Shakespeare in Iowa

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Abstract Shakespeare and the US state of Iowa have few, if any, direct connections. Yet even from Iowa's early pioneer days of the mid-nineteenth century, Shakespeare has maintained a notable presence in Iowans' reading habits and imaginations due to his use of agricultural motifs to portray families in crisis, particularly in *Hamlet* and *King Lear*. Centered around the associated themes of individual toil and familial strife, this article surveys the history of Shakespeare in Iowa from Hamlin Garland's recollections about farm life in the 1870s to two contemporary film adaptations *Field of Dreams* and *A Thousand Acres*.

Key words *King Lear*; *Hamlet*; Iowa; Iowa films, Hamlin Garland; individual toil; agriculture in literature

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In truth, William Shakespeare and Iowa, one of the United States, have very little in common. A mid-sized, land-locked state in the middle of America's Great Plains, Iowa sits more than fifteen hundred miles away in any direction from the nearest ocean. About ninety percent of Iowa's total land area (56,000 sq. miles/145,000 km^2) is devoted to agriculture. There are about seven times more pigs than citizens living within Iowa's borders (Monke). The state is not a cultural haven for early modern theater. Despite a town named Stratford in the north central part of the state (current population of 746), Shakespeare's armies, nobles, ships, pageants, and witty dialogue have never seemed at home in the sparsely-populated, rolling hills. As one twentieth-century chronicler of Iowans' reading habits put it, "While Shakespeare's works possess great literary value ... they are hardly suited to the abilities and the needs of the great masses of boys and girls who are finding their way into the high school" (Counts qtd. in Nemzek 224). Yet for all their seeming unsuitability, Shakespeare's plays have nonetheless persisted in Iowa, particularly those like *Hamlet* and *King Lear* that depict distressed individuals caught in a web of familial strife. Shakespeare permeates many literary and filmic depictions of Iowa, from Hamlin Garland's 1917 autobiography about growing up in Northeast Iowa to farm-based films of the late twentieth century such as *Field of Dreams* (dir. Phil Alden Robinson) and *A Thousand Acres* (dir. Jocelyn Moorhouse, adapted from Jane Smiley's 1991 book of the same name). The cultural interchange between Shakespeare and Iowa centers around the theme of individual toil and familial strife, a theme that is latent in Shake-

speare but brought into prominence by the culture and geography of Midwestern America.

To most Iowans past and present, Shakespeare's plays and even the playwright himself represent high intellectual culture, which is often contrasted with the common culture of a farm state where rural values predominate. In *A Son of the Middle Border* (1917), Hamlin Garland recounts how Shakespeare's lines provided a welcome escape from the monotony of northeastern Iowa farm life during the 1870s. "I now went about with a copy of Shakespeare in my pocket and ranted the immortal soliloquies of *Hamlet* and *Richard* as I held the plow" (206 – 07). Garland paints a picture of pastoral harmony, where the bard and the plow, the word and the hand, the closed theater and the open plain merge into a moment of spiritual nirvana. As a teenager Garland left his home state for artistic refinements of New England, and such spirit-enriching moments come to seem childish. Other Iowans have followed his example. Meredith Wilson (Mason City), John Wayne (Winterset), Johnny Carson (Corning), Bill Bryson (Des Moines), and Ashton Kutcher (Cedar Rapids) belong to the list of artistically successful Iowans who left the state, to return only sparingly if ever. Of course, all is not darkness among the cornfields. In the past ten years, Shakespeare has gained artistic ground in the Hawkeye State, which now boasts its own Shakespeare-oriented organization, the Iowa Shakespeare Experience (founded in 2002), as well as recurring productions such as the Iowa Repertory Theater's annual "Shakespeare on the Lawn" performance at the Salisbury House in Des Moines. [1]

Escapist literature, even if written by Shakespeare, can only fascinate the mind for so long before the reality of one's surroundings impinge on the fantasy. This interference is particularly true in Iowa, where, as Garland reminded his readers, the harsh reality often interrupts even the most pristine thoughts. The problem is that the details of farm life are messy, boring, and routine. When most authors write about the "merry farmer," Garland explains, they tend to "omit the mud and the dust and the grime, they forget the army worm, the flies, the heat, as well as the smells and drudgery of the barns" (129). If pushed far enough, any farm activity, such as milking cows on a frozen winter morning, can seem like an epic tale of humans overcoming adversity. But Garland's point is that such occurrences happen every day, and even worse, that one arduous activity always leads to another. The issue of timing on a farm almost completely negates the possibility of constructing a successful plot in the Aristotelian sense. There are no beginnings, middles, or ends, just conveyor belts of activity. Milking the cows also means cleaning their stalls and feeding them, and all of that before the milk sours or the bucket spills. Even harvest, the most conclusive event on a farm, can take over a month to complete.

The lack of an empirical connection between Iowa, the Bard, and his plays does not mean that Shakespeare can only serve as a marker of otherness for Iowans, of a life that is not their own. As Alex C. Y. Huang and Charles Ross have shown in their recent study of Shakespeare in Asia, each of Shakespeare's plays "has an uncanny ability to appeal to a generation or a culture" (2). Iowa is no different. In much the same way that Germany's G. E. Lessing found a genius in Shakespeare who could mirror all of his own writerly faults (377) and Ralph Waldo Emerson champi-

oned Shakespeare as the fount of individual creativity and originality (Bristol 124), Iowans have also squeezed some relevant lessons from the English playwright's works. [2]

At first, the lessons gleaned from Shakespeare were largely rhetorical and historical due to the influence of William Holmes McGuffey's *Readers*, an early English language textbook that emphasized diction, delivery, and rhetoric (Pawley 279). Aside from the odd library folio of Shakespeare or a personal edition of a well-to-do book collector, the McGuffey *Reader* is the place where nearly every nineteenth-century Iowan, including Garland, first encountered Shakespeare. In the *Rhetorical Guide*, first published in 1844, McGuffey included famous speeches by Hamlet, Henry V, Othello, and Marc Antony, which were all chosen for their historical value (Vail 17). Garland reports that he and his fellow students "were taught to feel the force of those poems and to reverence the genius that produced them, and that was worth while" (113). Of course, Garland's Shakespeare repertoire, at least according to his recollection some forty years after the fact, seems to have been much larger and more literary in nature than what the small passages from McGuffey's *Rhetorical Guide* would have offered. Nevertheless, Shakespeare had a place in early Iowa, tenuous and haphazard as it was.

Shakespeare's reputation for high culture in the early American Midwest may have also arisen due to the non-British cultural heritage of local residents. At the time of its inclusion in the Union in 1848, Iowa's white population possessed a mix of cultural heritages, with no one group exhibiting dominance. By 1870, the population of Iowa had eclipsed one million, of which a majority claimed German heritage, followed by Irish and Scandinavian (Bogue 89 – 90). British or English interests became relatively smaller and were restricted largely to venture capitalists (Cook 622). Even though the German-heritage immigrants were largely lower-class laborers and farmers, they likely also carried with them their peculiar cultural prejudices with regard to English theater in general and Shakespeare in particular, who has a long tradition in Germany dating back to the mid-eighteenth century.

German literary scholars and critics, who influenced Iowan culture, have looked up to Shakespeare as a model playwright worthy of emulation ever since Christoph Martin Wieland published the first German translations of Shakespeare between 1762 and 1766 (16 plays in all) and G. E. Lessing sung Shakespeare's virtues first in his *Literaturbriefe* and later in his *Hamburgische Dramaturgie* (1767 – 68). Shakespeare's German legacy was not hindered by the fact that much about his plays remained a mystery. Many lines still seemed untranslatable, if not completely incomprehensible. "Is it then always Shakespeare," Lessing mimics his readers' concerns, "who understood everything better than the French? That makes us angry; we simply can't read him" (84). [3] Later Lessing reassured his readers that Germans still have much to profit from the beauties of Shakespeare's translated verses, even if some of the deficiencies threaten to diminish the value of the German language even further. Lessing held out hope that Shakespeare's "beautiful qualities" would in time be discovered and later appropriated by the German national theater (84). His theatrical successor in Germany, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, took up Lessing's charge and

began to mine Shakespeare for more thematic structures. In his famous "Rede zum Shakespeares-Tag [Speech on Shakespeare's Day]," given at his familial home in Frankfurt on October 14, 1771, Goethe emphasized the individuality of Shakespeare's stage figures, which he contrasted against the rigid structures of society:

> Shakespeare's theater is a beautiful show of rarities, in which the history of the world floats before our eyes on an unseen thread. His plots, speaking in the vernacular style, are not plots, but his pieces twist around a secret point (one that still no philosopher has either seen or defined), in which the very essence of our selves—the pretended freedom of our will—collides with the necessary progress of the entire world. [4]

Goethe retains a sense of his predecessor's mysticism about Shakespeare's plays, but Goethe also emphasizes the theme of individuals suffering at the hands of the world. It is this theme of suffering and society that carries over into narratives about Iowa. The lone farmer out in the field, the housewife silently enduring her lot at the kitchen table, the senile man agonizing over his decline—all of these figure into the lore of Iowa, and all of these are prominent in Shakespeare's tragedies, especially *Hamlet* and *King Lear*.

Shakespeare's presence in Iowa did not stagnate with the few soliloquies and conversations available in the McGuffey *Readers*. Iowa's population continued to grow on into the twentieth century and so did the demand for more intensive education. This push culminated in 1902 when the state legislature passed a mandate for compulsory school attendance (Pawley 278). Shakespeare's history plays remained the most widely read, but as Claude Nemzek's survey of 1929 high school curricula reveals, Iowans were beginning to develop a taste for comedy and tragedy as well. Nemzek shows how Shakespeare's plays account for five of the top twelve titles most regularly used in Iowa textbooks during 1929: *The Merchant of Venice*, *Macbeth*, and *Julius Caesar* enjoyed top-five status in every available study. *As You Like It* and *Hamlet* also saw regular use (223). But if the only lessons early Iowans took from Shakespeare emphasized the high culture of early modern England, which displayed sophisticated speech patterns, rhetoric, and poetry, then Shakespeare could just as easily be supplanted by travel literature or foreign romance literature, both of which are easier to read. There had to be another reason to keep Shakespeare's plays in focus.

If one considers the German reception of Shakespeare in conjunction with his persistence in nineteenth-century Iowa, the shared mystified attraction among both sets fits with what Harry Levin calls a general acknowledgement of Shakespeare's rhetorical and experiential superiority (112). For Iowans in particular, Shakespeare represents a legacy of nineteenth-century American escapism, a hope for future cultural refinement, that was tinged with a sense of identification. The trials of daily life on the Midwestern plains taught the early settlers that survival was anything but easy, particularly when just it is just one person and (maybe) his or family striving against the world. This scenario blossoms in *King Lear* and *Hamlet*.

The broad expanse of the Iowa landscape, rather than inviting its denizens to ex-

plore, tends to drive them closer together, as if each homestead, each community were united against the detrimental forces both natural and man-made of the outside world. Shakespeare's tales of families in crisis, particularly those such as Hamlet's and Lear's who are involved in a property quarrel, provide insight into the vicissitudes of Iowa life. In his essay "What is the Midwestern Mind?", Thomas T. McAvoy notes that the most important problem for Midwesterners at any given time "is the Midwest, the land in which they live, earn their livelihood, and plan their future. They are chiefly concerned with the prosperity, the business, the labor relations and the suitability of their own community" (12). In this sense, Iowans tend to look at *King Lear* as a play not about the younger generation's desire for a quick inheritance (the greediness toward the fathers that Goneril, Reagan, Edmund exhibit). Rather, Iowans focus on the raging patriarch who neglects to care properly for the transfer of his estate and power. Iowans find the same problem of inheritance in *Hamlet*, namely that the problems at Elsinore lie not with the younger generation but with the ruling generation's failure to maintain the steady, uncontested strength of the kingdom.

The Iowan focus on comfort over money is partly due to the middle-to-lower class heritage of many of the state's inhabitants. As McAvoy explains, the industrial and agricultural development of Iowa was largely a lower middle-class project (6). Any type of financial success was (and still is) generally explained as the fruit of hard work, a lesson Hamlin Garland learned well under the rule of his task-master father. "Having had little play-time himself," Garland remembers of his father, "he considered that we were having a very comfortable boyhood. Furthermore the country was new and labor scare. Every hand and foot must count under such conditions" (100). Each individual functions as an essential cog in the wheel of daily activity, and any deviation from one's expected duties, as with the increasingly unpredictable Hamlet or the ever-more bumbling Lear, threatens to undo the entire community.

As is often the case in Shakespeare's social groupings, the close-knit qualities of many Iowa families and communities are what make them successful, but this proximity also tends to exacerbate any discontent. More than a few Iowans have, at one point in their life, uttered along with Hamlet, "Iowa's a prison" (compare Hamlet on Denmark, 2.2.243).[5] Many would stay, but the lack of opportunity for intellectual and professional advancement sends young Iowans elsewhere. Hamlet similarly dreams of continuing his education outside of Elsinore's walls, but family matters keep him close to home. Iowa life is similarly determined by a tenuous equation in which communal success must be balanced against individual aspirations. Such an equation is rarely in balance, often leading to a tension that boils just beneath the sunny surface, and so Shakespeare's plays provide more than just a means of imaginative escape. Constantly at odds yet hopelessly bound to each other, the families surrounding the Kings Hamlet and Lear serve as models for understanding life lived between the Missouri and Mississippi Rivers.

Despite the efforts of some critics to prove otherwise, Shakespeare was not an agriculturalist.[6] But knowing how to work the land is different from knowing how the land works, and it is the latter which Shakespeare uses to great effect both in *Hamlet* and *King Lear*. Producing a successful harvest requires planning, careful mainte-

nance, persistence, and a little bit of luck, all of which exist in the kingdoms of Denmark in *Hamlet* and ancient England in *King Lear*. In both plays, Shakespeare invokes the landscape and agricultural concerns as a backdrop for his portraits of individual suffering amidst familial discord. In the middle of Act 4 of *Hamlet*, Cladius muses over how best to deal with the increasingly troublesome Hamlet: "He's lov'd of the distracted multitude," Claudius proclaims as he goes on to compare the management of his kingdom to crops producing an even yield. The common people "like not in their judgment, but their eyes, / And where 'tis so, th' offender's scourge is weigh'd, / But never the offense. To bear all smooth and even, / This sudden sending him away must seem / Deliberate pause" (4.3.4 – 9). Like Claudius, King Lear invokes agricultural imagery in his darkest hour. When it looks like the usurping Edmund has taken control of the kingdom, the broken King comforts Cordelia with a prophecy of bad harvests, "Wipe thine eyes; / The good-years shall devour them, flesh and fell, / Ere they shall make us weep! We'll see 'em starv'd first!" (5.3. 23 – 25). Though both kings treat agricultural issues as secondary to the more important matters of family and power, they still refer to land management as a means to assess Hamlet and Edmund's behavior. In other words, bad harvests and starvation do not make for good stories in themselves but rather signify the stakes of the main familial drama.

Lear knows Edmund lacks the power to manage a harvest, much less a kingdom. His incapacity for genuine rule makes his attempt to seize power immoral, not any abstract spiritual flaw or philosophical error. Lear's language recalls the Biblical Joseph's invaluable interpretations of the Egyptian Pharoah's two agricultural dreams, the first about fat and skinny cattle and the second about corn stalks devouring each other (NRSV, Gen. 41:1 – 8). Had Joseph not been there to help Pharaoh manage the harvest, most of the Egyptian populace would have perished. The same, Lear thinks, will be true of Edmund's reign.

The way in which Shakespeare's characters manage the land marks the passage of time and character development, but the productivity of a particular tract of land also serves as a tangible way to measure the wisdom of past decisions. Are the living conditions growing better or worse? Is the social welfare improving or suffering? Claudius claims that the multitude is distracted by Hamlet's mischief, but he never states what the Danish populace is neglecting. Are they the striking artisans of *Julius Caesar* or have the Danes left the plow in the field? Either way, Claudius, as ruler of the kingdom, needs to find a way to get them back to work. As the members of Hamlet's and Lear's families increasingly turn their attention toward each other, they also turn away from the material success of their kingdoms.

An untended field means trouble elsewhere, and one can often start with the household. True to their Shakespearean models, the films *Field of Dreams* and *A Thousand Acres* use an agricultural background as a means to measure the moral success of the landowners. Both films depict a family farm in danger due to some ill-conceived decisions by the familial figurehead. *Field of Dreams* follows a *Hamlet*-style plot of an impetuous young know-it-all with a few crazy ideas, while *A Thousand Acres*, in an adaptation of *King Lear*, marks the decline of an aging patriarch intent on

dividing his kingdom amongst his three daughters. In both cases, the fate of the farm mirrors that of the family. Where *Field of Dreams* ends happily for the Kinsella family, *A Thousand Acres* ends with every acre of the Cook operation on the auction block. Neither story focuses directly on the day-to-day operations of the respective farms. The movement from planting to harvest does not become an epic of man versus nature. Rather agricultural processes move along in the background, just as they do in *Hamlet* and *King Lear*, marking both time and morality. Here success is not measured by triumph or wealth but rather by maintenance. As McAvoy has remarked, those that succeed in Iowa are the ones who focus on the problem of living with and for each other, who focus on "the land in which they, earn their livelihood, and plan their future" (12). The story of Iowa is not one of immediate success but of survival, of living to grind out yet another day and another year.

The Iowa version of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is the film *Field of Dreams*, which presents the story of Ray Kinsella (Kevin Costner), a New Jersey man who marries an Iowa woman, Annie (Amy Madigan), and decides to try his luck at farming. "The only thing we had in common," Ray narrates the opening sequence, "was that she was from Iowa, and I had once heard of Iowa." The locals, particularly Ray's brother-in-law Mark, consider Ray the ultimate outsider and doomed to failure. How could someone with virtually no prior knowledge about farming presume to succeed in an endeavor that requires intimate knowledge of the region's weather, soil, and people? Like Hamlet duly engrossed in his philosophical studies in Wittenberg, Germany, Ray proves himself to be a moderate success among foreigners. His fortunes, however, take a turn after he hears a ghostly voice emanating from somewhere in his cornfield, saying, "If you build it, he will come." The rest of the movie turns on various interpretations of the pronouns "it" and "he," but initially Ray believes he must build a baseball field (the "it") in the middle of his cornfield so that an old-time baseball player named Shoeless Joe Jackson (the "he")—who was banned from the game in 1919 for allegedly losing the World Series intentionally—can return to enjoy the game one more time. At the end of the movie, Ray finds himself in a Hamlet-inspired face off with his deceased father (the actual "he"). Just as at times only Hamlet can hear or be addressed by his father's ghost, not everyone in Ray's family can hear the ghostly voice, much less understand its cryptic riddles. It takes a singular act of belief to pursue the ghost's suggestions for better as with Ray or for worse as with Hamlet.[7]

Like *Hamlet*, *Field of Dreams* is essentially a family drama set against an agricultural backdrop. Just as Denmark is an unweeded garden, Ray's cornfield, with the large baseball diamond in its midst, appears doomed to produce an unprofitable, and therefore unsuccessful, harvest. The prospect of unproductive farmland sends Ray's brother-in-law into a near apoplectic fit near the end of the movie, recalling the earlier scene when Ray plowed under his ripening corn crop:

Mark: Ray do you realize how much this land is worth?
Ray: Yeah, yeah, 2200 hundred bucks an acre.
Mark: Well, then you gotta realize you can't keep a useless baseball diamond

in the middle of rich farmland!

During the plowing scene, the camera focuses mainly on a half-smiling Ray, but in the background, There sit all of his neighbors watching from the roadside. In a scene reminiscent of the final duel in Hamlet, the local townspeople even bring lawn chairs, waiting, one supposes, for lightning to strike the foreigner for his lunacy. Like Hamlet, for whom everyone has a different explanation, Ray's behavior is both explicable and inexplicable. The individual toils while those around him bicker and snipe.

If *Field of Dreams* creates an agricultural setting for one man's strange behavior, Jane Smiley's 1991 novel *A Thousand Acres* and Jocelyn Moorhouse's film adaptation of it offer a similar rural setting for Shakespeare's *King Lear*. The issue here is not the mystery of a man but the careless division and legacy of a farm. Like the drudgery of day-to-day farm operations, land quarrels are tedious affairs at best. They generally involve a multitude of interested parties, largely hinge on legalistic details, and rarely end with any sort of timeliness. Yet Shakespeare's *King Lear* opens with just such an event that requires both a considerable amount of time and staging. The first scene of *Lear* is only one of four in the play to eclipse three hundred lines, and it commands the onstage presence of nearly the entire principal cast. The scene touches every aspect of the proposed property transfer: property lines, management requirements, familial relationships, and even financing ("nothing will come of nothing"). This initial and detailed focus on Lear's divestiture provides a foundation for the legal and familial drama that follows because it specifically delineates what is at stake for all involved parties. Second, the settlement establishes a type of moral barometer by which one can assess character and decision-making in the play. Here again the financial, legal, and managerial details of a land arrangement form the basis of an unfolding familial drama, and though these details are somewhat tedious, they are still necessary. Inter-familial intrigue is only interesting if we know what the members are fighting about.

As the movie title *A Thousand Acres* suggests, numbers frame the action of the film even though the characters rarely discuss them outright. Most of the details about the Cook homestead are condensed into Larry Cook's (Jason Robards) one-minute speech to his eldest daughter Ginny when the film opens. In an attempt to capture the ceremonial grandeur of Shakespeare's initial scene, Larry and Ginny stand in an untilled field beneath the late-morning horizon. The mix of sun, cornrows, and light breeze suggest the expansiveness of the Cook agricultural operation. In Smiley's novel, Ginny goes into more exacting detail, easily reciting the worth of each acre on the family farm, around $3200 per acre in 1979, and she assures the reader that her father not only knows the value of all the other farms in the county but also the amount of debt each owner currently carries (23). The movie dialogue is more nebulous with the facts and figures, but the elder Cook recalls his ancestors building and cultivating "everything" by hand. This "everything" is just as non-specific as Cordelia's "nothing," so one at least has a sense of the plot's downward trajectory.

The carefully planned divestiture, endowed with all the official pomp of courtly or, in the case of Moorhouse's film, agricultural simplicity, turns into a free-for-all

where all predators, leeches, and hangers-on strive to claim a piece of the kingdom. This disarray stems from the concerted attention paid to land boundaries at the outset of Shakespeare's play. Without Lear and Larry Cook's geographic and mathematical descriptions, it would be impossible to know what exactly is at risk. In this sense, the rest of the plot develops into one big argument about who gets to manage what.

The opening scene of *King Lear* asks much of anyone striving to produce a contemporary adaptation. The scene must not only include all the legal, geographical, and financial details of Lear's divestiture (including his own personal addenda), it must also depict the escalating emotional tension in the room, as first Cordelia and then Kent receive their respective banishments. Though it is a relatively long scene compared to others in the play, the pace should feel rushed, giving rise to the sense that the various judgments, proclamations, and decisions have not been fully thought through. Lear's "fast intent" only picks up speed as it encounters more resistance, and Goneril's closing line does nothing to retard the pace, "We must do something, and i' th' heat" (1.1.307). Lear's stormy exit from the court should leave a sense of uncertainty. The divestiture itself as well as Cordelia's disinheritance happen so fast that it becomes difficult to predict what will happen next. "Such unconstant starts," as Regan calls them (1.1.299), require everyone to prepare for an uncertain future.

Moorhouse's version of the divestiture scene figures this uncertainty by letting the camera pan to each family member's face as they individually pale during Larry's announcement. The scene occurs on the edge of a recently planted field, symbolizing hope for the year's crop, while the grand patriarch sits beneath an enormous oak tree so tall the screen shot captures all trunk and no leaves. The correlation between Larry Cook and stolid nature recalls the opening scene in Peter Brook's famed 1971 film, where Lear, played by Paul Scofield, appears wearing a massive bearskin cloak, seated in a dome-like throne of stone. Imposing as Scofield's presence is, the scene contrasts with the opening montage, in which shabbily-clad peasants make a difficult trek toward the castle to hear the King's doom. Here again, the land structures the unfolding familial drama. In contrast to the scowling Scofield, Jason Robards delivers his divestiture intentions with flowing ease, turning the figure of Lear into more of a doddering yet benevolent grandfather, which is perhaps even more dangerous in farm management terms. At least the tyrant knows what he wants.

The world outside the family or community, though dangerous, can be overcome as long as everyone gets along. From the days of back-breaking pioneer toil to the current time of genetically-modified seeds and ten-thousand-acre farms, the outside world has been and still is brutal. A decade rarely goes by in Iowa in which tornadoes, floods, hailstorms, drought, and markets have at one time or another endangered the communal welfare, and the years between 2000 and 2010 have been no different. One of the worst disasters of decade was the F5 tornado that nearly decimated the small town of Parkersburg, Iowa, on May 25, 2008. With winds above 205 miles per hour the tornado destroyed nearly forty percent of the homes in the area. But according to Parkersburg City Clerk Gary Hinders, the community response was to rebuild right away: "[The residents'] attitude has been 'lead, follow or get out of the

way.' They were digging basements before their debris was hauled away" (Love).

In the face of widespread destruction on his stage, Shakespeare too tends to end his tragedies with a vision of community-building. In *Lear*, the now elder statesman Albany declares a state of mourning, "Our present business is general woe," but he also directs Kent and Edgar to start figuring out how to restore order, "Friends of my soul, you twain / Rule in this realm, and the gor'd state sustain" (5.3.319 – 21). In the case of *Hamlet*, it is worth noting that due to the strength of the Danish royal family, Norway's Young Fortinbras must pass over Denmark on his first martial expedition and instead attack the much weaker and less valuable Poland (2.2.71 – 76). But at the end of the play, after the Danish royals have murderously torn themselves apart, Fortinbras opts for a state funeral, an act of reconciliation between the warring parties, in hopes of restoring order to the beleaguered kingdom (5.2.395 – 403). There is a lesson to be learned from both Shakespearean families and Iowa communities: a group of people can accomplish nearly any objective, overcome any obstacle, so long as they do not succumb to infighting in the process.

This lesson plays out at the close of both *A Thousand Acres* and *Field of Dreams*, though in almost polar opposite fashion. Where the Kinsellas find that their magical baseball field has brought the family closer together as well as the promise of commercial success as a tourist attraction (the movie set in Dyersville remains a tourist attraction to this day), the Cook family farm and homestead have been sold to a large farming conglomerate. Like Lear and his daughters, the Cook family virtually imploded. In a modern update to Shakespeare's tragedy, Moorhouse, following Smiley's novel, ascribes the primary cause of the family's downfall to Larry Cook's incestuous relationships with his two eldest daughters. As the anthropologist and social theorist René Girard points out, "incestuous propagation leads to formless duplications, sinister repetitions, a dark mixture of unnamable things" and virtually invites a crisis of community-shattering proportions (75, 115). Invariably in societies where incest is forbidden, there is no social fix for incest except for all parties to move on in separate directions, either that or risk a violent crisis of community-shattering proportions (49). This dispersal is true for the Cooks in *A Thousand Acres*. Each of the sisters moves on in her own way. Ginny flees to Minneapolis, Minnesota where she takes a non-descript job as a waitress in a roadside café; Rose tries to continue the farming operation but eventually succumbs to cancer; and the youngest Caroline, the Cordelia figure, returns to her job as a lawyer in Des Moines (the capital of Iowa and often the symbol of urban, non-agricultural living). But even with the members of the Cook family scattered, the final image of the film--another Iowa trope--reveals a panoramic view of a country road next to a cornfield, while Ginny narrates a monologue about hope for the next generation in the form of Rose's two daughters, Pammy and Linda. Their names and genders may be different than the Duke of Kent and Edgar, but their task remains the same, namely to sustain the communal project.

Though *Field of Dreams* is a success story and does not follow the same downward, tragic trajectory of its Shakespearean model, Ray Kinsella's success is similarly explained as a boon for the entire community. Ray's double victory of familial and agricultural sustainability mirrors that of Young Fortinbras, for he as well, in an unsta-

ted way, seeks to rectify his forefather's shortcomings and, likewise, restore his family and state's reputation. The success of Ray's magical baseball field is prophesied by Terrence Mann (James Earl Jones), "People will come, Ray. They'll come to Iowa for reasons they can't even fathom." The same could be said of Shakespeare himself.

The details of life on an Iowa farm do not make for great literature, theater, or film. The days are long; the activities are repetitive; and the triumphs are small. Yet for a few souls, like Hamlin Garland, there remains a certain romantic magnificence embedded in the state's rolling hills but not in the sense of mountaintop panoramas or ocean horizons. Rather, the Iowa countryside offers a glimpse of an endless horizon, one that allows its residents to dream of something beyond the homestead but not so much as to make them believe that their efforts are insignificant. This perhaps explains the mix of attraction and criticism that sustains the view of Shakespeare as escapist literature. But as in his plays, the numerical, geographical, and environmental details of the landscape provide a backdrop to other types of narratives. Stories about familial strife often find the greatest expression when the land is at stake. This is because crises do not develop overnight, nor is it possible to judge them immediately after the fact. One must wait, like Young Fortinbras in *Hamlet* or Kent and Edgar in *King Lear*, to see what can be salvaged, what must be remembered, and what must be forgotten. The history of Shakespeare in Iowa follows much the same path. Often praised, regularly undermined, sometimes forgotten, yet he persists. Even without a direct physical link to Iowa life, he functions like the voice in Ray Kinsella's field, disembodied and a little vague yet instructive in the ways of families and land management.

【Notes】

1. More information on the Iowa Shakespeare Experience is available at their Web site <www.iowashakespeare.org>, and the performance schedule for Shakespeare on the Lawn can be found at <http://www.salisburyhouse.org/events_shakespeare_on_the_lawn.html>.

2. All translations from German are my own. "So würde ich Shakespeares Werk wenigstens nachher alseinen Siegel genutzt haben, um meinem Werke alle die Flecken abzuwischen."

3. "Aber ist es den immer Shakespeare, der alles besser verstanden hat als die Franzosen? Das ärgert uns: wir können ihn ja nicht lesen."

4. "Schäkespears Theater ist ein schöner Raritötenkasten, in dem die Geschichte der Welt vor unsern Augen an dem unsichtbaren Faden der Zeit vorbeiwallt. Seine Plane sind, nach dem gemeinen Stil zu reden, keine Plane, aber seine Stücke drehen sich um den geheimen Punkt (den noch kein Philosoph gesehen und bestimmt hat), in dem das Eigentümliche unsres Ichs, die prätendierte Freiheit unsres Wollens, mit dem notwendigen Gang des Ganzen zusammenstößt."

5. All quotations from Shakespeare's plays are taken from The Riverside Shakespeare, ed. G. Blakemore Evans, 2nd edition.

6. In her monumental analysis of Shakespeare's imagery, Caroline Spurgeon registers a few Shakespearean references to farming, yet when compared to those for gardening, the farming references "are not only much more perfunctory and general, but are very small in number" (46). In a 1985 article in Agricultural History, Robert Spier and Donald K. Anderson attempt to refute Spurgeon and argue that Shakespeare not only had a more intimate knowledge of agriculture but that he also wrote

that knowledge into his plays. Yet the evidence is paltry at best. Shakespeare refers to the plow only three times (LLL 5.2.884; Henry 5 4.08.14; and Two Noble Kinsmen 2.3.28). At one point in Henry V, he makes reference to a colter, a knife that cuts the turf in advance of the plowshare, as it "rusts through disuse (5.2.46)" (Spier and Anderson 451). The colter reference appears in the Duke of Burgundy's eulogistic entreaty to the warring Kings of England and France. Peace, Burgundy laments, "hath from France too long been chas'd, / And all her husbandry doth lie on heaps, / Corrupting in its own fertility" (5.2.38 – 40). The only practical farming advice contained in Burgundy's lament works as a type of negative example, namely how magistrates and farmers ought not to behave. Though they attempt to prove otherwise, Anderson and Spier eventually must capitulate to Spurgeon's thesis that Shakespeare's farm imagery is almost wholly metaphorical rather than realistic.

7. Stephen Greenblatt, in *Hamlet in Purgatory*, has argued that Hamlet's singular failure to follow his father's commands, first to avenge his murder but secondly to, "Remember me" (1.5.91), are what ultimately lead to his undoing. This causes a "shift of emphasis from vengeance to remembrance" (208). It is also worth noting that Hamlet completely forgets his father's request not to blame Gertrude for her speedy remarriage.

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