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McGuffey's Oxford (Ohio) Shakespeare

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James Fenimore Cooper regarded Shakespeare as "the great author of America." For most frontier readers, this distinctly *American* Shakespeare was disseminated within the pages of the ubiquitous McGuffey Rhetorical Readers, and Hamlin Garland speaks for several generations across the Ohio frontier when he writes, "I got my first taste of Shakespeare from the selected scenes which I read in these books." This Oxford (Ohio) canon draws generously from the Roman and English history plays, including scenes from the surprisingly popular *King John* and *Henry VIII*, and students were encouraged to memorize, and read aloud, classic orations such as "Antony's Oration over Dead Caesar's Body" and "Henry V. to His Troops." The tragedies were most frequently represented by "The Hamlet Soliloquy," and the more problematic comedies were virtually ignored, with the exception of brief appearances by a much sanitized John Falstaff. By the close of the century, the McGuffey canon had contributed to an American belief in Shakespeare's authority as second only to the Bible's, a point of view reflected in Emerson's judgment that Shakespeare is "inconceivably wise."

James Fenimore Cooper regarded Shakespeare as "the great author of America."[1] His plays were performed from the theaters of Boston, New York, and Philadelphia to the frontier outposts of California and Nevada, where "mountain men, soldiers, miners, and cowboys read his works,"[2] and "a few billiard tables pushed together with a dozen candles for the footlights" served as a makeshift stage in a hall over a shop or a saloon.[3] The extent to which Anglo-America revered Shakespeare is reflected in an Indian school's

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[1] James Fenimore Cooper, *Notions of the Americans: Picked up by a Travelling Bachelor* (Philadelphia: Carey, Lea & Carey 1833), 2, 113.

[2] Richard A. Van Orman, "The Bard in the West," *Western Historical Quarterly*, 5 (Jan. 1974), 29–38, 29.

[3] Gene Smith, *American Goethic: The Story of America's Legendary Theatrical Family – Junius, Edwin, and John Wilkes Booth* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992), 53–54.

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education of a young Arapaho named Red Turtle whose long hair was cut and name changed to "William Shakespear" (*sic*).[4]

Especially throughout the Mid-western frontier, one of the more pervasive influences toward this essentially American Shakespeare was the ubiquitous McGuffey Readers, first published by Truman & Smith, Cincinnati, between 1836 and 1837.[5] The first four Readers were largely written by William Holmes McGuffey, while he served as a professor at Miami University (1826–36). The *Fifth* and *Sixth Readers*, largely based on the work of his youngest brother Alexander and initially published as the *Rhetorical Guide* (1844), and a *High School Reader*, appeared within the following two decades. The American Book Company calculates that "more than 122,000,000 readers were sold between 1836 and 1920."[6] Since books were expensive and hard to come by, families passed these "eclectic readers" down from one generation to the next. Henry Hobart Vail, one of the later editors and historians of the McGuffey Readers, observes that this necessity nurtured within students an unforced love of literature: "Without intent they treasured in their memories such extracts from the authors of the best English literature" and these memorized passages "gave them a desire to read more."[7] In Eudora Welty's novel *The Optimist's Daughter*, Laurel McKelva remembers how her late mother would often recite from memory pages from her old *McGuffey Fifth Reader*: "It had become a book of reference."[8]

The McGuffey Readers, as Hugh S. Fullerton writes, "probably exerted a greater influence consciously upon the literary tastes and unconsciously upon the morality of the United States than any other books, excepting the Bible,"[9] and Henry Steele Commager concludes, "If [the McGuffey Readers] did not themselves provide the stuff of culture and morality, they were one of the chief instruments for weaving this stuff into the fabric of American life."[10]

[4] Tim McCoy, with Ronald McCoy, *Tim McCoy Remembers the West* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1977), 53–54.

[5] David D. Anderson, *Ohio in Fact and Fiction: Further Essays on the Ohio Experience* (Lansing, MI: Michigan State University, 2006), 27–30, discusses the importance of the McGuffey Readers to book publishing in nineteenth-century Cincinnati, Ohio.

[6] Richard David Mosier, *Making the American Mind: Social and Moral Ideas in the McGuffey Readers* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1965; first published 1947), 168.

[7] Henry Hobart Vail, *A History of the McGuffey Readers* (Cleveland: Private Printing, 1910), 11.

[8] Eudora Welty, *The Optimist's Daughter* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978), 172–74.

[9] Hugh S. Fullerton, "That Guy McGuffey," *Saturday Evening Post*, 26 Nov. 1927, as quoted in Harvey C. Minnich, *William Holmes McGuffey and His Readers* (New York: American Book Co., 1936), 82.

[10] Henry Steele Commager, Foreword to *McGuffey's Sixth Eclectic Reader* (New York: New American Library, 1963; first published 1879), xvi.

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According to Vail, the McGuffey Readers were fashioned on the underlying premise that "character is more valuable than knowledge and a taste for pure and ennobling literature is a safeguard for the young that cannot be safely ignored."[11] For McGuffey, and for his generation, education was an inevitable outgrowth of a staunchly evangelical Protestant belief, which emphasized salvation of the individual soul and a social mobility directly related to an individual's determination not to fall into sin or betray his or her humble origins through inappropriate speech and comportment.[12] McGuffey's selections from "ennobling literature" began with the Bible but also included British and American masters, including William Cullen Bryant, Milton, and Shakespeare.

With "the reservation of tracts of public land in each township for the support of public schools,"[13] and "more money building schools, reckoned per person, than citizens anywhere else in the nation,"[14] McGuffey found in the frontier a growing market in which he could play a vital role in shaping the American character. Described by Sullivan as "a staunch Presbyterian [and] an admirer of great men," Professor McGuffey "advised his students to read the Bible first, Shakespeare second."[15] His editorial decisions were governed by a desire to illustrate the virtues of individual enterprise, truthfulness, abstinence, self-discipline, promptness, industry, honesty, and piety, among others, within "a pastoral landscape where humankind blended harmoniously with the land."[16] Within the Readers, less emphasis was given to social reforms, with the exception of support for the temperance crusade,[17] and Kathy Jean Schneider demonstrates that public virtues and heroism are restricted to men and boys.[18]

[11] Vail, 64–65.

[12] John H. Westerhoff III, *McGuffey and His Readers: Piety, Morality, and Education in Nineteenth-Century America* (Milford, MI: Mott Media, 1982; first published 1978), 24, writes that the early Readers "may have been the last witness to the orthodoxy of the nation's religious past." See also Adam Neil Saravay, "Religion and the Teaching of Citizenship in Nineteenth-Century American Public Education (bachelor's honors dissertation, Harvard University, 1986).

[13] Arnell Morgan Gibson, *The West in the Life of the Nation* (Lexington, MA: D. C. Heath & Co., 1976), 213.

[14] *The Wild West* (New York: Time-Life Books, 1993), 198.

[15] Dorothy P. Sullivan, *William Holmes McGuffey: Schoolmaster to the Nation* (Rutherford, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1994), 91.

[16] Elliot J. Gorn, ed., with introduction, *The McGuffey Readers: Selections from the 1879 Edition* (Boston and New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 1998), 16.

[17] See, for example, "The Folly of Intoxication," from *Othello* 2, 3, in *McGuffey's Sixth Eclectic Reader* (1879), 348–49.

[18] Kathy Jean Schneider, "Role Models in Representative *McGuffey Readers*, 1836–1907 (master's thesis, Bowling Green State University, 1976).

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The McGuffey Readers, combining lessons in elocution with moral instruction, contributed more than any other written source to establishing Shakespeare throughout the Mid-western frontier as first among English-language poets.[19] Hamlin Garland, in *A Son of the Middle Border*, reminisces, "I wish to acknowledge my deep obligation to Professor McGuffey, whoever he may have been, for the dignity and literary grace of his selections … I got my first taste of Shakespeare from the selected scenes which I read in these books."[20]

A highly influential precursor of these "eclectic" readers, William Scott's *Lessons in Elocution, or, A Selection of Pieces, in Prose and Verse, for the Improvement of Youth in Reading and Speaking*, first published in 1799, prefigures a pattern for the selection of excerpts from Shakespeare that would be invariable in the following century, with readings coming almost exclusively from the history plays and from *Hamlet*.[21] While literary merit was certainly not discounted, Scott was primarily interested in illustration or example, "for *the Improvement of Youth* in *Reading and Speaking.*" Shakespeare, as well as other writers, was studied as a model of public discourse as well as for examples of praise-worthy character. These selections were usually set off as a kind of "wisdom literature," and usually did not identify standard dramatic elements, such as plot and dramatic context.

As Lawrence Levine notes, for nineteenth-century Americans, "so many of [Shakespeare's] values and tastes were, or at least appeared to be, close to their own."[22] After a hard day's travel across a frozen South Dakotan wilderness, Theodore Roosevelt and several ranch hands found relief at a spare line shack. To provide some entertainment, the future President read aloud from a pocket edition of *Hamlet*. Roosevelt recalls it was Polonius's Solomonic advice to Laertes that a Texan cowboy especially liked and "which he translated into more homely language."[23]

The nineteenth-century poet Bayard Taylor extolled Shakespeare for preaching "within the shadow of our spires,"[24] and the McGuffey Eclectic Readers also reflect an American acceptance of Shakespeare as an authority

[19] James G. McManaway, "Shakespeare in the United States," *PMLA*, 79, 5 (Dec. 1964), 513–18, 513.

[20] Hamlin Garland, *A Son of the Middle Border* (New York: The MacMillan Co., 1962), 94.

[21] William Scott, *Lessons in Elocution, or, A Selection of Pieces, in Prose and Verse, for the Improvement of Youth in Reading and Speaking* (Montpelier, VT: E. P. Walton, 1820).

[22] Lawrence W. Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), 36.

[23] Theodore Roosevelt, *Theodore Roosevelt's America: Selections from the Writings of the Oyster Bay Naturalist*, ed. Farida A. Wiley (New York: Devin-Adair, 1955), 45.

[24] Bayard Taylor, *Shakespeare's Statue*, Central Park, New York, 23 May 1872.

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on both English history and the Bible. This tendency to regard Shakespeare as a preeminent source for the study of British history is observable in Owen Wister's Virginian, who is introduced to a range of Shakespeare by schoolteacher Molly Wood. In the end, it is *Henry IV* which impresses this cowboy, with its "bed-rock"[25] in historical truth rather than fancy. Through Cardinal Wolsey and Cromwell, Hotspur and Prince Harry, Richard III and Richmond, students were given a moral compass as well as an ear to the power and eloquence of spoken English.

Reflecting the clerical practice of cross-referencing one biblical passage with others, McGuffey readings are often framed contextually by passages coming before and after a given selection. Largely unfamiliar to this present generation, this method would have been second nature to nineteenth-century Americans whose acquaintance with literature was largely from the pulpit or in selected excerpts. Only the learned few, or those with proximity to major libraries, would have had access to complete texts. McGuffey's readers, therefore, would have understood the meaning and import of the editorial decision to locate "Henry V. to His Troops" at Harfleur between Walter Scott's "The Soldier's Rest" and St. Paul's monumental "Speech of Paul on Mars Hill," or to place "The Fall of Cardinal Wolsey," from *Henry VIII*, before an essay by the American Huguenot Thomas S. Grimké (1786–1834) in which he compares the lives of Lafayette, international statesman and French ally to American patriots, and Robert Raikes, founder of the English Sunday School movement. Without disparaging Lafayette's conspicuous achievement, Grimké concludes that it is Raikes, in dedicating himself to the souls of God's children, who "has lived for all ages and all countries":

> The time may come when the name of Lafayette will be forgotten; or when the star of his fame no longer glittering in the zenith, shall be seen, pale and glimmering, on the verge of the horizon. But the name of Robert Raikes shall never be forgotten; and the lambent flame of his glory is that eternal fire which rushed down from heaven to devour the sacrifice of Elijah.[26]

This tribute contrasts sharply with the words of a Cardinal who, fallen from the king's graces and removing the rags of power and influence, confesses to Cromwell, "Oh, 'tis a burthen, Cromwell, 'tis a burthen, / Too heavy for a man that hopes for heaven!"[27]

Since the nineteenth-century schoolroom did not separate reading, writing, and elocution, selections were made and frequently modified with a focus on

[25] Owen Wister, *The Virginian: A Horseman of the Plains* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992; first published 1902), 298.
[26] *McGuffey's Sixth Eclectic Reader* (1879), 184.
[27] Ibid., 186 (see *Henry VIII* 3, 2, 384–85).

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oratory, with the intervening dialogue excised.[28] Eudora Welty describes her mother's reciting McGuffey poems aloud to pass the time during her arduous trek to and from the one-room schoolhouse where she taught,[29] and Herbert Quick, a widely read and influential agricultural journalist in the nineteenth century, recalls a visiting actor's schoolhouse performance of *King John* sometime in the 1880s:

> In order that she might have full scope for her scream, she began with a line which she gave us as "Oh, ye men of Angiers!" … A switch engine a mile away … answered … with the same number of syllables, on the exact key of the elocutionist's voice, and with the identical circumflex at the end: Hoot – te – toot – te – toot – too – oo – oo.[30]

In similar fashion, the *Sixth Reader* (1857) gives students the following instruction for recitation of "Henry V. to His Troops": "Speak in the open air, at the very top of the voice; this is an exercise admirably to be adapted to strengthen the voice and give it compass, and should be frequently practiced."[31]

Astonishing from a contemporary perspective is that the early editions of the McGuffey Readers reprint selections from Shakespeare with virtually no annotation. Although this lack of critical apparatus may point to limitations in scholarly book publishing at the time, it may also reflect the reading capability of a generation that was thoroughly familiar with Jacobean language, both in the spoken text of the King James Bible and, as Stuart Henry points out, in the remarkably similar language of the American West.[32] In his tribute to the McGuffey Readers, Quick expresses an easy acquaintance with Shakespeare's language: "I could say as I opened my Shakespeare, my Milton or my Byron, 'Why don't you remember our meeting away back on the farm in that old book with the front cover torn off?' … you're no stranger to me."[33]

[28] Robert V. Friedenberg, "America's Most Widely Read Speech Teachers: the Brothers McGuffey," *Speech Teacher*, 21, 2 (March 1972), 79–85, 85, writes: "This criterion is no doubt responsible for the disproportionately high number of speeches included in the advanced readers."

[29] Eudora Welty, *One Writer's Beginnings* (New York: Warner Books, Inc., 1984), 56–57.

[30] Herbert Quick, *One Man's Life: An Autobiography* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1925), 280–81.

[31] *McGuffey's New Sixth Eclectic Reader: Exercises in Rhetorical Reading with Introductory Rules and Examples* (Cincinnati: Sargent, Wilson & Hinkle, n.d.; first published 1857), 53.

[32] Stuart Henry, *Conquering Our Great American Plains* (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1930), 98.

[33] Quick, 153 ff., does not specify the *Fourth*. However, it is likely that he is recalling this volume.

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Although the McGuffey Readers eventually appeared in a series, they "were ungraded … and the stages designated in the titles bore no relationship to a student's status in school."[34] Throughout the majority of the nineteenth century, the *Fourth Reader* (1837 edition), passed down from one generation to the next, was the highest level used at home and in Midwestern and Southern schoolhouses at "a secondary school level."[35]

In its Preface, this original edition of the *Fourth Reader* describes great writing as the refinement of elevated thought by correct and graceful expression: "Nothing is so difficult to be understood as 'nonsense.' Nothing is so clear and easy to be comprehended as the simplicity of wisdom."[36] The *Fourth Reader* introduces students – and their families – to "extracts in Prose and Poetry from the Best American and English Writers,"[37] including William Cullen Bryant and Washington Irving, Addison and Byron, as well as Shakespeare, Milton, and the Bible. Hamlin Garland, recalling the literary excerpts in the *Fourth Reader*, writes, "We were taught to feel the force of these poems and to reverence the genius that produced them."[38]

The *Fourth Reader* (1837) introduces the following selections from Shakespeare's plays:

Prince Arthur: *King John* 4, 1, 1–133
Antony's Oration over Caesar's Dead Body: *Julius Caesar* 3, 2, 73–230 (1 [3, 2, 73–84]; 2 [85–107]; 3 [118–37]; 4 [169–97]; 5 [210–30])

In these excerpts, and throughout the entire *McGuffey* series, the voices of women are conspicuously absent.[39] Observing this tendency to marginalize females, Schneider concludes, "The *McGuffey Readers* present a world in which division of labor according to sex is a rule."[40]

In "Prince Arthur," an odd choice for a grammar school reader from a contemporary point of view, the young prince learns that the father-like chamberlain, Hubert de Burgh, has received orders from King John to burn out his young rival's eyes. Although Hubert struggles to fulfill the command of his liege, he cannot "for the wealth of all the world" offend against a

[34] Carol Kammen, "The *McGuffey Readers*," *Children's Literature*, 5 (1976), 58–63, 60.
[35] Sullivan, *William Holmes McGuffey*, 210.
[36] William McGuffey, *The Eclectic Fourth Reader: Containing Elegant Extracts in Prose and Poetry from the Best American and English Writers* (Milford, MI: Mott Media, Inc., 1982; first published 1837), viii.
[37] Ibid., viii.
[38] Garland, *A Son of the Middle Border*, 95.
[39] It is only with the *New High School Reader* that the editors introduce a speaker who is clearly female, in "The Sister's Plea," from *Measure for Measure*. Although "Mercy," from *The Merchant of Venice*, also appears in this volume, the speaker is not identified.
[40] Schneider, "Role Models in Representative *McGuffey Readers*," 71.

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young prince whose language evokes the words of Jesus at the Passion: "I'll forgive you, / What ever torment you do put me to."[41]

The other Shakespeare selection in the original *Fourth Reader*, "Antony's Oration over Caesar's Dead Body," is the most frequently anthologized, not only in the McGuffey series but in virtually all nineteenth-century readers.[42] Melancthon Tope, an educator and an early biographer of William Holmes McGuffey, recalls that his generation "had pupils … act out some of the dialogues and other exercises in the Readers, as 'Antony over Caesar's Dead Body' … All went home happy, feeling that they had done something elevating and inspiring."[43]

In the *Fourth Reader*, the dialogue of the plebeians is excised, and Antony's oration alone appears in five numbered sections:

1) I come to bury Caesar, not to praise him.
2) You did love him once, not without cause …
3) Let but the commons hear this testament …
4) If you have tears, prepare to shed them now.
5) … But were I Brutus / And Brutus Antony, there were an Antony / Would ruffle up your spirits, and put a tongue / In every wound of Caesar, that should move / The stones of Rome to rise and mutiny.[44]

This oration follows, in the *Fourth Reader*, "The Fall of Babylon,"[45] and there is little doubt that the editors intend its readers to link the two selections. From the editors' perspective, all pagan achievement, even that of great Caesar, is bound ultimately to fail. And yet the words of Antony, almost moving stones to rise and mutiny, link mighty Caesar's fall to the betrayal of the Son of Man. In the *Sixth Reader* (1879), notations following "Antony over Caesar's Dead Body" clarify the stakes surrounding Caesar's death in a tribute that places him among the precursors of the young America's great patriot heroes: Julius Caesar "was the most remarkable genius of the ancient world … Under his rule Rome was probably at her best, and his murder at once produced a state of anarchy."[46] Here, as elsewhere in the McGuffey Readers, heroic deeds, performed by men, are identified with the stability of the commonwealth; villainy with anarchy and a consequent tyranny.

[41] *The Eclectic Fourth Reader* (1838), 303–7.
[42] "Antony's Oration" appears in the *Eclectic Fourth Reader* (1837), the *Rhetorical Reader* (1844) and, subsequently, the *Sixth Reader* (1857 and 1879).
[43] Melancthon Tope, *A Biography of William Holmes McGuffey* (Bowerston, OH: Phrenological Era Press, 1929), 80.
[44] *The Eclectic Fourth Reader* (1838), 334–37.
[45] Revelation 18 and 19:1–8; as reprinted in John Jebb, *Sacred Literature* (Edinburgh: W. Blackwood, 1820), 455–58.
[46] *McGuffey's Sixth Eclectic Reader* (1879), 310.

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Beginning with the edition of 1857, Shakespeare disappears entirely from the *Fourth Reader*. In part, this reflects a trend, over the next fifty years, to delay introduction of Shakespeare, initially to the *Fifth* and finally almost exclusively to the *Sixth Reader* and the *High School Reader*, an upper-level textbook "for advanced classes,"[47] with very limited circulation within modest frontier classrooms.

The substance of what would be the *Fifth* and *Sixth Readers* was initially introduced by W. H. McGuffey's youngest brother Alexander (born in 1816 in Trumbull County, Ohio) as the *Rhetorical Guide* (1844). According to Ruggles, these three volumes "were to mould the tastes of four generations."[48] The *Rhetorical Guide* includes fourteen selections from or about Shakespeare.

Reading Lessons in Prose:
*"The Knave Unmasked," *All's Well that Ends Well* 3, 6; 4, 1; 4, 3, 75–340
+"The Folly of Intoxication," *Othello* 2, 3, 259–334
"Shakespeare", William Hazlitt
+"Prince Henry and Falstaff," *1 Henry IV* 2, 4, 113–81

Poetical Lessons:
+"Hamlet's Soliloquy," *Hamlet* 3, 1, 55–87
+"Speech of Henry V. to His Troops," *Henry V* 3, 1, 1–34
"Othello's Apology," *Othello* 1, 3
+"Fall of Cardinal Wolsey," *Henry VIII* 3, 2, 351–459
"Death of Cardinal Wolsey," *Henry VIII* 4, 2, 5 ff.
+"The Dream of Clarence," *Richard III* 1, 4, 1–77
*"The Murder of Arthur," *King John* 3, 3, 19–69a
*"The Remorse of King John," *King John* 4, 2, 181–269
+"The Quarrel of Brutus and Cassius," *Julius Caesar* 4, 3, 1–123
+"Antony's Oration over the Dead Body of Caesar," *Julius Caesar* 3, 2, 73–230

*Selection also reprinted in the *New Sixth Eclectic Reader* (1857)
+Selection also reprinted in the *New Sixth Eclectic Reader* (1857, 1879)

No other McGuffey Reader so generously excerpts the works of Shakespeare, and these selections reinforced and disseminated the sacred canon within the nineteenth-century American public classroom. As noted in

[47] See *McGuffey's New High School Reader: For Advanced Classes, Embracing about Two Hundred Classic Exercises* (New York: Gordon Press, 1976; first published 1857).
[48] Alice McGuffey Merrill Ruggles, *The Story of the McGuffeys* (New York: American Book Co., 1950), 97.

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the table above, eleven selections reappear in the 1857 *Sixth Reader*, only seven in the 1879 edition. "Othello's Apology" would reappear only once in the *New High School Reader* and the "Death of Cardinal Wolsey" is not reprinted in any later editions within the McGuffey series.

Any reader who first discovered Shakespeare in the pages of a McGuffey Reader might find years later that the words of the Stratford bard had been subject to wide-ranging editorial license. In the Preface to the 1857 edition, the editor writes, "Considerable liberty has been taken with the articles selected, in order to adapt them to the especial purpose for which they are here designed. Much change and remodeling have been necessary. The lessons are therefore credited as taken 'from' the author named."[49]

The *Rhetorical Guide* (1844) and *Sixth Eclectic Reader* (1857) alone include a dramatic sequence from *All's Well that Ends Well*, Acts 3 and 4. As noted earlier, comedy is largely absent in the McGuffey Readers, and it is especially surprising to find a selection from one of Shakespeare's so-called "problem plays," with, like *Measure for Measure*, a conflict resolution that depends on a morally ambiguous "bed trick." Bertram is altered to "Count Rosencrantz," a change that may imply a spurious link with *Hamlet*, and references to the Helena–Bertram main plot have been expunged, as well as lines involving sexual allusion, expletives, or crudity (appearing below in bold face):

> He ne'er pays after-debts, take it before,
> **And say a soldier, Dian, told thee this:**
> **Men are to mell with, boys are not to kiss …**[50]
> He will steal, sir, an egg out of a cloister.
> **For rapes and ravishments he parallels Nessus.**[51]

This expurgated selection, entitled "The Knave Unmasked,"[52] highlights moral instruction through a cautionary tale about the foolishness of keeping bad company. In Shakespeare's *All's Well that Ends Well*, the knave in question is Bertram's follower Parolles (literally, "words"), whose achievements amount to nothing more than tales and fabrications. Lest readers miss the point, the McGuffey editors change Parolles's name to the even less subtle "Delgrado." Captured and masked by Florentine lords, Delgrado is cross-examined as though he were being held by soldiers of the enemy's camp. Delgrado falls for the trick and willingly shares military secrets with the supposed enemy, while Bertram, who overhears this exchange, sees his

[49] *McGuffey's New Sixth Eclectic Reader* (1857), 8.
[50] See *All's Well that Ends Well* 4, 3, 226–28.
[51] Ibid., 4, 3, 250–51.
[52] *McGuffey's New Sixth Eclectic Reader* (1857), 185–95.

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companion for what he truly is: a "damnable both-sides rogue," and a coward.

An excerpt from *1 Henry IV*, entitled "Prince Henry and Falstaff,"[53] finds Falstaff and his cronies, at the Boar's Head, describing how they bravely attempted to fight off a band of as many as eleven who steal the very plunder Falstaff and company had taken in highway robbery. As in the selections from *All's Well that Ends Well* and *Othello*, the language of *1 Henry IV* is sanitized. Sir John Falstaff's earthy epithets

> **S'blood**, you starveling, you [eel-]skin, you dried neat's tongue,
> **you bull's pizzle**, you stock-fish! (2, 4, 244–45)

are cleaned up, with the oath by "[Christ]'s blood" and the likening of one to a "bull's penis" expurgated:

> Away! You starveling, you eel-skin, you dried neat's tongue, you stock-fish!

Though Falstaff's tale-telling is remarkably creative, Hal reveals, in the end, that "these lies are like the father of them" and that "in a plain tale [Hal] shall put [Falstaff] down." After Hal reveals that he and Poins alone had succeeded in robbing Falstaff and company, Falstaff tries to cover for himself by arguing that he really knew that Hal was one of the two thieves and that "the lion will not touch the true prince." Earlier in the *Rhetorical Guide* and the *Sixth Reader*, students encounter, at Harfleur, a prince who has put Falstaff and his ways behind him, and who stands before his troops as the last king of England to lead his army into battle:

> I see you stand like greyhounds in the slips,
> Straining upon the start. The game's afoot;
> Follow your spirit: and, upon this charge,
> Cry – "God for Harry, England, and St. George!"[54]

No specific link to American Revolutionary history is made here. Nonetheless, the student may have been invited to see the parallel between Henry V and America's own "St. George," a former President of the United States who as a military commander also led his troops into battle.

From Scott's *Lessons in Elocution* (1799) through McGuffey's *Sixth Reader*, the "Fall of Cardinal Wolsey" from *Henry VIII* appears as a cautionary tale on the dangers of overweening pride and misguided ambition.[55] The religious landscape of frontier American was decidedly Protestant, and Roman clergy, especially the upper echelon, were generally characterized as

[53] Ibid., 360–63. [54] Ibid., 136. [55] Ibid., 418–21.

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self-indulgent, corrupt, and proud. Following his arrest on charges of treason, Wolsey ruminates on the emptiness of a life devoted to vain ambition and a voracious appetite. In an extended simile, he likens his misadventure to the adventures of country boys:

> I have ventur'd
> Like little wanton boys that swim on bladders,
> This many summers in a sea of glory,
> But far beyond my depth.[56]

This metaphor would also have struck home for more than one child in that frontier classroom. Shortly thereafter, Wolsey shares with his faithful servant, Cromwell, words that could easily guide any would-be statesman in the young American republic:

> Mark but my fall, and that that ruin'd me:
> Cromwell, I charge thee, fling away ambition!
> By that sin fell the angels; how can man then
> (The image of his Maker) hope to win by it?
> Love thyself last, cherish those hearts that hate thee;
> Corruption wins not more than honesty.[57]

Hamlet's "To be, or not to be" soliloquy appears first in the *Rhetorical Guide* (1844) and in all subsequent editions of the *Sixth Reader* (1857, 1879) under the title "Hamlet's Soliloquy."[58] More than any other passage, it has been identified by generations with Shakespeare's Danish prince. Given McGuffey's emphasis on passages that illustrate heroic deed and valorous action, the selection of "Hamlet's Soliloquy" is unusual. However, the editors could not ignore the immense popularity of a play whose familiarity to the general public is documented by references as widely disparate as *Huckleberry Finn* and, much later, John Ford's *My Darling Clementine*.[59] Therefore it is not surprising that it has been a frequent subject of parody, and its general theme has been identified, as in the title given to it by Scott, as the "Soliloquy of Hamlet on death."[60] Harry Levin argues that acquaintance through this one soliloquy alone and "theatrical bowdlerization" contributed to "the romantic notion of a statuesque figure who broods apart, who thinks too much, who shies away from the others."[61] The pervasiveness of this

[56] See *Henry VIII* 3, 2, 359–62.
[57] Ibid., 3, 2, 439–44.
[58] *McGuffey's New Sixth Eclectic Reader* (1857), 110–11.
[59] See Philip H. Christensen, "'Shakespeare in Tombstone': Hamlet's Undiscovered Country," in Holger Klein and Dimiter Daphinoff, eds., *Hamlet on Screen* (Lewsiton, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1997), 280–89.
[60] Scott, *Lessons in Elocution*, 373.
[61] Harry Levin, *The Question of Hamlet* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959), 48.

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interpretation of Hamlet's character is captured by a first-hand witness to one of Edwin Booth's many performances; he describes Booth's Hamlet as "a man of first-class intellect and second-class will."[62]

The *McGuffey's New High School Reader for Advanced Classes*, first published in 1857 and revised in 1889,[63] seems to have enjoyed limited distribution on the Western frontier, where even the relatively small percentage of students who completed a high school education would have had little access beyond the *Fourth*, *Fifth*, or *Sixth Readers*.[64] In addition to Hazlitt's tribute to "Shakespeare,"[65] which had previously appeared in the *Rhetorical Guide* (1844), and an essay by Washington Irving entitled "Shakespeare's Home and Tomb,"[66] the *New High School Reader* also includes "Othello's Apology,"[67] a selection that had previously appeared only in the *Rhetorical Reader* (1844), and Jacques's "Seven Ages of Man,"[68] a first appearance for a McGuffey Reader but a selection previously printed in Scott. In total, selections from Shakespeare are limited to the following:

"*Hamlet*. Scene 1," *Hamlet* 1, 2, 160–257
"*Hamlet*. Scene 2," *Hamlet* 2, 2, 239–379; 3, 2, 296–372
"Mercy," *Merchant of Venice* 4, 1, 184–202
"The Sister's Plea," *Measure for Measure* 2, 2, 26–158
"Othello's Apology," *Othello* 1, 3, 76–94; 127–69
"Seven Ages of Man," *As You Like It* 2, 7, 139–66

The first four selections are arranged as thematic pairs. The two excerpts from *Hamlet*, identified as "Scene 1" and "Scene 2" respectively, are actually taken from Act 1, scene 2 and Act 2, scenes 3 and 4.[69] What ties these passages together is the theme of friendship, a topic frequent throughout the McGuffey series. In the first passage, Hamlet learns of the appearances of the Ghost and receives from his "good friend" Horatio, and his companions Bernardo and Marcellus, assurances that whatever may transpire that evening, they will "give it an understanding, but no tongue." The second passage combines excerpts from Act 2, scene 2 and Act 3, scenes 3 and 4. Hamlet begins by greeting his "good friends" Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, but it

[62] Charles H. Shattuck, *Shakespeare on the American Stage: From the Hallams to Edwin Booth* (Washington, DC: Folger Shakespeare Library, 1976), 145.
[63] *McGuffey's New High School Reader* (1857). This volume was revised as *McGuffey High School Reader* (Cincinnati and New York: Van Antwerp, Bragg, and Co., 1889). This edition has not yet been available to this writer.
[64] Charles Carpenter, *History of American Schoolbooks* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1963), 82, writes that publication of the *McGuffey High School Reader* was limited.
[65] *McGuffey's New High School Reader* (1857), 127–29.
[66] Ibid., 130–33.
[67] Ibid., 318–20.
[68] Ibid., 383–84.
[69] Ibid., 133–40.

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does not take long for Hamlet to understand their reason for coming to Elsinore. Holding out a recorder to Guildenstern, he asks his false friend "to play upon the pipe." When Guildenstern responds that he "know[s] not the touch," Hamlet rejoins, "You would seem to know my stops; you would pluck out the heart of my mystery; you would sound me from my lowest note to the top of my compass … yet can not you make it speak."[70]

In similar fashion, the selections from *Merchant of Venice* and *Measure for Measure* illustrate a common theme: mercy.[71] The first passage, Portia's familiar "The quality of mercy is not strain'd," is arranged as two stanzas of ten lines each. The dramatic context and the speaker are not identified. In the second passage, the plea for mercy is set within a dramatic context, with Isabella beseeching and Angelo turning a deaf ear. While the selection is dialogue and the speakers are identified by name, the reader is not given the slightest clue regarding the nature of the offense committed by Isabella's brother. What remains, as in the companion selection, is an apology for the exercise of mercy in high places:

> No ceremony that to great ones 'longs,
> Not the king's crown, nor the deputed sword,
> The marshal's truncheon, nor the judge's robe,
> Becomes them with one-half so good a grace
> As mercy does.[72]

As noted earlier, the *McGuffey High School Reader* had limited circulation. In the second half of the nineteenth century, few students had the opportunity, or public schools the resources, to explore "advanced studies." By the turn of the twentieth century, as Carpenter writes, eclectic readers were giving way to "small literature texts scarcely more than pocket-size. This innovation resulted in the beginnings of thorough study of individual authors."[73] Ironically, the *Eclectic Readers* themselves contributed to their own marginalization by whetting the appetite of several generations of rural Americans to more intensive literary studies. This growing reverence for literature, with an accompanying decline of influence from Christian evangelicalism, is evident within the changing editorial policy of the McGuffey Readers. While the 1857 edition of the *McGuffey Sixth Eclectic Reader* introduces Shakespeare as "the son of a wool-comber [who] received some education at a grammar school,"[74] the later 1879 edition contributes toward an emerging bardolatry by concluding that Shakespeare may be "the greatest poet the world has ever

[70] See *Hamlet* 3, 2, 364–69.
[71] *McGuffey's New High School Reader* (1857), 213–17.
[72] *Measure for Measure* 2, 2, 59–63.
[73] Carpenter, 166.
[74] *McGuffey's New Sixth Eclectic Reader* (1857), 110.

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produced."[75] Although Hamlin Garland cautions against "undue worship of Shakespeare,"[76] the worship of Shakespeare at the altar of high culture had begun, and Emerson, by the close of the nineteenth century, is describing Shakespeare as "inconceivably wise."[77]

The earlier twentieth century witnessed a "rediscovery" of the McGuffey Readers as "sacred texts of American civil religion"[78] for a generation longing for a return to a more pastoral America. Henry Ford selected the McGuffey Readers as the curricular foundation of his new frontier school in Dearborn, Michigan, and Hugh S. Fullerton, journalist and former baseball player, became a national voice, through the *Saturday Evening Post*, for the National Federation of McGuffey Societies.

As recently as 1926, my paternal grandfather, who was raised on a Wisconsin farm, exhorted his son with words inscribed in a copy of Parson Weems's *Life of Washington*: "May the Christian Spirit, loyalty to country and heroism of George Washington ever inspire and lead you to noble works."[79] A decade before the Vietnam conflict, my own father challenged me to live by the ideals of Richmond and Henry V, Caesar and Mark Antony, Horatio and Hamlet. Apart from his *Life of Washington* and Sandburg *Lincoln*, what I remember most clearly about my father are his frequent recitations from Virgil (in Latin), the King James Bible, and the McGuffey poets Whittier, Longfellow, and Shakespeare. What I did not realize at the time was that he was walking in what had become the almost imperceptible shadow of a largely forgotten Ohio educator whose name I would only learn decades later. By the early 1960s I had begun to discover a very different Shakespeare.

[75] *Fifth Eclectic Reader: Revised* (1879), 340.

[76] Hamlin Garland, *Crumbling Idols: Twelve Essays on Art Dealing Chiefly with Literature, Painting and the Drama*, ed. Jane Johnson (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1960), 72–73.

[77] Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Shakespeare; or The Poet," in *idem*, *Seven Lectures: Representative Men* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin & Co., 1893), 202.

[78] Jason Fredrick Earle, "The *McGuffey Readers* and Civil Religion: 1918–1963" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Minnesota, 1994), 4.

[79] Inscribed in a personal copy of Mason Weems, *A History of the Life and Death, Virtues and Exploits of General George Washington*, ed. Mark Van Doren (n.p.: Macy-Masius Publishers, 1927).

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