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Afterword.
Continuity, Change and Infinite Variety, Revisited

Four of the five articles included in this issue derive from papers that helped create a lively double-session seminar on "Continuity and Change in Screen Shakespeare(s)" at the European Shakespeare Research Association (ESRA) meeting in Budapest during the summer of 2023. I was honored to serve as the respondent for both sessions, and the eleven essays we discussed there exemplified the broad range of interests among the participants and the ever-expanding definition of screen Shakespeare itself, a topic I have begun to discuss elsewhere but which merits more collective consideration.[1] What, if any, are the new parameters for marking the field of screen Shakespeares as we enter the second quarter of the twenty-first century, fully immersed in the digital age? What analytic methods, goals, and values deriving from the first generations' study of more narrowly filmic and televisual narrative adaptations do we choose to maintain, develop or let go? Who is the "we" that cares, decides, and shares their writing at conferences and in journals, in Europe and around the globe? Extending the seminar's title, how might conscious attention both to continuing patterns and to innovations in media forms and theoretical approaches help us to find a fruitful balance between creative inclusiveness and intellectual coherence, in an age of ubiquitous screens and fractured communities? And, to adjust the frame slightly, will such conferences and writing continue as they have for the past half century, or does change embrace scholarly practices as well?

These are large, potentially daunting questions that seldom receive more than passing attention on conference programs, or impassioned debates over collegial dinners, even in – or perhaps especially because of? – challenging times for the humanities in the wider world. Thus, to offset what might be some readers' increasing levels of anxiety or weariness, and also because the subfield and the essays here prompt more energizing responses, I add to the seminar title's keywords a positive phrase from Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*, now also descriptive of screen versions of his plays: infinite variety. In Budapest, we discussed the queering of *Romeo and Juliet* in a single close-up and two Argentinian short films, Albanian theatrical promotional videos broadcast on Facebook, the functions of mixed-reality screens within a stage production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, dark media, rebel children and nostalgia in the Shakespeare archive. Even in the selected sampling of essays here, a range of interests and methodologies becomes visible: from historical recovery of formative film theories to analysis of current streaming television series; from relatively 'traditional' full-narrative scripts to deracinated advertising allusions; from emphasis on framing visual techniques to alternative narratives for minor characters (in each instance moved from 'background' to foreground); from multiple screen versions of a single playscript to a single repurposing of multiple plays; and from what is now art-house cinematic montage and avant-garde Chroma-key (or Green Screen) video to mainstream television and overt commercialization. I can't help but smile to recall when, in the earlier 2000s, a publishing house turned down my book manuscript (eventually *Collaborations with the Past*) explicitly because they could not imagine an audience interested in Shake-shifting in *both* novels and films. How much broader our vision and our remit has become!

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[1] See Diana E. Henderson, "Parted Eyes and Generation Gaps in Twenty-first-century Perceptions of Screen Shakespeare", in Simon Smith, ed., *Shakespeare/Sense: Contemporary Readings in Sensory Culture*, The Arden Shakespeare (London: Bloomsbury, 2020), 319-351.

At the same time, certain patterns emerge which are indicative of our present moment, exploring interests distinct from earlier thematic, filmic and narrative analyses. Whilst one could create subgroups among these five essays divided along multiple axes, I wish to highlight two here: first, a clustering that both preserves and modifies what we attend to in Shakespeare-related film theory and analysis; and secondly, one that centers commercially-oriented new narratives that use Shakespeare in bits and pieces. In each instance, I discern both continuity and change.

Returning to the originary era of modern screens – the word "screen" having had older meanings for the writer himself – Melissa Croteau's "Sergei Eisenstein and William Shakespeare: A Dialectical Love Story" nicely foregrounds the affective potency and networks of influence that collaborating with Shakespeare has afforded creative artists in new media. Furthermore, she emphasizes the crucial role of the spectator's "*active mind*" within the great filmmaker's theory of montage, "filling in the gaps 'between' images and co-creating meaning". It is not hard to see the parallelism here with the humanities scholar's interpretive role in creating a cohesive account of an artwork through selective emphasis and amplified description (be this fully conscious or a product of training, location and accident). Croteau's essay, specially commissioned for this issue of *Anglistica AION*, provides a helpful theoretical frame for the more specific (though still theorized) analyses of several twenty-first-century screen *Macbeth*s by Kinga Földváry and Márta Hargitai.

Each of their essays explores dimensions of what is seen that might seem 'minor' or elusive for a conventional or less reflective viewer, one who instead focuses on the more traditional foci of Shakespeare analyses for general audiences, *i.e.*, the main characters and their stories. Justin Kurzel's 2015 film may not have succeeded by box-office metrics, but both scholars here find, in the filming of its Scottish landscape and in its misty visual references to Fleance respectively, something suggestive of our current paradoxical desires for immersion and artifice, indeterminacy and counter-narrative. Each also turns to Joel Coen's more overtly stylized 2021 feature film that blurs categories of medium specificity (drawing on Edward Gordon Craig's modernist stage designs for its stark, strange castle) and of past and present: reproducing an earlier black-and white film era yet with "highly advanced and thus very contemporary cinematographic precision as well", as Földváry puts it; and recalling Roman Polanski's film precedent in recasting Ross as a sinister marker of narrative irresolution yet innovatively conjuring and culminating in an "alternative narrative" for Fleance, as Hargitai interprets the film's conclusion. But in choosing a third screen version as a third term – as each essay also does – they part company, with Földváry maintaining her cinematic visual emphasis within narratively "conservative" films by turning to Kit Monkman's 2018 "bold experiment in what the Chroma key technology is capable of", whereas Hargitai turns to the televised reconceptualization of Rupert Goold's 2007 staging to explore a further instance of Fleance's increased visibility, finding there (in contradistinction to William Carroll's earlier reading of his role in forcing narrative closure) a haunting reminder of indeterminacy.[2]

Földváry is right to say there is a "conservative" aspect to the three English-language films she examines in their use of Shakespeare's language and full narrative, as indeed there is a traditional side to her own methodology, discussing them impersonally without explicit reference to her own, or ESRA's 2023, location in Budapest. At the same time, and like the films as she describes them, there is a mixture with innovation here, in her emphasizing reduced color palettes and spatial simulacra rather than the representation of the Macbeths' marriage or the role played by the weird sisters. This combination of continuity and change serves as a useful rebuttal to those outside the field who reduce all "presentism" to self-affirming identity politics and those within literary studies who despair of others' dispassionate

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[2] For Carroll's more recent work on the long history of *Macbeth*'s multifold interpretive history in performance across media, see both his book (referenced by Hargitai) and his chapter "Politics, Adaptation, *Macbeth*", in Diana E. Henderson and Stephen O'Neill, eds., *The Arden Research Handbook to Shakespeare and Adaptation*, The Arden Shakespeare (London: Bloomsbury, 2022), 81-99.

ability to close read, while simultaneously bringing to bear the resources that have enriched the study of Shakespeare on film through more extensive dialogue with media studies and performance studies. Hargitai's observation about the versions she examines holds true for the artworks discussed in both essays: none

> celebrate or give too much screentime to Malcolm, the victor, who in the play-text purges evil from the country, frees time, and restores something of the original order…. As modern adaptations, these films talk as much about Shakespeare as ourselves and our age, about our cycles of violence and current political crises, "spanning from the Middle East, through Europe and beyond".

I would insert a 'yet' into the ellipsis above to make the balance I am highlighting clearer. Her final phrase comes from Agnieszka Rasmus's 2018 article "What Bloody Field Is This? *Macbeth* for Our Time" and internationalizes the contemporary resonances that Stephen Greenblatt calls out in *Tyrant* and James S. Baumlin describes in charting 'the Shakespearean moment'.[3] That *Macbeth* should be the Shakespeare play receiving sustained treatment here through attention to multiple versions without comparative evaluation of their excellence bears witness both to the politics of our moment and to a strong engagement with recent works in adaptation studies, so unlike the auteur-focused studies of the establishing decades for film Shakespeare as an academic subject, the 1970s and '80s.

The retreat from evaluation in our era of "infinite variety" of course has its downsides, yet it has also licensed more interpreters to draw on their local knowledge – when and only if they so choose – and to look more broadly around the globe and across media forms. Nonetheless, that two of the three works in each *Macbeth*-centered essay are the same recent feature films, and in Coen's case the work of someone with valid claims to auteur status for this generation, tells us canonicity is not entirely dead – just reimagined along different categorizations of value. To my mind, this form of canonicity warrants further exploration of its strengths and weaknesses: strengths, in engaging students where they are, helping set shared curricula, and continuing to create broader audiences with shared references (if the screen versions are accessible, a separate and important issue); weaknesses, in that canonizing recent versions reinforces the 21st-century's extraordinary overvaluation of the present and new without adequate awareness of the excellence of past versions, technologies, and (as Croteau reminds us) theories, many of which have not been matched, much less superseded, in the relentless quest for the next big thing.

Kit Monkman's *Macbeth*, with its consciousness of silent film ancestors incorporated into the Porter's (now security guard's) role courtesy of scholar Judith Buchanan's consultancy on the film, provides an apt pivot to the other two articles in this special issue… though the remediation of stage to television in Goold's, starring Patrick Stewart, likewise exemplifies multiple layers of re-producing Shakespeare across media, including its interweaving with popular celebrity and non-Shakespearean screen narratives. But let's call out the less famous Kit, for attempting the low-budget experiment of creating a Shakespearean gamescape and then sharing it with scholars at the 2017 ESRA conference in Gdansk, at the remarkable theater Jerzy Limon managed to conjure before his too-early exit from this mortal coil. Because here is a real-life narrative to remind us of our own diverse roles, or at least potential, as scholars, practitioners, and impresarios as well as teachers in shaping the future of what becomes valued or at least attempted. Sometimes this means creating a student audience for screen versions that would otherwise disappear in that other infinite variety of commercially unsuccessful movies. And sometimes those recollections of earlier films (like Zeffirelli's *Romeo and Juliet* and its Argentine afterlives) find their way into new screen genres, ranging from games and manga to gifs and

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[3] See Stephen Greenblatt, *Tyrant: Shakespeare on Politics* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2019) and James S. Baumlin, "'The Shakespearean Moment' in American Popular/Political Culture: Editorializing in the Age of Trump", *Language, Literature, and Interdisciplinary Studies (LLIDS)*, 6.1 (2024), 2.28-42.

advertisements, with radically different perspectives on racial and sexual politics. This is the territory the other two essays here illuminate.

With Croteau's reminders of montage in mind, what Roberta Zanoni describes as a "lacuna" in Shakespeare studies regarding advertisements might also suggest an opportunity, a gap for creative intervention by "active minds" – which is what Zanoni sets out to recover from a 2005 ad for Levi's 501 jeans. Although a 2011 website[4] and other sources attest to some earlier interest in this topic, and a 2024 volume in which Zanoni has a piece makes clear that there will be no absence of attention moving forward,[5] it does seem especially timely to put such analysis of advertisements in dialogue with Shakespearean borrowings in other commercially profitable forms of mainstream entertainment—which is what Pauline Durin investigates in *Bridgerton* season two's invocations of *The Taming of the Shrew*. In each case, deracinated allusion opens up a space to compare and contrast, at time speeds appropriate to the digital age and its 24/7 onslaught of information (and disinformation, and distraction).

While Zanoni is no doubt right that film no longer dominates our definitions of screen Shakespeare, some irony persists in that she focuses on a Levi's ad riffing off Baz Luhrmann's most successful of all Shakespeare films at the box office, *William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet.* But the advertisement also alludes to the tragedy's comic companion, likewise performed during Shakespeare's mid-1590s 'lyric phase'. This admixture of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* with *Romeo and Juliet* allows the modern audience a comparable experience to what some early modern audience members may have realized: that the basic structures of narrative can arc in surprisingly distinct directions. One particularly valuable dimension of our ESRA seminar resulted from its organizers' assigning members to post comments on essays prior to our Budapest meeting, and the mash-up of these two plays (to sell jeans) prompted several thoughtful replies. To their insights, I only added another comment on the demographics of the 21st-century target audience, who would very likely be milllenials who had been exposed to these plays (and not coincidentally *Macbeth*) in their secondary education – perhaps also including Michael Hoffman's 1999 *Dream* alongside Luhrmann's film. Indeed, the ad-makers might have been English majors as those films were released, suggesting another angle of research familiar to those in media and cultural studies, but perhaps worthy of more attention among researchers of Shakespeare adaptations. Then again, and fully acknowledging the valuable close analysis in this essay, how much further investigation should we expend on a 20-year-old short video selling immensely popular jeans? The question is sincere, and open to debate.

By contrast, the consequentiality of Shakespearean overtones and allusions in a blockbuster instance of serial television would be hard to ignore for those interested in Shakespeare's persistent and changing role in 21st-century popular culture. Furthermore, Pauline Durin's reading of *Bridgerton*'s goes well beyond description to judgment, finding its version of Viscount Antony falling for another Kate "sugar-coated feminism" and discerning heteronormativity and stereotyping around the narrative edges. This too speaks to the present moment: gender and sexuality, especially in fluid and non-binary configurations, receive ample attention. As someone who has been continuously committed to advancing women's and gender studies for four decades and charted twentieth-century screen *Shrew*s extensively and critically (in "A Shrew for the Times" and beyond) this would seem at first glance to be unambiguously gratifying.[6] And yet… I found myself asking, where is class, money and status

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[4] See laurengus17, "Shakespeare in Advertising", *Transmedial Shakespeare*, 15 March 2011, *transmedialshakespeare.wordpress.com*.

[5] Márta Minier, Maria Elisa Montironi and Cristina Paravano, eds., *Local/Global Shakespeare and Advertising* (London: Routledge, 2024).

[6] Diana Henderson, "A *Shrew* for the Times, Revisited", in Richard Burt and Lynda E. Boose, eds., *Shakespeare: The Movie II: Popularizing the Plays of Film, TV, Video, and DVD* (Abingdon-on-Thames: Routledge, 2003), 120-139; and Diana Henderson, "The Return of the Shrew: New Media, Old Stories, and Shakespearean Comedy", in Henderson, *Collaborations with the Past: Reshaping Shakespeare Across Time and Media* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006), 155-201.

throughout this collection of essays? In these times of precarity and plenty, one form of intersectionality seems curiously absent – perhaps because it is too painful or too obvious, and yet… Have we collectively decided not to call out the elephant in the room except on social media posts?

I suspect some of these later paragraphs sound edgier than I would like, and I want to applaud the move to consider multiple sources and the return to serious consideration of Shakespeare in bits and pieces – which is the way most people have always enjoyed his works. But I also want to support these essayists in taking us further by considering the economic realities that constrain and license the writers of Netflix shows and television ads, just as we should the makers of *Macbeth*s that do and don't get distribution deals. But do they have time to do so? Do our publishing models fit these times, as I too write under deadlines that seem faster and faster, though the print products do not appear so? And at what point does the infinite variety of modern collaborations with Shakespeare, both creative and critical, overwhelm us all?

When such questions become a source of more pressure than provocation to create, it might be the occasion to step back in time and consider our position not as unique or special but with humility and a sense of fellowship. We might listen to voices beyond our subspecialty, speaking in ways we don't think we can. Recently, I found an example of someone speaking in a time of war and existential threat who inspired me to write this afterword frankly – in a way I think also would have pleased the groundbreaking dedicatee of this issue, the immensely kind and knowledgeable Sam Crowl. In 1943 as World War II raged on, the Oxford historian F. M. Powicke addressed the Bedford College for Women (then in Cambridge). He concluded his account of the rise of European universities in the 13th-14th centuries with a rousing peroration that foreshadows our own moment, providing another resonant instance of continuity and change:

> A new world is emerging, in which education will be an obligation on all, above every kind of specialism. The greatest problem set before human society will be the maintenance of freedom. Some say that discipline and purpose are the only things which will matter in a general education. Discipline and purpose are not the *only* things. The best safeguard of freedom will be the desire for truth. So long as men keep that desire and act upon it, the medieval university will not die.[7]

Perhaps very few of us studying and delighting in screen Shakespeares would be roused by the desire to uphold the versions of truth that sustained the universities of which he spoke with such conviction. And yet, in finding our own kernels of truth that bridge the gap of time between Shakespeare's play-writing and modern collaborators' reanimations (only half the number of centuries Powicke strived to connect), and doing so with similar forthrightness in facing *this* moment, *our* challenges… we can reclaim some of the energetic confidence in scholarship that he advocated during a horrific global war. I hope this collection, and the larger corpus of writing and fields of inquiry for which it stands, will not only illuminate the artworks upon which these essays focus but will also spark a chain reaction among readers who are prompted to explore the screen Shakespeares they find most significant, most resonant now, asking – and sharing – how, and why. If this happens, it will be the best tribute we can offer to champions like Sam Crowl, to the only begetter of our very special field, and to the next generation.

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[7] F. M. Powicke, *Ways of Medieval Life and Thought: Essays and Addresses* (London: Odhams Press Limited, 1949), 212.