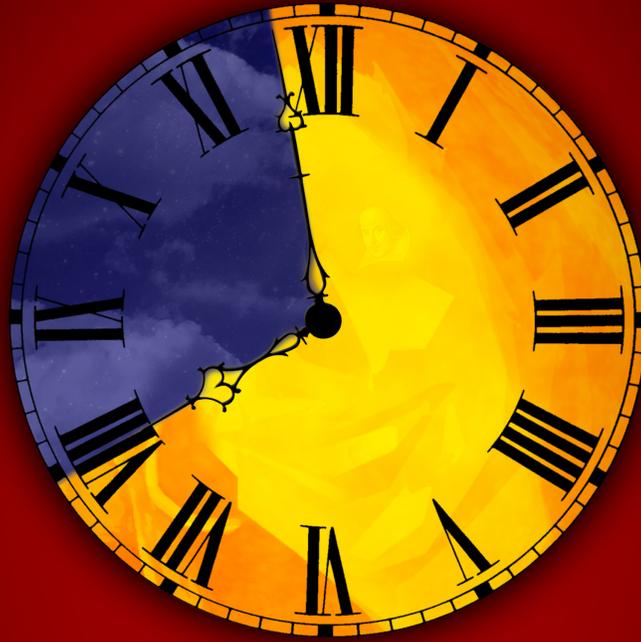


twenty-four hours to
Twelfth Night



*One Bardolator's Sleepless Saga of
Shakespeare in the Park, the Meaning of Life
and Anne Hathaway's Second~Best Bed*

a short, sweet slice of creative nonfiction by

ADAM BERTOCCI

author of *Two Gentlemen of Lebowski*

"Adam Bertocci's hysterical" – The Royal Shakespeare Company "A Shakespeare adaptation expert" – AOL Pop Eater

This piece has not been approved, authorized, licensed or endorsed by any entity or person involved with the Shakespeare in the Park production of *Twelfth Night*, including Anne Hathaway.

© 2009, 2012 Adam Bertocci

Twenty-Four Hours to *Twelfth Night*:
One Bardolator's Sleepless Saga of Shakespeare in the Park,
the Meaning of Life and Anne Hathaway's Second-Best Bed
by Adam Bertocci

"Why, this is very midsummer madness."
— Olivia, *Twelfth Night*, Act III, Scene iv

Eleventh Night, or, Hark! A Vagrant.

Fanciful notions of a grittier, angrier New York from the long-forgotten 1980s swim through my mind as I plod up Central Park West. Things change. When I was a kid, I knew (don't know how, but I knew) that Central Park was one of those places you just didn't go at night; the black sky's kiss had this way of transforming the verdant paradise into a shrouded haven for winos, vagrants, thieves, brigands, prowlers, prostitutes, rapists and garden-variety outdoorsmen in search of casual encounters.

I know things change. The city knows things change. The great mixed bag of gentrification swept through such bugbears of decades past. Now people push strollers through Alphabet City and the most horrifying thing you'll face in Harlem is a guy selling terrible artwork on cheap t-shirts. And very few people get killed.

Still and yet, the prospect of braving Central Park at night dutifully strikes the odd chord in my privileged Caucasian bones, as if I'm in for real adventure lending me legitimacy and, in a word, cred. Why, a thrill was totally with me as I did my Internet research on the matter. Call it a new step in my lifelong love affair with the dark.

It is somewhere between 2:00 and 2:30 in the morning on Sunday, July 5, 2009, and I am making my first proper and serious attempt at tickets for Shakespeare in the Park, specifically, Academy Award-nominee Anne Hathaway as Viola in *Twelfth Night*.

For the uninitiated, Shakespeare in the Park is the brainchild of legendary producer Joseph Papp, whose vision of free Shakespeare in (you'll never guess) the Park has been part of the metropolitan fabric since the 1950s. The agreeable ticket price aside, the program has proven a beloved cultural institution, attracting star-studded casts from both Broadway and Hollywood and some of the most dedicated culture vultures you'll ever meet.

Exact ticket-acquisition procedures have varied from year to year. At present, by which I mean between 2:00 and 2:30 in the morning on this particular Sunday, tickets are distributed at the Delacorte Theater at 1 PM on the day of the performance. What this means to the hopeful consumer can vary. At this point in *Twelfth Night*'s run, thanks to Hathaway's star power and a rave review from the *Times*, arrival any later than eight in the morning is a fool's errand, and even seven is pushing it.

It is no later than 2:30 AM when I reach 81st Street.

The old familiar buildings look different at night, or maybe the whole city feels different; hard to say, really. My erratic schedule as a freelance layabout has more than once granted me the sublime experience of feeling like the only person in Manhattan, out and about in the strange hours where one can walk streets with even the most iconic of brand names and find not another human in sight, nary a moving car or a sound to prove the island still populated.

Speaking of unpopulated lands, nobody's piled outside the gates of the park waiting to be let in, which implies to me, barring neutron-bomb-induced holocaust, either that I'm the first arrival or that the fashion is to scoff at the park's not-terribly-enforced closing time of 1 AM. I presume the latter, or perhaps assume, and tentatively creep in as if expecting someone to leap out of Diana Ross Playground and purposefully violate my anal cavity.

Not that I condone trespassing, of course.

There's a nice young couple playing with a dog about fifty feet into park proper; if they're there, it can't be too bad. It also means the cops aren't going round sweeping the park with flashlights just to toss out eager beavers.

This sets me up for a prime opportunity to make the most of my early arrival.

Which I blow.

Predictably, I get lost by overcorrecting for a turn near the Marionette Theater and only reach the Delacorte around 2:45.

There are already about ten people lined up.

I claim my spot in a nice patch under a tree, my bed a pile of soft wood chippings. I am greeted by David, whose last name I never ask nor learn, who will be my neighbor and friend for the next nine-and-a-quarter hours. "Are you here for Shakespeare tickets?" he asks. (Ruining my planned opening line to him: "So, what brings you here?")

The people ahead of us clearly wanted it more. David tells me that the first guy on line claims to have arrived at midnight. How he didn't get thrown out of the park at closing time is a mystery. I admire the spark of the true earlycomers. They're not young whippersnappers, either; indeed, I am the youngest person here by several years. Most are New Yorkers. The tourists will come later.

As David inflates his industrial-strength air mattress, which he'll later twin with two soft folding chairs and a portable DVD player, I lie down on the wood, or perhaps lay down, rest my head on my backpack. It's about 3 AM. I yammer *Star Wars* trivia at David until he falls asleep. Through the trees, in my little shred of sky, I can see one star above. I will stare at it long enough to see it rotate.

Other people drift in over the course of the night. I nod to them, say hi. I am not sleepy, and in any case I've never been much of a napper. I have deliberately corrupted my sleep schedule to get here at this ungodly hour, understanding that my chance to score a ticket would plummet with every minute post-sunrise. I mean, this was a whole production—I stayed up really absurdly late on Friday, slept in past 1 on Saturday, I even took a nap in the evening. In essence, I have done nothing of value with my weekend but tamper with my natural rhythms to get me here. I am reminded of the famous headline from *The Onion*: "Dressing Up Your Dog As Boba Fett Is Something You Have To Devote A Weekend To."

At some point between four and five in what isn't yet morning, a man in an unmarked truck shows up to open the restrooms, for which I am grateful; it's not that I'm inexperienced or ashamed about tree-based urination, it's just that for some reason this seems the wrong setting. I go to christen the men's room and pass a fellow queuer, reciting some sort of monologue to himself. Maybe *Twelfth Night*? Who knoweth?

It occurs to me that there is now no moment on the 24-hour clock that has not found me, at some point in my life, out on the streets of New York. The hours move quickly. I turn on my cell phone at 5 AM just in case anyone wishes to call me, for

reasons I cannot explain even to myself; perhaps I'm hoping someone will call and ask where I am at this hour. It's a good story; it's good to have a story. As the sky lightens, I realize that I've polished off the 'bum' phase of this adventure. Soon the park will officially open and I'll be there as a perfectly legitimate citizen. This vaguely disappoints me.

Twelfth Morning, or, America On Line.

You can't really watch the sun rise unless you can see the horizon, and ideally there should be a woman beside you, but this is still the first time in years I've been awake and paying attention to the sky as the night slips out of it. I will take what I can get. It's a gradual process, and yet not: join a conversation for two minutes and the world becomes different before you catch it.

At around 5:30 AM (so very, very AM) the patterns shift. Traffic configures. I speak of people here. No more little clumps of two and four. Actual droves take the plain, swarming the grass like disciples flocking to their preacher of choice; if I hadn't known better, I'd have said that some tour bus or trolley had pulled up for the express purpose of dropping off hopeful patrons of the arts. The line quickly shoots north. It is a twisting, curving little road, and soon I cannot see where any new additions land. I only see them arrive, storming over the fields, power-walking.

I get to know only my immediate neighbors. A *New Yorker* cartoonist combating a bout of Bell's Palsy, sporting an eye patch. A genial geek in a black hooded sweatshirt, his bed head (wood-chip-pile head?) never quite remedied over the course of the day. A bespectacled, bearded, bald man of Stentorian voice. A beautiful girl in pajama pants and an ironic t-shirt who has criminally bespoiled a perfect face with a nose piercing. I do not learn most of these peoples' names. We are what *Fight Club* so memorably called single-serving friends, us bold folk at the head of the line; the entire purpose of our being here this early was to ensure that we wouldn't spend another day this summer sitting in the line with each other.

I say "the line", but there are really two lines, as there's a special one for seniors and the disabled. The first senior arrives at around 6 AM.

The term 'extreme culture' really needs to be coined, if it hasn't already.

I stand, review the competition. I have much to admire, and a worthy spot to do it from. Oh, the people up front have a more advantageous area to sit in, perhaps, but I have space. I can swing my arms, I can see more people. The seating isn't all bunched up on my little tree-lined corner. This is the basic question driving New York real estate, and by association all of New York: neighborhood versus space.

And I prefer to stand in my space, incidentally. It helps me meet people. Given my high-visibility location on the corner and my general shaggily approachable demeanor (for some reason I'm always the guy people ask for directions or "do you work here?" in stores), I meet people. I am eager to become what urbanist Jane Jacobs calls a public character.

After the fifth or sixth time someone asks me, "What time did you get here?", I fashion a sign reading **2:45** in bold Sharpie. This proves a popular conversation-starter or –stopper, dependent on my whims. Many passersby laugh when I point to the sign in response to the question. Many passersby even mock-sympathize.

And there are passersby indeed; I tell them the same stories I'm telling you now. When they ask how far down the line goes, I say, "Try Astoria." (My geography is muddled here, I should really say something like Riverdale, but Astoria is a much funnier word. The funniest Bronx neighborhood, incidentally, would be Baychester. That's what I really should have said. Throggs Neck is funnier to read than to say, and Spuyten Duyvil just calls too much attention to itself.)

(Oh, and Throggs Neck is the neighborhood, Throgs Neck is the bridge. In case you were wondering.)

They're New York people, these people, whether all their lives or just for the day. There's the people who laugh and the people who just move on.

Then there's the chipper girl who interviews me for her video blog. We talk for about half an hour and I end up holding the camera for her intro shot. We get it in one take, just before the battery goes dead.

Then there's the giggling woman who asks if she can get a picture: me with my **2:45** sign and David and his wife on their air mattress, watching *Blindness* on DVD. It is merely the most memorable of many tourist photos I turn up in.

For the line is an impressive entity, and I encourage anyone visiting New York in the summer to make it a part of their Central Park tour. It stretches at least a quarter of a mile, a snakelike beast buzzing with energy, dotted at every turn with little communities and strange sights to see. It's a linear Burning Man, Woodstock in one dimension. People set up tents, lay down colorful blankets, play board games. Deliverymen troll up and down the line on bicycles, calling the names of whoever ordered takeout. A genial chap offers to rent me a tripod stool for five bucks. Tourists gawk; jaded New Yorkers jog by.

People swap stories about being in line. Lines they've previously sat in. Folks they've seen, times it rained. Theories of arrival times and handicapping. There's a science to all this: a popular rule of thumb has it that the geographical cutoff point for tickets sits around the swing set, and anyone between the theater and the swing set is probably safe.

Then there's the toothless black man who tells me about how he used to go clubbing long into the night before swinging in for show tickets, back in the day.

Then there's the woman strolling through the park with her tiny kitten in a pouch around her neck, a little tabby, can't be any more than four months old, looking around at a world still so new to him.

Somewhere in all this I befriend a local raccoon, enjoying the daylight. What mischievous trick of evolution made these rascally bandits so cute? I'm finding all the animals very socialized here, actually; a little hopping robin will come to visit me several times over the course of the wait, and sparrows surround me without fear... I've disparaged them as boring birds in the past, but up close their browns become more distinct, patterns emerging in the plumage. All told, though, the avian attention makes me feel like a Disney princess getting dressed.

The entire affair is nearly scuttled when a disconcerting clutch of pigeons congregates in my general area. Rats with wings, spreading disease. Mercifully, they leave me alone.

Twelfth Afternoon, or, The Mushy Middle.

At pretty much 1 they get us organized to hand out tickets. I give high props to the staff for keeping things orderly, but the studiedly random scheme of individual ticket distribution befuddles me; you would think that first-comers would get better seats, but my assignment to Row T does not fill me with confidence. So much for the meritocracy. If having the free time for urban camping can constitute merit.

Still, I have my ticket. Which is more than can be said for anyone that day who arrived after 5:45. In the morning, that is. I cannot stress this enough.

I have nearly seven hours before curtain, all the time in the world. Even allowing for excursions to the restroom or the hot dog cart, I have not left a specific hundred-foot radius since 2:45 AM. I have stood in one place and watched night turn to day; watched clouds become wisps and then empty blue sky, watched the park shake its colors from forbidding inky wasteland to a tourist's playground.

I haul myself in a southeasterly direction, to the jewel they call the Apple Store, to reacquaint myself with civilization and to crow about my ticket to the lazy Sunday lollygaggers in my social network. It's as good a destination as any, and I want to see something today.

Central Park is a confusing place to explain. It's the only place in Manhattan where you can lose sight of where you are, where the orderly grid of numbers and streets means nothing. Sometimes you can't even see buildings.

Supple bodies are littered about like leaves, tanning; there's an oily girl in a bikini everywhere you look. Bicyclists, rollerbladers. Little street bands doing Michael Jackson covers. I've never seen most of these corners, statues, but then, I have a way of getting lost in here. I pass several people who cheer out "Ghostbusters!" in response to my fashionable logo-festooned t-shirt, and one impromptu recitation of the theme song lyrics. I get this a lot.

It would be appropriate for me to mention the Shakespeare statue, watching over everything. Sadly, I don't pass it. This diminishes my travelogue considerably, I know.

I emerge from leafy green onto 59th Street in the height of full-on tourist scramble. It's hot. I collapse near a fountain, and sit and collect myself for a bit, staring up at the Plaza Hotel. I splash water from the fountain onto my face without shame, being careful not to disturb the pennies that are people's wishes. I've gotten too many of mine to dishonor that.

But I ascertain too late that the heat has made me comically delirious; I find myself weeping with joy in FAO Schwarz at the sight of all the happy kids, marveling at toys. Just giddy and close to bawling. This happens at least three or four times. Actually, sometimes it's not even the kids that set me off. Sometimes it's just the toys.

Upon heading for the park again, I find myself recollecting my many adventures, and what an amazing experience I had being on line, and mustn't New York be just the most special place to bring a kid on vacation, and long story short I'm in tears again. I have not slept since 8 PM the previous evening, and it is probably time for me to calm down a bit. I feel a deep connection to Holden Caulfield's memorable blubber... you know, when he watched his sister ride the carousel in... Central Park. He wound up in the loony bin not long after, right?

I wind my way up through the park again, giving ample and careful berth to the carriage horses. My affection for horses has historically been limited, and in any case I prefer to keep my distance from any abused animal larger than a Pekinese.

A crowd has gathered at the Strawberry Fields Memorial. Presumably they're feeling something for the recently-late Michael Jackson as well, letting one fallen musician stand in for another; the connections are tenuous at best, but you can feel the sensation, and though I would not have thought to remember Jackson here, I, in a word or two, get it. As I always do when in the area, I pay my respects to Lennon, with a minimum of fuss. Two fingers pressed to the lips, down to the stone, and I'm up and I'm gone.

I never stay long. A song at most. I've never felt the impulse people have to leave things behind that will only be swept away. But I comprehend the need to gather; the artificiality of everyday life compels us to go to specific places to feel again.

I'm back at the Delacorte by four. This begins the unpleasant portion of proceedings, as I am at this point very tired. I never quite find an enjoyable rock to sit on, and I feel myself threatening to doze off whilst attempting to read. My pretensions extended toward packing books about acting and the theatre (yes, folks, we're spelling it British-style). They were hardcover, which was stupid. They were heavy and I can't even focus on them.

I am hoping for a 'class reunion' atmosphere with the people in my cluster of the line, but it never quite comes. Some don't even seem to recognize me, as if it all happened a thousand years ago. Even David barely gives me fifty words. Maybe all our bonds were meant to break when the tickets came out; in an era when everyone has to be friends on Facebook, where we trade business cards and store numbers in our phones within minutes of contact, maybe it's important to know people just once and let them slip away.

I change my shirt to a dark blue polo. Classier and less likely to provoke people into chirping the biggest hit from Ray Parker, Jr. I take off my shoes and socks, which is kind of like heaven. My two notes for if I ever do this again: bring a chair with a back, and fresh socks.

Aside from a brief interlude wherein I help a senior citizen over a fence, this is an uneventful period, and I really, really struggle to stay awake. I will not have slept for twenty-four hours by the time the proverbial curtain rises.

Twelfth Night, or, What You Will.

I confess to being unimpressed with Row T, Seat 403. I was one of the first twenty arrivals and my reward is one of the worst twenty seats. A look around the nosebleed section reveals many from the just-past-midnight crew, moping like spurned lovers; my eye-patched cartoonist companion is particularly irate. Luck of the draw, people. Luck of the draw.

Next to me sits an older gentleman with someone I presume to be his niece, explaining the plot. I've never seen the show and I've only read it once, but the program is most helpful in imparting the Cliffs Notes version. Said program also includes a lengthy summary of the rationale for picking *Twelfth Night* and some photos from past productions; this has evidently been a popular choice for the Park lately, and the whole thing lends the occasion a sense of history. It is well and good to support live theatre, the Bard in particular, if only because movies keep proving that you cannot place a 35mm

camera in front of Hollywood's most luminous ladies, shoved into a vest and jaunty cap, and expect to honor the illusion of a convincing boy disguise.

This document is a travelogue, a stream-of-consciousness journal, not a piece of arts criticism, so discussion of the play itself will be kept to a minimum. It worked: it started slowly, yes, and laid on the clowns a little thick, but the folk-pop score was enchanting and the comic energy built to a wonderful ending. There can't have possibly been an unsmiling face during the final dance.

So what if I hadn't slept in twenty-seven hours and my eyes looked like I'd spent the whole time smoking up; I felt alive, enthralled. And I'd shared this whole day with eighteen hundred other people.

Call it a brief repudiation of *Bowling Alone*. What a miracle it was, this epicenter of communal experiences, of people coming together to see and do and be, eighteen hundred people together. Once all in a line, now in weaving rows, moving, feeling, applauding.

Well, all in two lines, really, because, disabled, and seniors.

Thirteenth Morning, or, The Next Stage.

Having waited at stage doors many a time, in my time, I must award props to the Public Theater's way of doing things. They organize us by hand, not rope, into one line and facilitate autography, no theatregoer left behind. I deem this appropriate to Joseph Papp's vision of a theater for the people. Everyone is not only signing, but having conversations; some of the cast are so friendly that one thinks they might be fishing for a dinner invite.

As befits the trend of uniting top-flight theatrical talent with the luminaries of Hollywood, the two big names I'm excited to meet are Audra McDonald (Olivia) and, no surprises here, Anne Hathaway. McDonald emerges first. The four-time Tony-winner not yet at her fortieth birthday just looks like a cool, casual college student in a t-shirt and jeans; she is the first person I have ever seen who looks younger offstage than on. I wish I had a better story to tell her than, oh, hey, I saw HBO's *Wit* a few months ago. The family to my right, it turns out, contains one of her old college professors, and so there is an amusing reaction to be had.

But really, I'm in line for Anne Hathaway. I've been in line for Anne Hathaway since 2:45 AM.

Every right-thinking man is entitled to a celebrity crush, unrealistic and not to be apologized for, and Anne Hathaway has long been mine—supplanting even the once-undethronable Jennifer Aniston. Like I said, things change. And friends will attest that I'm a sucker for innocent-looking brunettes; Hathaway, all big brown eyes and effervescent smile, is so much an expression of my type that it verges on parody.

My heart does a beat-skipping flop when I catch a glimpse of her around the bend. It is strange to see her as a real person. I don't mean real in the everyday-clockpuncher sense but in the sense of her material presence as a physical creation. As if the concept of Hathaway only existed in fiction and in other people's photographs, and she decongealed into an intelligent energy when not required for a picture. I think I would have been just as surprised had they wheeled out a life-sized mannequin of her, mounted on a little red wagon.

She comes closer. It doesn't occur to me to consider the irony that I'm beginning and ending this adventure on a line. The family to my left has young daughters, no older than ten, who I assume know her best from *The Princess Diaries* and its regrettable sequel. (Or maybe they're huge fans of *Havoc*, what do I know.) She bends to talk to them, like a princess—like the ones at Disney World. I am sure they will never forget this memory. Me too, kids. Me too.

I tense up when she reaches me. Her beauty turns my mouth dry. Thank God I've rehearsed my lines.

"Welcome to the very, very, very small list of people I'll get up at 2:45 for," I say, hearing myself stumble and waver as she signs my program. "Get to Central Park at 2:45, I mean."

(She knows what I mean.) I barely hear her. My head is swimming.

"Is it all right if this gentleman takes a picture?" I ask, indicating the patriarch of the family on my right, who I've enlisted as my photographer. Upon a reply in the affirmative, I hand over the camera, put my arm around her. The arm in question is numb; I can't feel anything under it, nor can I honestly confirm that I even have an arm at all.

And I generally don't ask for pictures with celebrities. Autographs, okay, but never pictures, perhaps in part because I do not like posing for pictures (the process or the result). But this shot, well, I knew I'd be kicking myself if I didn't get it.

Two pictures are taken. She, I am told, looks radiant. I have blinked as usual. This won't be the first time I Photoshop new eyes into one of my disastrous pics. That's okay; I'm here for the memory, not the journalism.

But I have one card yet to play. I've been working this joke over with a fine-toothed comb for days now, trying every single variant, and I think I've nailed it.

"So, when the production is over," I ask, "do you get the second-best bed?"

It takes her a second.

Okay, maybe it's just an Oscar-nominated actress faking amusement. But if it is, then, what a performance. You could see her puzzling through the joke briefly before reacting. On the basis of watching the wheels turn in her head, I'm confident that I have actually made her laugh.

With Shakespeare nerd humor.

Referencing a coincidence that every Shakespeare nerd she's ever met has already brought up, not to mention the occasional two-bit hack reporter.

Just after seeing her do... well, you know.

I deserve some sort of medal for this.

"Yeah, it's weird," she says. "Like, I've been discovering all these... like, did you know she was twenty-six when they got married, and I'm twenty-six now, so... that's really interesting to me, but, I'm a dork, so."

She talks like a real person.

I probably say something stupid next. I'm blanking, alas. The imbecilic joke preceding is the part of the conversation I remember best; even now, as I write this, I'm having trouble recalling so much of this encounter. I remember the actions but not the sensation, as if I wasn't actually there, like I only saw it in a movie. Even two minutes after she's moved on down the line it's turned hazy for me. It's as if it wasn't meant for me to hold onto.

I have trouble with time, trouble with verb tenses. Past and present mingle. Time to get some Goddamned sleep.

The city looks positively magical when I re-emerge onto Central Park West. Even the winos and vagrants seem to glow, touched by fairy dust. My head swims with more funny things I could have said to my Hollywood dream—but never mind. I did what I needed to do.

Perhaps the sociologists are right, perhaps we have lost our way with the shared experience. If this is the disease plaguing a soul-purged America, then I have found the cure in a midsummer overnight's dream. I conquered new ground in the city, sat at the fountainhead of a mass gathering in pursuit of high culture, plunged myself among thousands of people, and yet in the end it all came down to one meeting with one person I know only through a screen.

Not bad for a free ticket.

Then it ends as it began, with me alone on Central Park West, savoring the stillness of the night. Glenn Frey's lonely saxophone echoes in my mind, though I know I do not belong to the city. Not really. Though I like to think there's still a scrap of my heart someplace, left behind forever, hidden in a little pile of wood chips off West 81st Street.

It's someone else's turn to sit there now. I hope it means to them what it means to me—

*“So was my heart forsaken in the dark,
Mix'd in betwixt the wood chips in the park.”*

I won't quit my day job. The hours are better.

About the Author

Adam Bertocci is an award-winning filmmaker, screenwriter, and freelance Bardolator working in and around New York. He is a proud graduate of the film program at Northwestern University, with a surprisingly useful minor in English literature.

His crowning achievement in the highly profitable realm of Shakespeare-fandom scribblings is the world-famous, critically-acclaimed, surprisingly educational mashup [*Two Gentlemen of Lebowski: A Most Excellent Comedie and Tragical Romance*](#), praised by *Entertainment Weekly*, *USA Today*, *The New Republic*, *GQ*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Guardian*, *Back Stage*, *Broadway World*, the Royal Shakespeare Company and the Folger Shakespeare Library.

He'll strive to please you every day at

www.adambertocci.com