innumerable, episodic escapades and who seems most noteworthy for his unusually small stature, his voracious sexual appetite, and his ambiguous ethical stances. Moore is not bound by formal definitions of the picaresque, but Pocket's adventures accord with this literary tradition, which Ligia Tomoiagā describes:

> In the older stories, the picaroon is an isolated individual, "thrown" in a state of crisis, very often an orphan who is forced to face a hostile society. After a series of events, he will soon discover that he has to find a social role, that he cannot just be an outsider, that society cannot be ignored. Thus, he will try to find a role to play, even though this means cheating, lying, deceiving etc. He is not only urged by the need to belong to a certain social group, but also by the even more urgent material needs, which make him be even more vigilant and a keener observer of social realities.[26]

Pocket's history, which is presented at length in *Fool*, closely conforms with Tomaigā's account. A child on his own, he falls

under the care of the suggestively whiskered, presumably male nun, "Mother" Basil, who sends him to bring food to the mythologically-named Thalia, who lives as an anchoress, enclosed in a convent wall. During their extensive encounters, the young Pocket takes his first steps into what could be termed kink by developing a torridly sexual relationship with incarcerated Thalia, which incorporates a barrier between the lovers resembling the wall between Pyramus and Thisbe in *A Midsummer Night's Dream.* As a consequence, Mother Basil is forced to order his hanging "since you shagged the anchoress, Pocket."[27] In Pocket's telling, "The sisters pulled me away, tied my hands, and took me to the barn where I was hanged," but this incident becomes one of the Shakespearean feigned deaths discussed below.[28] Pocket subsequently leaves to find his way in the world, where he engages in the kinds of roguish activities associated with the picaroon, especially including those involving physical intimacy of the unsanctioned sort as Pocket notes: "I am such an accomplished horn-beast and eloquent crafter of cuckoldry."[29] The Fool's picaresque isolation is also noted by Pocket himself, "Am I to be forever alone?" and by the anchoress, who says, "You're gifted with wit, Pocket, but to cast jibe and jest you must stand separate from the target of your barbs. I fear you may become a lonely man, even in the company of others."[30] While Pocket is often surrounded by people, the solitariness noted here generally remains with him during the trajectory of these novels, except possibly during his short, but happy, marriage with Cordelia.

Pocket's singularity is often signaled by his physical appearance. In *Fool*, for instance, he is frequently said to be physically smaller than average, but his size is rarely described with specificity. Much to Pocket's displeasure, for instance, Cornwall refers to his stature early in the book: "Don't worry, little one, the king'll keep your hide whole."[31] Readers are not usually given sufficient information to know what "little one" means, other than to realize that while his diminutive height is noticeable, it does not interfere with his sexual desirability or prowess, which he references regularly. In *Fool*, for instance, he trades bawdy barbs with Lear's kitchen staff:

> "Back, Fool," said, Bubble, the head cook. "That's the king's lunch and I'll have your balls before I'll let you at it."
> "My balls are yours for the asking, milady," said I, "Would you have them on a trencher, or shall I serve them in a bowl of cream, like Peaches?"[32]

While Pocket's physicality receives regular mention and draws attention from those he encounters, it does not seem to have significant influence on the array of mishaps he meets in these novels. Instead, he alternates between stumbling into adverse circumstances and making deliberate choices destined to wreak havoc in his life and the lives of those around him, even when he is trying to assist his often-hapless companions, including Drool and Jeff. His vexed circumstances also appear when he is trapped in the company of the *Serpent of Venice*'s attentive sea monster (which was imported by Marco Polo), who prefigures the further nods to sexual animal play found in *Shakespeare for Squirrels:*

> The creature in the dark had left fish for me, scored it for me, saved me from hunger if not delirium. What rough beast knows charity? What shark's cold eye shines with kindness? None! These are human things, but even as a man can act a beast, can a monster show the character of a man? A woman?[33]

Since this encounter involves Pocket, it inevitably includes sexual congress. From Drool's perspective, "Pocket shagged a dragon."[34] Predictably, the fool offers Marco Polo a more complicated account of these events:

> I told my tale of being drugged, chained in the dungeon, of the creature coming to me in the dark, doing the dark deed upon me, and its subsequent murders and mutilations. I left out the bits about being able to project my thoughts to the serpent, to receive what appeared to be return messages on the dark canvas of my eyelids, and my plans for revenge.[35]

While these stories are ribald and entertaining, Pocket's hijinks reach a further narrative peak in *Shakespeare for Squirrels,* where the fool and his entourage encounter the reimagined characters from the complex world presented in *A Midsummer Night's Dream.* Here, the picaresque fan fiction of the first two novels morphs into homages to animal play, magical realism, and the World of Warcraft spell Feign Death.[36] Keeping with the trilogy's ongoing investment in "kink," moreover, there is also a significant amount of sexual activity that is not constrained to unions between those of the same species.

A Midsummer Night's Dream is generally classified as a comedy, but it contains many dark episodes, including a father's threat to

have his daughter put to death for refusing to marry according to the Athenian laws that guarantee patriarchal prerogatives (1.1.45-6). There are numerous physical and social distinctions between the characters in the play, where some of those portrayed are humans with varying degrees of societal status, while others are categorized as fairies or sprites. Productions of this play are frequently highly sexualized. The Bridge Theatre *Dream*, a prominent recent production disseminated widely through National Theatre Live, for example, presented a range of sexual proclivities and activities. Even though this drama frequently ends up in the curricula of younger students and "family friendly" performances abound, the implications of a fairy queen falling in love with a human wearing an ass head, a fairy king and queen purportedly cavorting sexually with humans; a pair of sexually alert young couples; a juvenile "Indian boy" who may attract the erotic attention of Oberon, even though he does not appear physically in the text; and an often maliciously mischievous "Robin Goodfellow," leave ample room for highly-charged, sexually complicated productions. *A Midsummer Night's Dream* may boast a cast of many fairies, but those figures are not always benign, and the play also contains innumerable "adult" situations that Moore capitalizes on throughout his novel.

In addition, this play, even in its early modern form, closely corresponds to many of the features modern criticism refer to as "magical realism," where, according to Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B. Faris, "For the characters who inhabit the fictional world, and for the author who creates it, magic may be real, reality magical."[37] In early modern England, of course, fairies, witches, and other supernatural beings frequently seemed to inhabit liminal spaces between reality and imagination. Like the Oracle in *The Winter's Tale* and Ariel in *The Tempest,* mystical figures here coexist with humans. These fungible spaces are not straightforward, however. Accordingly, Bottom is perplexed after he returns from his sojourn with Titania:

> Methought I was—there is no man can tell what. Methought I was, and methought I had—but man is but a patched fool if he will offer to say what methought I had. The eye of man hath not heard, the ear of man hath not seen, man's hand is not able to taste, his tongue to conceive, nor his heart to report what my dream was. (4.1.1769-76)

Nevertheless, audiences are given little reason to be confused as the play introduces some characters who are clearly human, some who are fairies, and some, such as Titania/Hippolyta and Oberon/Theseus, who inhabit different realms, but are often played by double cast actors. In the domain of the play, the characters who represent adjacent worlds do not always confront each other knowingly, but there are indications that they are aware of each other and that they sometimes interact unconsciously, including when Robin Goodfellow/Puck uses his ability to shape shift in order to wreak havoc on humans:

> And sometime lurk I in a gossip's bowl
> In very likeness of a roasted crab,
> And when she drinks, against her lips I bob
> And on her withered dewlap pour the ale. (2.1.415-8)

In the plays and in early modern folk traditions, it is not always easy or possible to distinguish between reality and fancy.

Moore takes advantage of the permeability between these realms, then twists things even further. He includes fairies who fulfill many roles that are congruent with their parts in the drama, but in *Shakespeare for Squirrels,* they only spend part of their time as fairies and several of them also have extended contact with Pocket. Cobweb, in particular, becomes emotionally attached to the fool, unsuccessfully endeavors to seduce him on numerous occasions, ultimately convinces him to engage in physical intimacy, and leaves the forest with him at the end of the narrative, although Pocket tries and fails to dissuade her:

> "There probably won't be other fairies. You won't be able to frolic." "I've frolicked before." "But you're a squirrel." "Not all the time." "But a crashing lot of the time. The time when it's not dark." "In the day I shall ride on your shoulder and listen to you tell tales of wonder and adventure. Besides, you fancy me, Pocket of Dog Snogging." "Fuckstockings," said I, defeated. "Come along, then."[38]

These kinds of interactions bring aspects of magical realism into view, since they enable fairies and humans to interact closely, but Moore does not stop at that boundary. Instead, possibly recognizing that there is a growing body of criticism devoted to Animal Studies, exploring the complex relationships between human and

non-human living beings, Moore leaps into a similar territory, by creating personified (or fairyfied) animals, such as Cobweb, with unusual abilities. His venture into animalized realms introduces questions corresponding with other investigations emerging from fan fiction, as Paul Waldau suggests in his description of Animal Studies:

> Contemporary developments in Animal Studies reveal that many people today desire to learn about nonhuman animals—some seek to recover lost perspectives; others work to ignite creative thinking and artistic sensibilities regarding other other living beings; and many work through one or more of the impressive sciences that our species has nurtured.[39]

Moore does not focus in depth on animals, but his inclusion of significant, but unexpected, squirrels in *Shakespeare for Squirrels* and of a sea monster in *The Serpent of Venice* who straddles human, animal, and supernatural realms suggests that his fiction gestures to this emerging critical area in addition to more long-standing literary traditions.

Moore also investigates boundaries between life and death and beings who inhabit spaces between these states. Tales about unworldly characters, such as vampires, often place constraints upon those figures' ability to range freely during daylight hours. Similar limitations are also found in Shakespeare, as we learn in *A Midsummer Night's Dream:*

> And we fairies, that do run
> By the triple Hecate's team
> From the presence of the sun,
> Following darkness like a dream,
> Now are frolic. (5.1.2232-6)

Otherworldy creatures, it seems, cannot freely roam through human territories when they might be seen, even though it appears as though Oberon and Titania have been able to engage in sexual dalliances with people who attract their interest (2.1.385; 428-546). In Moore's rendition, the fairies also need to depart human territories when the sun rises, but they do not slink away into secret hiding places or magically disappear. Rather, these mysterious beings leave the realm of the supernatural, moving instead into the trees, where they hide in plain sight by presenting

themselves as squirrels. For much of the novel, the fairies keep their duality a secret from everyone, including Pocket, but their complex identities are eventually revealed, and the fool resumes his sexual relationship with Cobweb:

> The fairies dropped naked out of the trees, at dusk, and Cobweb immediately leapt into my arms and snogged me mercilessly, breathing her nutty breath on me, her skin redolent of bark and leaves from her squirrely day out and about.[40]

Pocket is not terribly pleased to discover that Cobweb switches between fairyland and the realm of the squirrels, but it doesn't interfere with their lovemaking, although Bottom takes great delight in mocking Pocket as a "squirrel shagger" until the fool reminds Bottom that he bears an animal shape that will keep him from performing in the play: "*you* have a tail. And a long snout. And nostrils like teacups. You, sir, are an ass."[41] In Moore's recreation of Shakespeare's comedy, sex between species is consistently widespread and complicated.

By exploring the narrative and sexual complexities emerging from fairies or humans who become animals, Moore expands the range of identity-marking signals and physical boundaries his fiction examines and often undermines. While humans and fairies already share close contact between humans and fairies in this environment, placing the fairies in a position where they alternate between species extends these considerations even further. As Waldau indicates, there is a

> definition of Animal Studies that focuses on the ways human individuals and cultures are now interacting with other-than-human animals, have in the past interacted with species beyond their own species, and in the future might interact with them.[42]

The fairies turned squirrels can easily be counted as "other-than-human-animals," and Moore takes full advantage of the comic implications of that status, while creating a possible space for more philosophically attuned readers as well.

Throughout the trilogy, Moore investigates how to manipulate narratives so that they offer readers the opportunity to examine their understanding of different kinds of beings and to consider,

often through comedy or satire, the ways their beliefs are formed, modulated, or fiercely protected. Such tactics also encompass his apparent dual "fan fiction" references to supernatural series such as *Twilight* and contemporary electronic games, including World of Warcraft, when he interrogates borders between those who are dead, "undead," or captured in some liminal space between. As mentioned, Moore introduces incidents from these and similar realms in the first two volumes of the trilogy. Then, in *Shakespeare for Squirrels,* he incorporates related questions in segments focusing on two key characters, namely, Pocket and Robin Goodfellow or "Puck," and briefly suggests that Hermia has died, although she apparently just fainted at the sight of Nick Bottom in his guise as an ass.[43] This death is related to *Feign Death,* a "spell" associated with World of Warcraft, a complex series of games, books, manga, and associated merchandise. This spell is designed to help those in dangerous situations to defuse the threat surrounding them by distracting their enemies, at least temporarily, with the erroneous belief that whoever is under siege has died.[44] Shakespeare and other early modern authors use similar strategies to help characters such as Juliet evade unwanted people and events. Pocket's seeming demise in *Shakespeare for Squirrels* occurs early in the book, when the book's protagonist faces angry, armed assailants. In typical Moorean fashion, however, this narrative shift becomes more complicated before it is resolved. For part of this novel, Pocket also believes that he has died, although he is not impressed with death:

> Well, Death was a darkling dollop of dog wank. Neither paradise nor perdition as promised. No shining gates to welcome me into the bosom of those I had loved, nor pit to pull me onto the pikes of mine enemies.[45]

Pocket is particularly annoyed because the distinction between life and death does not seem as absolute as he expected:

> Had I known hunger would follow me into the undiscovered country I would have taken more time for lunch before shuffling off this mortal coil. . .And what an ignominious death it was! Death by dunderheaded official?[46]

Since Pocket is generally a comedic figure, his misapprehension here facilitates humor at the same time that it raises questions about what constitutes death and what happens to human consciousness

and appetite once mortal life has ended. Shakespeare, of course, explores such questions in many of his plays.

This narrative tactic emerges at length later in the novel when Puck faces death and is determined to have permanently passed away, even though many of those involved in these adventures are unsure how Puck can actually be subject to mortality. Thus, when Oberon announces "I have no fear. I am immortal," Pocket reminds him "So was the Puck, your grace."[47] Since Pocket and Cordelia remain alive even after leaving Lear's kingdom, in contradiction to what happens in Shakespeare's play, Puck's demise could be seen as simply another antithetical gesture that similarly undermines the trajectory of Shakespeare's plotlines. In Moore's telling, however, this extended incident allows the author to invoke a link to World of Warfare while raising questions about which human constraints apply to creatures from other categories. Pocket, notes, for instance, that none of the fairies are likely to have murdered Puck, since he died while they were squirrels:

> it was broad daylight when Puck stopped the arrow. And I think we can say that a squirrel is very unlikely to have shot a crossbow no matter how small the weapon.[48]

Titania points out the usual distinction between the fairy and human realms when she tells the story of the death of the Indian boy's mother in childbirth: "She, being mortal, of that boy did die" (2.1.505), but the barriers between humans and fairies seemingly remain fungible, as the Fairy Queen's sexualized encounter with Bottom as an ass indicates. In *Shakespeare for Squirrels,* the issues become even more complicated, since Moore introduces the master obfuscator Rumour, from *Henry IV, part two,* into the story. Eventually, however, Puck returns to the narrative, after a symbolic three days of death, only to discover that he may be the father of the little Indian boy.[49] Shakespeare, of course, raises related questions frequently. Is Caliban, human, for example, being the son of a witch by the devil who is sometimes mistaken for a fish or a monster? (*Tempest*, 5.1.2343-7; 2.2.1109, 1115).[50] What powers do the weird sisters in *Macbeth* possess? They can generate winds but cannot kill the seaman whose wife refused to share her chestnuts: "Though his bark cannot be lost, / Yet it shall be tempest-tossed" (1.3.122-3). How do we interpret the powers

and limitations of Hermione when she is immobilized in *The Winter's Tale* or, in fact, when Hermione Granger encounters a similar fate in *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*? Do all of these figures inhabit different regions of the same "world" or do they live in intersecting or parallel universes? Many of the texts inspiring fan fiction raise similar topics for consideration. The laws governing time, space, physics, and mortality repeatedly become subjected to new rules and challenges, as writers, including Moore, imagine what different environments could become if the strictures informing their existence were redesigned.

By directing his novels at an audience literate in a range of intellectually rich artifacts and theories, such as those alluded to above, Moore hints at why so many gifted Shakespearean actors also work in projects such as *Star Trek, Sherlock, Dr. Who, Harry Potter, Lord of the Rings,* and *Game of Thrones.* Like Shakespearean drama, these texts challenge standards familiar from what might be called "the real world." They are filled, for instance, with realistic characters who interact with figures from other geographies or dimensions. Such spaces frequently operate under rules varying from those applicable in human, earthly domains. These texts encourage intellectual and emotional engagement, rewarding viewers and audiences who bring deep knowledge bases into these encounters. Enthusiastic external participants then frequently take the narratives in new directions through additional writing or creative activity. They challenge characters and audiences to test their intellectual, physical, and/or moral mettle against dark forces that may or may not be human. Christopher Moore's *Fool* trilogy is often light-hearted and raucous, but it simultaneously supplies its readers with a complicated refashioning of a number of challenging texts, including those by Shakespeare. As my title suggests, their "shape and making" may remain ambiguous and in flux, but these realms invite readers and audiences to join fervent, imaginative explorations of innumerable questions involving humanity, the spirit world, and "the great globe itself" (*Tempest*, 4.1.1884).

Notes

All quotes take from *The Riverside Shakespeare,* edited by G. Blakemore Evans (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1996).

1. Pope includes a lengthy footnote defining these diffuse terms, which range from sexually explicit genres to "feel good" narratives, characters from multiple

fictional universes, and other creations. Johnathan H. Pope, *Shakespeare's Fans: Adapting the Bard in the Age of Media Fandom* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 15.

2. Brian Mansfield, "10 actors who played one character on multiple TV shows," *USA Today*, 8 February, 2015, accessed 11 October, 2020. https://www.usatoday.com/story/life/entertainthis/2015/02/08/multiple-shows-better-call-saul/77600410/.

3. Sara K. Howe and Susan E. Cook, eds. *Representing Kink: Fringe Sexuality and Textuality in Literature, Digital Narrative and Popular Culture* (Lanham, MD. Lexington Books, 2019); "Lil Succubuss," "Types of Animal Roleplay," March 12, 2020. Accessed 16 February, 2021. https://animal-role-play.com/2020/03/12/types-of-animal-roleplay/.

4. Howe and Cook, *Representing Kink,* 1.

5. Christopher Moore, *Fool* (New York: HarperCollins, 2009); Moore *Lamb: The Gospel of Biff, Christ's Childhood Pal* (New York: HarperCollins, 2004); Moore, *Serpent of Venice* (New York: HarperCollins, 2014); Moore, *Shakespeare for Squirrels* (New York: HarperCollins, 2020).

6. Christopher Moore was very generous in his willingness to answer my questions and I am very grateful for his cooperation. Moore, Personal email correspondence. 2021. Accessed January 28, 2021.

7. McClellan, among others, discusses the kinds of "worlds" operative in fan fiction. Ann K. McClellan, *Sherlock's World: Fan Fiction and the Reimagining of BBC's Sherlock* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2018), 6.

8. Karen Helleckson and Kristina Busse, eds. *The Fan Fiction Studies Reader* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2014), 3-4.

9. Urban Dictionary, "Nerd." 2020. Accessed 11 October, 2020. https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=Nerd.

10. Viviene E. Cree and Cathlin Macaulay, eds. *Transfer of Learning in Professional and Vocational Education* (London: Routledge, 2000), 6.

11. Francesca Coppa, ed. *The Fanfiction Reader: Folk Tales for the Digital Age* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2017), ix.

12. McClellan, *Sherlock's World,* 19.

13. Sheenagh Pugh, *The Democratic Genre: Fan Fiction in a Literary Context* (Bridgend, UK: Seren Press, 2005), 14.

14. McClellan, *Sherlock's World,* 19.

15. Moore, (January 28). Personal email correspondence. 2021. Accessed January 28, 2021.

16. Moore, (January 28). Personal email correspondence. 2021. Accessed January 28, 2021.

17. McClellan, Sherlock's World, 6.

18. Valeri M. Fazel and Louise Geddes, eds. *The Shakespearean User: Critical and Creative Appropriations in a Networked Culture* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 8.

19. Coppa, *The Fanfiction Reader,* viii.

20. Moore, *Shakespeare for Squirrels,* 271.

21. According to the Urban Dictionary, Easter eggs are "A hidden item placed in a movie, television show, or otherwise visual media for close watchers.

Originates from the 1975 movie "The Rocky Horror Picture Show," when the cast had an Easter Egg hunt but most of the eggs went unfound. They can be seen throughout the film in various locations (such as under Frank N. Furter's throne). Urban Dictionary, "Easter Eggs." 2020. Accessed 11 October, 2020. https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=easter%20egg.

22. Nahum Tate, *History of King Lear* (London, 1681).
23. Moore, *Fool,* 175.
24. Moore, *Serpent of Venice,* 151.
25. Moore, *Serpent of Venice,* 214; Edgar Allan Poe, *Cask of Amontillado.* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 1847).
26. Ligia Tomoiagă, *Elements of the Picaresque in Contemporary British Fiction* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012), 19.
27. Moore, *Fool,* 74. It seems likely that this avid, but circumscribed, sexual relationship alludes to the lovers Pyramis and Thisbe, who were famously separated by a wall in *A Midsummer Night's Dream.*
28. Moore, *Fool,* 74.
29. Moore, *Fool,* 75.
30. Moore, *Fool,* 75.
31. Moore, *Fool,* 8.
32. Moore, *Fool,* 5.
33. Moore, *Serpent of Venice,* 44.
34. Moore, *Serpent of Venice,* 220.
35. Moore, *Serpent of Venice,* 220.
36. As is probably clear, there are inevitably popular culture, literary, and historical references included in these novels that will not be discussed here. I am grateful to my son for his guidance on gaming culture.
37. Lois Parkinson Zamoraand Wendy B. Faris, eds. *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community (*Durham: Duke UP, 1995), 3.
38. Moore, *Shakespeare for Squirrels,* 263.
39. Paul Waldau, *Animal Studies: An Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), xii.
40. Moore, *Shakespeare and the Squirrels,* 145.
41. Moore, *Shakespeare and the Squirrels,* 132.
42. Waldau, *Animal Studies,* xiii.
43. Moore, Shakespeare and the Squirrels, 141.
44. "Feign Death," *Wikidot,* 2020. Accessed 11 October, 2020. http://dnd5e.wikidot.com/spell:feign-death; "Feign Death," *Wowpedia.* Accessed 11 October, 2020. https://wow.gamepedia.com/Feign_Death.
45. Moore, *Shakespeare and the Squirrels,* 29.
46. Moore, *Shakespeare and the Squirrels,* 29.
47. Moore, *Shakespeare and the Squirrels,* 173.
48. Moore, *Shakespeare and the Squirrels,* 136.
49. Moore, *Shakespeare and the Squirrels,* 258.
50. Not surprisingly, Caliban appears in many fan fiction creations. See, for example, "Caliban (The Tempest)," *Non-alien Creatures Wiki,* Accessed 3 March, 2021. https://non-aliencreatures.fandom.com/wiki/Caliban_(The_Tempest).